

To
Heads of OfS-funded higher education institutions
Heads of OfS-funded further education colleges
Heads of alternative providers of higher education in
England with specific course designation
Heads of publicly funded providers in Northern Ireland

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Ref OfS 2018.24

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22 May 2018

Dear Head of provider

National Student Survey and Unistats: Updated timetables and changes for 2018

1. This letter sets out information for higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland on:
 - revised arrangements and timetable for publication of the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS), arising from the Office for Students' expected designation as a producer of official statistics by July 2018
 - the processes and timetable for the Unistats data collection for 2018
 - upcoming changes to the Unistats website and dataset, including the incorporation of Longitudinal Education Outcomes data.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Scottish Funding Council will write separately to Welsh and Scottish providers.

Key points to note

2. The Office for Students (OfS) is applying the Code of Practice for Statistics to its data publication in anticipation of its designation as a producer of official statistics by July 2018. This has implications for the pre-publication access that we can grant to NSS outcomes and Unistats data, as these will now be treated as official statistics. As a consequence, we will now publish the NSS public dataset at the same time as providers are able to access their own data

on Friday 27 July 2018. There will also be no provider preview as part of the annual Unistats data collection and publication process, and data available in system reports will be limited to that essential for quality processes associated with the Unistats return.

3. In June 2018, we will add earnings data from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset for English providers to Unistats.
4. From September 2018, we will begin to use the Common Aggregation Hierarchy developed for the Higher Education Classification of Subjects to present data on Unistats in place of the current subject hierarchy.
5. We require all providers to have signed off their Unistats data by **noon on Friday 17 August 2018** for publication on the Unistats website on Thursday 30 August 2018.
6. For OfS-funded providers, it is currently a condition of funding to provide Unistats data, as set out in 'Terms and conditions of funding for higher education institutions' (OfS 2018.15, available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/terms-and-conditions-of-funding-for-higher-education-institutions/) and 'Terms and conditions of funding for further education and sixth form colleges' (OfS 2018.16, available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/terms-and-conditions-of-funding-for-further-education-and-sixth-form-colleges/).
7. As was the case in 2017, alternative providers of higher education in England are required as a condition of their specific course designation to provide Unistats data (see the Government's guidance published in July 2017, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specific-course-designation-alternative-higher-education-providers>).

Changes to the publication of 2018 NSS data

8. The timetable for publication of NSS 2018 was announced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in March 2018, in 'National Student Survey 2018: Publication of data' (HEFCE Circular letter 04/2018, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2018/CL,042018/). As it expects to be designated as a producer of official statistics prior to publication of NSS 2018, the OfS will need to make changes to the schedule to align the approach with the Code of Practice for Statistics. We will therefore no longer be able to offer providers prior access to the data. This will apply to all providers in the UK, as the OfS produces and publishes the data.
9. The OfS will now publish the 2018 NSS public dataset at the same time as providers are able to access their own data, at 0930 on **Friday 27 July 2018**, not 8 August as advised in HEFCE Circular letter 04/2018. Aside from the publication schedule, other arrangements announced by HEFCE in the circular letter are unaffected.
10. We acknowledge that this revision to the publication timetable will impact on providers and require changes to be implemented. We have therefore tried to minimise this disruption by ensuring providers do not have to wait longer than planned for access to the 2018 NSS results.

Table 1: Revised timetable for the 2018 NSS publication

Original date	Revised date	2018 NSS results
27 July 2018	27 July 2018	Providers are able to access overall provider-level and subject-level question responses and open text comments, via the data dissemination portal.
3 August 2018	27 July 2018	Providers are able to access all providers' NSS results at institutional and subject level via the data dissemination portal. Access to the OfS public dataset via the data dissemination portal is also available.
8 August 2018	27 July 2018	The OfS will publish the 2018 NSS public dataset on its website.

Changes and updates to the Unistats website and dataset

Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework outcomes

11. The Unistats website will be updated in June 2018 to include Year three outcomes from the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.

Addition of Longitudinal Education Outcomes data for English providers

12. The Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset is a new dataset, which links information about employment and earnings from HM Revenue and Customs tax records to individual student records for the first time. It is a substantial administrative dataset, which provides much greater coverage than the previously available survey data on graduate earnings. One of the aims of the new regulatory system in England is to ensure that all students have access to information that allows them to make well informed course choices. To support this aim, the Department for Education has asked the OfS to publish LEO data on the Unistats website as soon as possible.

13. We intend to add LEO data to Unistats in late June, for English providers for which we have appropriate student data returns. In deciding on our publication approach, we have carried out work to ensure that what we publish is robust and useful to prospective students, including testing various presentations of the data with them. Data is not currently available for other providers, but we intend to revisit UK-wide coverage when we develop longer-term approaches to graduate outcomes information as part of the redesign of Unistats for launch in 2019. In the future, we will also be able to publish data for English providers that have only recently been required to return student data, and for the majority of whose graduates we cannot therefore currently link earnings information.

14. The approach we will take will involve removing the longitudinal salary information from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey and, for English providers, replacing this with pay as you earn (PAYE) earnings data for the tax year three years after graduation from the LEO dataset. This was the approach which tested most effectively with students. This will enable us to provide prospective students with longitudinal earnings data at institutional level, whereas currently we can only publish data from the longitudinal DLHE survey at sector level. We will continue to publish the salary information collected six months after graduation from the DLHE survey. Further details about our approach to publication of the data are in Annex A.
15. In line with the Code of Practice for official statistics, LEO data on Unistats will be labelled as experimental statistics to reflect that these are new statistics and are still being developed. We will be inviting feedback from users on them and will publish the methodology used in their creation on the OfS website.
16. We will confirm the date of publication of LEO data on Unistats in the statistical release schedule on the OfS website before the end of May 2018.

Changes to subjects used for Unistats for the 2018 dataset

17. We currently use a three-level subject hierarchy for display and aggregation of data on Unistats which is based on Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) codes. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), has been developed to replace JACS (see <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/hecos>), and a Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) to which both JACS and HECoS codes can be mapped has also been developed. HECoS will be adopted by UCAS from May 2018 for 2019 entrants, so, to provide consistency for prospective students, we will begin to use the CAH to present data on Unistats from August 2018. This means that we will begin to use the new coding from the 2018 data collection.
18. The impact of this change on the data return is limited to new courses. Where courses are linked to historic course records in the Unistats data, we will map the JACS codes for the linked courses to the CAH. For further education colleges we will map Learn Direct Classification System (LDCS) codes for linked courses to JACS codes, as currently, and then map those JACS codes to the CAH. For new courses, higher education institutions and alternative providers will need to return HECoS codes where they currently return JACS codes, but further education colleges may continue to return LDCS codes.

Unistats 2018 data collection: process and timetable

Changes to data available through Unistats collection system reports and provider preview

19. In previous years, it has been possible for providers to see the figures that would be published on Unistats for the DLHE survey and the NSS through the reports that providers can generate from the data collection system to assist them in quality checking their returns. As we will apply the Code of Practice for Statistics to Unistats data, we will be removing the NSS and DLHE

response data from these reports. We will continue to show the number of students represented by the data associated with each course and, where relevant, the level at which the data has been aggregated. These reports should only be used for quality assurance purposes and the data within them should only be shared with individuals who need it for this purpose.

20. We will no longer be able to offer a provider preview period through the Unistats website. We would encourage all providers to engage with the reports available through the collection system to carry out checks on their data. As there will be no further opportunity to check the data this year, we have decided to set the sign-off deadline later in August than in recent years, to allow additional time for engagement with the system reports. This year's Unistats timetable is set out below. Please note that this differs from the timetable previously published on the Higher Education Statistics Agency website.

Unistats timetable

Table 2: Timetable for the 2018 Unistats collection

Date	Activity	Notes
24 May 2018	Data collection systems open.	
11 July 2018	National Student Survey (NSS) and DLHE data added	NSS and DLHE data will be added to the data collection systems and will be visible in reports. This data is restricted to the number of students and aggregation level associated with each Unistats course record.
12 July 2018	Valid data submission required.	By this date, providers are required to have submitted a dataset which passes validation and contains the majority of their courses.
17 August 2018 (noon)	Deadline for sign-off of data.	Providers are required to have signed off as accurate a dataset which has passed system validation and is suitable for publication.
30 August 2018	Update of Unistats website with the 2018 dataset.	
Early September 2018	Collection systems reopen for updates.	The Unistats dataset is dynamic and it will be possible to make amendments on a weekly basis from September, as it is currently.
29 September 2018	Deadline for update of widgets to reflect new course data.	There are no changes to the coding of the Unistats widget this year, but providers should update these for new courses or changes to course codes.

Data quality assurance

21. Providers are responsible for the quality of their Unistats data. The dataset for publication should initially be signed off by the accountable officer, but formal responsibility for signing off any subsequent updates may be delegated to another member of the senior management team.

Replacement of Unistats

22. Following consultation on the outcomes of the Review of Unistats in 2015, the funding bodies are working together on options for a replacement for the Unistats website. This new resource would draw on the findings from the review about decision-making behaviour and the information needs of different groups of prospective students. We will progress this work in stages – ensuring that it is developed in a way that meets the needs of prospective students across all countries of the UK – and will provide the sector with periodic updates, the first of which will be in summer 2018.

Further information

23. Further information on the Unistats data submission process and where to find guidance and support can be found in Annex B (for higher education institutions and alternative providers), and Annex C (for further education and sixth form colleges).

24. Further information on the OfS's application of the Code of Practice for Statistics can be found on our website.

25. For queries about Unistats, please contact Rose Spicer (0117 931 7148, unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk). For queries about the NSS, please contact Rob Denny (0117 931 7078, nss@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

Nicola Dandridge
Chief Executive

Abbreviations

CAH	Common Aggregation Hierarchy
DLHE	Destination for Leavers in Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HECoS	Higher Education Classification of Subjects
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System
LCDS	Learn Direct Classification System
LEO	Longitudinal Earnings Outcome
NSS	National Student Survey
OfS	Office for Students
PAYE	Pay as You Earn

Annex A: Approach to publication of Longitudinal Education Outcomes data on Unistats

Approach to publication of LEO data

1. As with DLHE salary data, we will display Longitudinal Earnings Outcome (LEO) earnings data only for those employed in the UK. We will also exclude those who are both working and studying.
2. Our approach to publication of LEO data is intended to ensure that the data is robust and as useful to prospective students as possible. It includes:
 - a. **Replacing the longitudinal earnings data on Unistats with the LEO data for the tax year three years after graduation** – At the moment we are only replacing the information from the longitudinal DLHE survey. LEO data can be published at provider level whereas longitudinal DLHE data can only be published at sector level, so this will allow us to provide more relevant information for prospective students. We will be developing a long-term approach to employment and outcomes information, to be introduced when the Graduate Outcomes survey replaces the DLHE survey.
 - b. **Using data from PAYE tax records only** – We will publish annualised data from pay as you earn (PAYE) tax records (those for individuals where income tax is deducted at source). The data from self-assessment returns (completed by individuals who are self-employed) is complex and difficult to interpret, and our testing with students indicates that it is not currently suitable for inclusion as student information.
 - c. **Combining data over two years** – We will combine data for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 tax years, to minimise the impact of any exceptional annual variations.
 - d. **Applying publication thresholds** – We will not publish data where we do not have it for 15 or more students. This threshold is based on analysis which shows significant volatility in the data below this level. As we are not currently using earning from self-assessment tax records, we will not publish data for a subject where those in self-employment account for more than 50 per cent of graduates working in the UK.
 - e. **Publishing subject-level data** – We cannot currently link LEO data to Unistats course records. We will publish data at the lowest level of the subject hierarchy at which the publication threshold is met. We will attempt to publish LEO data at level 3 of the subject hierarchy, then aggregate data at higher levels of the subject hierarchy where necessary to meet thresholds.
 - f. **Displaying a message where no data is available** – We are aware that there are some providers for which we will not yet have LEO data, and in these cases we will display a message making clear that the absence of data does not reflect on the quality of the course. This message will also be displayed where publication thresholds are not met at the highest level of the subject hierarchy and no data is published as a result.

- g. **Providing information on the dataset and highlighting key points about earnings data**
– Alongside the LEO data, we will publish the key points that users of the data should bear in mind, such as the changing nature of the labour market, the impact of factors other than course quality on earnings, and the impact that regional variations on earnings can have. We will also link to text which provides more detail on the dataset and greater explanation of earnings information.

Contextualisation of LEO data

3. We recognise that providers may wish to contextualise the LEO data published on Unistats. There is currently a field in the Unistats data return (EMPLOYURL), which allows for the return of a link to information about employment prospects of students completing the course. This link will now appear by the earnings information. Providers may wish to add further contextual information about employment outcomes to their destination pages, where they consider this would be helpful in light of the publication of the LEO data for the subject area.

Annex B: Further information for higher education institutions, Welsh further education institutes and alternative providers of higher education

1. Higher education institutions, Welsh further education institutes and alternative providers of higher education should submit Unistats data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
2. Detailed guidance on submitting Unistats data is available on the HESA website (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c18061/>). Access to the HESA data collection system is managed through the HESA Identity System (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/user-guides/ids-guide>).
3. HESA monitors the data collection system to ensure providers are progressing well and not encountering difficulties. For assistance with the submission process, contact HESA's institutional liaison 01242 211144, liaison@hesa.ac.uk, www.hesa.ac.uk/liaison.
4. Published Unistats data is based on the provider at which a course is taught, regardless of funding arrangements. The principle is that each student is recorded, for the purposes of Unistats, against the provider at which they studied in their first year. This means that where providers receive funding through a variety of routes they must submit a Unistats return even if they do not directly receive Office for Students (OfS) funding. Therefore, registering providers should make their partners aware of their responsibilities in relation to Unistats. For further guidance, see the 'Collaborative provision' guidance document on the HESA website (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c18061/>).
5. HESA and the OfS will liaise with providers' Unistats contacts about the provision of Unistats data, and will direct further communications to them. It is essential that providers ensure their Unistats contact details are up to date. Please note that the OfS and HESA hold separate lists of Unistats contacts, as these have slightly different purposes for each organisation. Providers are responsible for ensuring that their Unistats contact details are up to date on both the OfS's and HESA's records. HESA has an online contact management system through which providers can update the details of their nominated HESA Unistats contact: providers should communicate any change in staff to the institutional liaison by email to liaison@hesa.ac.uk, and will then be given access to HESA's online system so that they can make the necessary changes. Providers can amend their OfS Unistats contacts by emailing unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Annex C: Further information for English further education colleges

1. English further education colleges should return Unistats data to the Office for Students (OfS).
2. Further education colleges will need to collect the data outlined in the Unistats data technical guidance on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) website (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c18061/>) and upload it to the OfS extranet. Details of how to access the extranet will be sent to Unistats contacts when the data collection opens.
3. Published Unistats data is based on the provider at which a course is taught, regardless of funding arrangements. The principle is that each student is recorded, for the purposes of Unistats, against the provider at which they studied in their first year. This means that where providers receive funding through a variety of routes they must submit a Unistats return even if they do not directly receive OfS funding. Therefore, registering providers should make their partners aware of their responsibilities in relation to the Unistats data return. For further guidance, see the 'Collaborative provision' guidance document on the HESA website (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c18061/>).
4. We encourage providers to upload their data as early as possible after Thursday 24 May 2018, so that any issues of data quality can be resolved as soon as possible. For assistance with the submission process, contact unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk.
5. The OfS will liaise with Unistats contacts in further education colleges about the provision of Unistats data and will direct further communications to them. It is essential that providers ensure their Unistats contact is up to date. Email unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk to amend Unistats contact details.
6. Note that the data should not be signed off by the individual compiling and submitting the Unistats return, but by the accountable officer. This is normally the head of provider.