

A decorative pattern of overlapping diamonds in various shades of blue, green, and grey, arranged in a grid-like fashion that tapers towards the bottom.

ADVANCING UK HIGHER EDUCATION  
THROUGH DATA AND ANALYSIS

**IMPACT REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2017**

**HESA**

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# STATEMENT FROM THE CEO



▲ **PAUL CLARK**  
Chief Executive

*Paul Clark*

I am pleased to present the new Impact Report for the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited, covering the year 2016/17. This is the second such report we have published, building on the first ever HESA impact report in 2015/16.

These are exciting and challenging times for HESA, as they are for all organisations in the UK HE sector. The pace of change feels faster than ever, and the social, economic, and political importance of higher education has never been higher. HESA has not been immune to these changes, and we have sought to adapt our services for the future, while continuing to deliver value for money through our core activities. Through all the changes underway, we value our close relationships with providers above all, as we would not be able to do what we do without your support.

The year just gone has seen HESA continue to deliver its core data collections and services efficiently and effectively. We have progressed a number of major programmes that, collectively, add up to significant change for the organisation. Chief among these are Data Futures, the new Graduate Outcomes survey, and our preparations to put ourselves forward to become the Designated Data Body for higher education in England. We have facilitated the establishment of the Higher Education Data Landscape Steering Group, to support the rationalisation of the UK HE data infrastructure, and have implemented our new Open Data strategy. We have also worked closely with Jisc to develop the next generation of Heidi Plus outputs, ensuring that providers have the analytics they need to plan and operate effectively.

Through all the changes underway, we value our close relationships with providers above all, as we would not be able to do what we do without your support.

We have progressed our work with Jisc and QAA through the M5 Group to introduce more operational efficiencies. This will be an ongoing theme, as we continue to bear down on our internal costs, and introduce efficiencies wherever we can. Our priority is to deliver services for our subscribers in the most cost-effective way possible, and many of the transformations that we have underway will support this ambition.

HESA is proud to work across all four countries of the UK, and we greatly prize our relationships with colleagues in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. As we look further ahead, it will be a priority for us to ensure that we continue to operate a common, UK-wide data service.

Looking ahead, 2017/18 promises to be no less eventful than the year just gone for HESA. We will be doing all we can to ensure a positive outcome from the designation process, so that we can begin preparing in earnest for the new environment. Data Futures will become more of a reality as we roll out the Alpha Pilots, and Graduate Outcomes will also begin to take shape. More and more of our data will be published in open, machine-readable format, and we will continue to evolve our analytical tools and services for providers. And, of course, we will be delivering all our current data collections throughout this period.

Perhaps most significantly of all, HESA will need to undertake major changes to its governance, operational, and funding

models if it becomes the designated body – representing the most substantial changes since the organisation's inception in 1993. We are confident that the changes we are planning will ensure that HESA is established as a fit-for-purpose sector agency for the future, continuing to deliver value for money for providers, and supporting the strength and competitiveness of the UK higher education sector.

Please watch out for more to come from HESA over the coming months. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy reading this report.



**WE SUPPORT  
THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF UK HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

# INTRODUCTION

**This report provides an overview of the impact that HESA has made in the last year. With the introduction of our Corporate Strategy in 2016 we have, for the first time, reviewed the year against the four strategic aims this strategy identified. The statistics and figures quoted within this report relate to the period spanning August 2016 to July 2017.**

High quality data and analysis about UK higher education (HE) is crucial. It enables regulation of HE; informs policy-making; enhances strategic decision-making; delivers efficiencies; promotes public understanding of the sector; and informs student choice. We oversee every stage of the data journey – from specification and collection, to quality assurance and publication – to ensure that anyone can access relevant, accurate, reliable, and meaningful data and analysis about higher education.

## OUR VISION

Our aim is to be the analytical powerhouse for the UK HE sector, and the trusted source of national HE statistics and public information. We seek to provide flexible, efficient, high quality data, information, and analytical services to meet user needs, to support better decision-making in higher education, to promote public trust and confidence, and to enhance the competitive strength of the UK HE sector.

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to support the advancement of UK higher education by collecting, analysing, and disseminating accurate and comprehensive statistical information in response to the needs of all those with an interest in its characteristics and a stake in its future.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

A set of enduring principles underpins our current strategy and has informed everything we have done since we began collecting data in 1993.

## OUR CORE PRINCIPLES

1. We are a charitable company operating under a statutory framework on behalf of the funding councils and relevant UK government departments. We support HE providers in fulfilling their data reporting requirements.
2. We are part of the UK's **'statistics family'**. We produce Official Statistics, a sign that a number of our statistical outputs have met a rigorous quality threshold. These outputs are regulated by the UK Statistics Authority, which has a direct line of accountability to Parliament, **independent** of any government department.
3. We are principally funded by subscriptions from HE providers. We are dedicated to ensuring that we deliver **value for money**, and our subscription rates are kept low due to our commercial activities.
4. In addition to our work with HE providers and sector bodies, we are driven by a wider **public purpose**: to advance higher education in the UK.

## OUR FOUR STRATEGIC AIMS:



# AIM 1: UPGRADE THE UK HE DATA INFRASTRUCTURE



**We are dealing with more providers and more data than ever before. As the landscape evolves, we have a crucial role to play in ensuring that relevant and timely data is being collected in an efficient and robust manner.**

## **SUPPORTING THE PRESENT**

We assist all higher education providers in efficiently and effectively fulfilling their statutory reporting requirements.

We have worked with a total of 261 HE providers throughout the UK. This total includes organisations that have subscribed to HESA for the first time this year: an

additional 34 alternative providers of HE (including our first Scottish alternative provider) and three further education colleges in Wales.

From these 261 providers, we processed 118 million records to arrive at complete and quality checked data concerning over 2.8 million students.

Across 40,000 emails, our Liaison team have offered comprehensive and targeted support to nearly 3,500 stakeholders.

**"Speedy and informative responses in plain English. Thanks."**

**"Brilliant service, staffed by friendly and knowledgeable people."**

Our agile software development team delivers on-going upgrades to our data collection system to support providers throughout the data collection process.

We have launched a more powerful system homepage and rationalised functionality to ensure smooth and user-friendly interfaces. We have upgraded the key HUSID look-up tool – which allows providers to find the ID of a student on a previous course – and created additional reports with more functionality to assist providers in validating their data.

## **2016/17 THE BIGGEST EVER DLHE**

▶ **2016/17 saw the largest ever collection of data about graduates. We processed 4.4 million records from more than 472,000 surveys completed by graduates from 255 providers.**

### DATA FUTURES

Our Data Futures programme will deliver a modernised and more efficient approach to HE data collection. The programme will allow for the collection of more timely data that is fit for purpose. It will also minimise burden on providers by streamlining processes, reducing duplicate collections, and establishing common data standards.

In the last year, the programme has recruited an Alpha Pilot group including representatives from HE providers, software suppliers, and statutory customers, who are playing a vital role in the co-design of the new data platform and collection procedures.

We held a dedicated Data Futures conference attended by 133 senior HE managers; 128 providers were engaged in our workshops, run across the UK, to shape the collection’s design; and 118 providers responded to our Data Futures consultation activities.

The programme also made significant headway in its core aim of minimising the burden of data collection. We have now signed agreements with Health Education England and the General Medical Council to undertake data collections for them, and continue to work with other data collectors to meet this aim.

### DATA LANDSCAPE STEERING GROUP

We have led on the formation of the Data Landscape Steering Group, and an associated Advisory Panel.

This group provides oversight and leadership of the data landscape across the UK HE sector.

It promotes best practice in the collection and handling of data, while also developing strategies to minimise the burden of data collection and improve the quality, timeliness and accessibility of information.

Since inception, the group has overseen the implementation of HECoS (a new common subject coding system), and is consulting on a burden assessment and data governance model to benefit the whole HE sector.

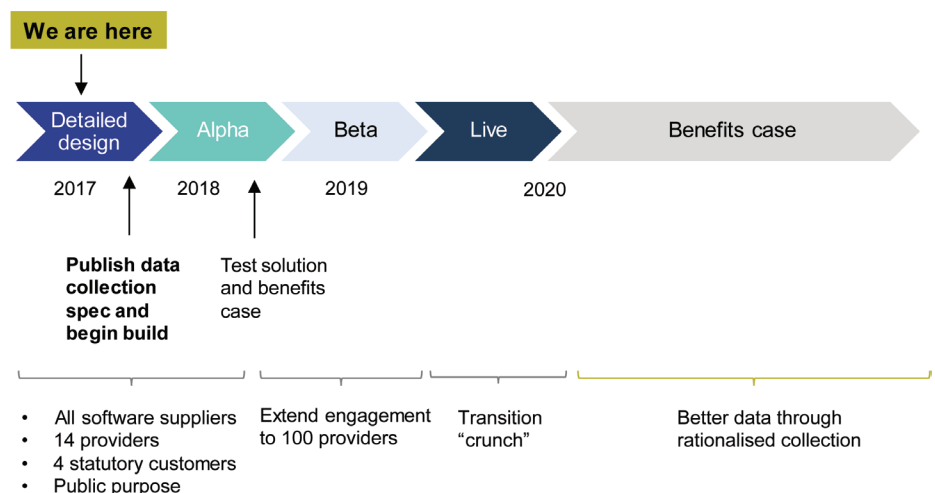
### HECoS

We have spent several years devising, in collaboration with UCAS and other key stakeholders, a new subject coding system to replace JACS. The new classification system – HECoS (the Higher Education Classification of Subjects) – is more flexible and better able to capture the diversity of modern HE provision.

**“HECoS will be a big step forward for the sector”** Marian Hilditch, Wonkhe blog

In the last year, we published the HECoS framework and released a range of supporting resources (including blogs, an implementation guide and mapping documents), and are working with UCAS to support providers coding courses ahead of the 2019/20 academic year.

#### ▼ Data Futures timeline



## AIM 2: INCREASE THE USEFULNESS OF THE DATA WE COLLECT



**We collaborate with data users to ensure that we provide information that is relevant and valuable. We also work to maximise access to our data, while providing key stakeholders with the necessary training to understand and manage data.**

### OPEN DATA

Our Open Data Strategy challenges us to publish much of the information we hold as open data over the next five years (where there are not data protection, or other concerns, preventing publication).

To achieve this we have appointed two open data champions who have spent the year engaging with the sector, building expertise through working with the Open Data Institute, and devising plans for what open data will mean for HESA.

- ▶ **Nearly 5,000 users have viewed our open data publication, *Higher Education Statistics for the UK 2015/16*.**

The open data champions have already overseen the publication of twelve of our releases under a creative commons licence, meaning that anyone is free to use and manipulate our data.

### COLLECTION REVIEW

We regularly review the data we collect to guarantee it is valuable, relevant, and necessary. To ensure we have the internal expertise to deliver these reviews, we have formed a new Data Policy & Governance team. This team oversees the entire data collection journey – from requirements gathering to drafting guidance and supporting submissions.

In addition to enhancing our internal expertise, we collaborate closely with the sector. In the last year, we have achieved the highest ever levels of engagement with our reviews – with 95 responses to our Staff record consultation, and 62 responses to our Estates record consultation.



## GRADUATE OUTCOMES

Our most significant recent review has been the NewDLHE review of the data we collect on the activities and views of graduates. This review ran for over two years and engaged widely with HE providers, sector bodies, governments, students' groups, and graduate recruiters.

The review proposed a new model for the collection of data on graduates which was put out to consultation in March. We received 187 responses to the consultation, and were given a clear mandate to adopt the new model.

Our new survey – the Graduate Outcomes survey – will include new questions that better reflect recent changes in HE provision and in the graduate labour market. These questions

will provide a richer picture of the diversity of graduate outcomes.

- ▶ Over 80% of respondents supported the design of the new survey of graduates.

The model of open centralisation selected for the survey will realise substantial efficiency savings across the sector, while ensuring that the data collected meets the highest standards of statistical rigour and that providers retain a significant stake in the survey's development.

Graduate Outcomes will provide important information about what graduates do after leaving university to work alongside and contextualise the data about graduate salaries provided by LEO.

## IMPROVING DATA CAPABILITY

As well as ensuring our data is open and meaningful, we have also worked over the last year to enhance the sector's ability to manage and understand the data they work with.

Our Training & Consultancy team has undertaken 65 seminars and 51 bespoke visits to providers. We have worked with over 2,500 delegates at these events, engaging with over 87% of HESA subscribers.

- ▶ 99% of delegates say they would recommend HESA training.

As part of our aim to support the professionalisation of colleagues, we now offer 31 CPD-accredited courses, which have already been taken by 378 attendees. We also continue to build up our online resources, running 61 webinars and relaunching the Data Capability Toolkit on our website.

### ▼ Graduate Outcomes milestones



## ► UNDERSTANDING AND MINIMISING BURDEN



**HESA has always been committed to minimising the burden on providers. We regularly make incremental changes to our systems to improve the user experience.**

“If we can get good flows of data on key indicators, we need to regulate less. When I raise the idea of data to people [...] they say that’s just going to be a burden. But [Data] can reduce the regulatory burden”. Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students, speaking to Universities UK, 23 June 2017

Over the last year we have provided 180 plain English translations of our quality rules. By providing rules that are comprehensible to all, we have saved users from having to work through multiple pages of guidance. We have also introduced drilldown functionality on our system reports.

This gives providers instant access to richer information about their student and staff populations, considerably speeding up the process of resolving credibility issues.

However, with renewed demands on realising efficiencies across the sector, we recognise the need to embed burden minimisation in everything we do, and that we must be transparent about how we evaluate this when making changes.

### **A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING BURDEN**

Burden is measurable – it can be assessed and reported on. We are working to establish a consistent and transparent method for assessing and reporting on the impact of changes in data requirements.

As part of the Data Futures programme, we have developed a new burden assessment matrix. This matrix assesses any change through a number of perspectives (or

‘lenses’). So, for each change, the matrix considers its impact on: gathering the data; quality assurance; data extraction and transformation; data transmission; systems development; and training and guidance. This will give us an overall understanding of the impact of the change.

### **THE FUTURE OF BURDEN MINIMISATION**

Our new burden assessment matrix (page 9) will be finalised over the coming year. It is one part of our wider strategic focus on developing and embedding data governance procedures in our activities, and in the activities of providers. Robust and consistently applied data governance procedures are crucial to achieving burden minimisation.

Although the matrix is still under construction, we have retrospectively put a recent change through it to give an indication of its impact on burden.

# BURDEN ASSESSMENT MATRIX

## FINANCE RETURN

Financial reporting regulations required providers to complete multiple Finance returns. We developed a solution that would combine two of these returns into one, but that would still produce the two necessary outputs at the end. We assessed this change through the six lenses (table below):

The change does not eliminate the burden, and in some areas (gathering and quality assurance) no burden reduction is achieved. But in other areas, significant burden reductions have been realised. By evaluating change through the matrix, we are able to decide on the value of the change, while providers also have a clear indication of the impact on their local processes.

**FINANCIAL RETURN - ANALYSIS OF CHANGE**



Change description	Consolidating two finance returns into a single return with two outputs		
	AS-IS	TO-BE	Context
Gathering	2	2	The data that needs to be gathered hasn't changed - and has to be collected anyway for providers' published accounts.
Assurance of data quality	5	5	The level of data quality is still the same, but is now managed through one system, and not two.
Extraction and transformation	7	3	Providers only have to extract the data once, but the return still has some complicated data in it (e.g. cost centre analysis).
Transmissions (load)	7	4	Providers only have to submit data once (to HESA), whereas before they had to submit it twice.
System change and development	4	1	Once the initial change is over, only one system needs to be maintained, and shouldn't change too much (given it's mostly based off the SORP which doesn't change that much).
Training and guidance	2	1	Guidance and training was produced for two systems, but now is only needed for one system.

# AIM 3: ENHANCE INSIGHT THROUGH ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION

**With our expert understanding of data and of the HE sector, we can provide powerful insights, which add further value to our data outputs.**

## ENHANCING BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

Heidi Plus, our business intelligence tool for the HE sector (developed in partnership with Jisc), is becoming integral to strategic planning. Heidi Plus allows users to intuitively and powerfully view and manipulate a range of datasets.

Heidi Plus is freely available to all providers with a full HESA subscription. 147 of our full subscribers (around 90% of the total) are now regular Heidi Plus users. A further 21 alternative providers and not-for-profit organisations have subscribed.

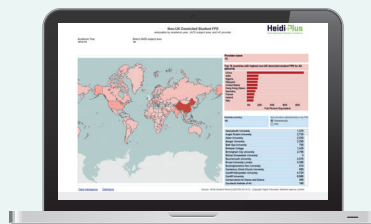


► **Unique users of Heidi Plus have increased from 300 to over 2,610.**

The Jisc Analytics Lab project – a collaboration between HESA and Jisc – is creating rich, fully interactive dashboards using HESA and other HE data for release through Heidi Plus. These dashboards are designed by colleagues in the sector and further developed by HESA. As a result, they respond directly to some of the key business challenges that providers face.

## ANALYSIS

Our Analysis team uses the latest statistical techniques to undertake detailed research and analytical projects using our data, as well as a range of linked data sources.



The team have worked on 25 detailed enquiries in the last year, while also continuing to work on data for the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) project. HEAT tracks learners who were involved in outreach activities into and throughout their time in higher education.

We continue to publish the UK Performance Indicators, in collaboration with the funding councils. These indicators provide comparative data on higher education providers, and afford significant insights into the sector's performance. For the first time this year, we published an experimental release on widening participation and non-continuation rates that included alternative providers. This release facilitates comparisons of HE providers in the publicly funded sector as well as alternative providers.

## NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

We continue to publish nine annual publications. We also completed 566 bespoke data requests – providing data to a wide range of organisations in the UK and beyond.

We are constantly producing and developing new reports to enable strategic decision-making within key organisations. We have launched a customisable report for local councils, and will be producing similar reports over the coming months.

## NEW WEBSITE

We launched the new HESA website in September 2016. The site holds nearly 25 years' worth of HE data and information, across many thousands of pages. Our free data on students in HE has been viewed by 65,000 users over the last year.

**"We like the new changes and can find everything we need - thank you!"**

We will continue to enhance this site over the coming years to ensure it becomes a powerful and intuitive hub for finding and interrogating higher education data and analysis.

## ▶ SHARING OUR EXPERTISE



**We are committed to sharing our data and expertise widely to support many different aims.**

### PROMOTING STUDENT CHOICE

## UNISTATS

Our data plays a crucial role in promoting student choice. The Unistats course comparison site relies on our student, course, staff, and destinations data. All the leading league table compilers make substantial use of our data also.

### INFORMING POLICY MAKING

Our data and sector expertise is regularly used by politicians and civil servants to inform and evaluate policies.

As leading experts in HE data, we were asked to contribute to the development of the Higher Education & Research Bill. Our senior leadership team has also addressed two all party parliamentary groups to provide insight into measuring graduate outcomes and into the current student enrolment landscape.

We were cited one hundred times in the Houses of Parliament last year: 41 times in the House of Commons, 59 times in

the House of Lords. HESA data is regularly used to provide authoritative answers to Parliamentary Questions relating to higher education across the UK.

### SUBSTANTIATING MEDIA COMMENTARY

The data we hold is regularly cited in media commentary about the HE sector and wider socio-cultural trends. Over the last year, our data has played a significant role in commentary on Brexit, grade inflation in HE, the gender pay gap, international students, diversity in academia, and widening participation.

### PROVIDING SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE

We have a wealth of expertise on a range of subjects related to data and the HE sector. Over the last year, we've spoken at a number of sector events, providing insight on such topics as: graduate outcomes, transnational education, the REF, degree apprenticeships, employability and skills, data quality, data governance, the alternative provider sector, HE finances, TEF and LEO data, university rankings, teaching qualifications, and data visualisation techniques.

"Since taking over the role of data editor at THE earlier this year, HESA has become a vital source of information that I have relied upon for countless articles. Not only do I find HESA's data resources easy to use and understand, its staff are always happy and willing to give advice and guidance on the way higher education statistics should be expressed and interpreted.

"HESA's data has this year helped THE provide informative and important articles on issues such as staff pay and how this is affected by gender and ethnicity; the financial state of the UK's universities and how staff from the European Union impact on HE in the UK.

"Quite simply, the debate on some of these crucial topics would be far poorer without the detailed facts underlying them, and HESA's input is essential to outlining and examining those facts."  
Simon Baker, Times Higher Education (THE)

# AIM 4: OPERATE EFFICIENTLY



**We are conscious of the financial pressures on HE providers, and are consistently pursuing efficiencies across all our activities to minimise additional costs and burden.**

## **COLLABORATION AND THE M5 GROUP**

The Bell Review of the sector agencies recommended that we form a strategic delivery partnership with Jisc, UCAS and HECSU to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of student-focussed data functions and services. We have existing relationships with these agencies and will be working with them to rationalise some data

processes, and to assess the feasibility of developing new, joint services in relation to the student journey.

We continue to demonstrate a commitment to delivering efficiencies through collaboration, via our activity with Jisc and QAA, as part of the M5 group. We are pooling expertise across a number of areas: technology support and development; marketing and communications; data protection; legal; CRM management; and procurement.

## **ENHANCING OUR BUSINESS SYSTEMS**

The M5 Group collaboration has enabled us to utilise existing expertise and development resource from Jisc in assisting a speedy

implementation of HESA's first Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution. The CRM provides a better experience for our customers while dramatically enhancing our ability to plan workloads, manage contacts and report on our activities.

## **DIVERSIFICATION OF REVENUE**

In addition to realising efficiency savings, we are also working to diversify our revenue streams to ensure our commercial activities can help ensure we keep subscription fees as low as possible. Over the last year we have developed our consultancy offering, launched new products, hosted a major conference, and begun developing strategic plans for maximising our revenue.

# ▶ THE YEAR AHEAD



**The year ahead is going to be challenging for HESA and the HE sector as the implications of the Higher Education & Research Act manifest. This not only affects England, it will also shape how we develop and deliver our services to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, to ensure a strong UK-wide data infrastructure is maintained.**

As we enter the second year of our five-year strategy we will continue to progress against our four strategic aims. To ensure a focus on these aims during such a busy and important year, we will be working to our Annual Operating Plan.

This identifies the following priorities to help us achieve our strategy:

- ▶ Delivering our current collections
- ▶ Building data insight and capability within the UK HE sector
- ▶ Achieving Designated Data Body status
- ▶ Securing our future financial stability
- ▶ Implementing governance and operational structures to deliver our statutory and commercial functions.

This year will also see us reach key milestones in many of our projects, including:

- ▶ Completing the Data Futures Alpha Pilot, establishing the Beta Pilot, and publishing the full detailed specification for the first collection in 2019/20.
- ▶ Appointing the contractor to run the Graduate Outcomes survey and finalising the survey specification.
- ▶ Publishing our first machine-readable open data publication.

These projects will drive innovation in the sector and contribute to the transformation of the HE information landscape.



## STAY IN TOUCH

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 **@ukhesa**

**HESA**

**95 Promenade**

**Cheltenham**

**GL50 1HZ**

**+44 (0)1242 255577**

