

Office for
Students



Higher Education Students Forecast 2024-25 (HESF24)

Reference OfS 2023.49

Enquiries to recurrentgrant@officeforstudents.org.uk

Publication date 17 October 2023

This document is relevant to higher education providers that:

- have registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in the Approved (fee cap) category
- do not have higher education provision recognised for OfS funding purposes in 2023-24
- will offer higher education provision recognised for OfS funding purposes in 2024-25.

The data collected provides a forecast of higher education students expected to study on courses recognised for OfS funding in 2024-25 and will inform the allocation of teaching funds for 2024-25.

Action: To allow grant allocations to be calculated, higher education providers will need to upload returns to the OfS portal according to a timetable that we will specify separately.

Contents

Introduction	3
Purpose	3
Action required	4
Calculating funding	5
How to use this document	6
Part 1: Guidance for completing the survey	6
Part 2: Funding rules and definitions	6
Part 1: The HESF process and instructions on completing the workbook	7
Contents of this section	7
The HESF process	7
Data assurance	10
Self-check questions	12
Guidance for completing the workbook tables	13
Forecast of years of engagement for 2024-25	13
Part 2: Definitions and further guidance	16
The HESF24 population	16
Academic year	17
Year of engagement	17
The provider that registers the student	17
New entrants	18
Actively pursuing studies	19
Recognised higher education courses for OfS funding purposes	19
Study outside the UK	19
OfS-fundable students	20
How years of engagement are counted and categorised in HESF	21
Mode of study	21
Level of study	22
Long years of engagement	23
Price group	23
List of abbreviations	25

Introduction

Purpose

1. All providers that are registered in the Approved (fee cap) category with the Office for Students (OfS) for the academic year (1 August to 31 July) 2023-24 will be required to submit a data return. This will allow us to calculate OfS funding for 2024-25.
2. This document sets out the requirements for the HESF24 survey, and applies only to higher education providers that:
 - a. Have registered with the OfS in the Approved (fee cap) category.
 - b. **Do not** have higher education provision in 2023-24 recognised for OfS funding purposes and are therefore not receiving OfS funding for the 2023-24 academic year. (Some may, however, have provision that is subcontracted in, whereby they teach students of another provider under a subcontractual arrangement.)
 - c. Will offer higher education provision recognised for OfS funding purposes for the first time in 2024-25. This excludes eligible provision that is subcontracted in.

Recognised higher education for OfS funding purposes relates to the types of courses offered by a provider as defined in paragraphs 78 to 80. It does not depend on whether the OfS is actually funding the provider directly.

3. Typically, the HESF return will be completed by providers that are starting to offer higher education courses for the first time. Higher education providers in the Approved (fee cap) category that have students in 2023-24 on higher education courses recognised for OfS funding purposes will need to complete the 2023 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES23) survey.¹
4. The data in the HESF24 return will provide a forecast of the number of students on higher education courses recognised for OfS funding purposes who are expected to begin studying in the academic year 2024-25, and will inform the initial allocation of teaching funds for the academic year 2024-25.
5. This document provides the following:
 - a. An introduction to the HESF24 survey and how we will use it to inform our funding allocations.
 - b. Guidance notes for completing the HESF24 survey (Part 1).
 - c. Notes on the specific definitions used in the HESF24 survey (Part 2).
 - d. Good practice guidance.
6. Appendices which provide detailed technical information to support the HESF24 tables (Part 3) will be available on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-

¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/heses23/.

[collection/hesf/](#). Providers that need to complete HESF24 will be able to download the workbook from the OfS portal.

Action required

7. To allow for HESF24 data to be used to calculate 2024-25 grant allocations, providers will need to:
 - a. Submit a completed HESF24 workbook.
 - b. Answer any verification queries we may raise on the submitted data.
 - c. Arrange for the HESF24 data to be signed off as accurate by the provider’s accountable officer.
8. The survey timetable is summarised in Table A below, including indicative deadlines comparable with those given to providers completing the HESES23 survey, which would allow inclusion in the main announcement of recurrent grant for 2024-25, scheduled for summer 2024.
9. Providers may be asked to complete HESF24 outside of this timeline, for instance if they become registered later in the 2023-24 academic year. In such cases, we will provide alternative deadlines and will announce any 2024-25 grant allocations later in the year.

Table A: Indicative HESF24 timetable

Stage	Action	Indicative dates ²
Workbook release	This is the date from which HESF24 workbooks will be available to relevant providers via the OfS portal.	From late October 2023
Submission deadline	This is the deadline by which providers will be expected to return HESF data, if they are to be included in the initial spring 2024 announcement of grant for 2024-25. Workbooks must be submitted through the OfS portal by noon on the deadline date.	11 December 2023
Data verification phase	This follows the initial submission of HESF24. Student data contacts at providers will be asked to verify, and answer any questions about, the data. Contacts will have up to five working days to respond. Further rounds of queries may be necessary.	From mid-December 2023
Sign-off deadline	Once data verification is complete, HESF24 data must be signed off by the provider’s accountable officer , ³ who is usually the head of provider, as being a realistic forecast of the student numbers that the provider will have in 2024-25.	31 January 2024

² These indicative dates are based on the required timetable for completing HESF24 to allow providers to be included in the spring 2024 initial announcement of recurrent grant for 2024-25. Alternative dates/deadlines will be set for providers that register later in the 2023-24 academic year which will lead to incorporation into later grant announcements.

³ See ‘Regulatory advice 10: Accountable officers: Guidance for providers on the responsibilities of accountable officers’ (OfS 2018.29), available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-10-accountable-officers-guidance-for-providers-on-the-responsibilities-of-accountable-officers/.

10. Where a provider fails to return credible data on time, we may base the allocation of funds on our own estimate of student activity. Providers that do not submit credible data on time are more likely to be audited.
11. Each provider completing HESF must have its data signed off by its accountable officer. This forecast data should represent the most realistic and likely outcome of the provider's recruitment in 2024-25. We will use this data in the calculations for each provider's initial 2024-25 grant allocations.
12. Providers that receive OfS funding for 2024-25 will be required to complete an in-year data return in late 2024. For providers that have completed HESF24, this in-year data return will be used to recalculate their initial 2024-25 grant allocations.

Calculating funding

13. Once your HESF24 data is signed off, we will convert the count of years of engagement into full-time equivalence (FTE) figures that can be used to inform our funding calculations for 2024-25. These FTE figures will take into account factors not recorded in the HESF survey itself, such as the study intensity of part-time students. To do this, we will apply 'multiplication factors' to your HESF24 data; these factors will be derived from sector-level data for 2022-23 returned in the HESES22 survey.
14. For further detail on how this process will work, please see Changes to 2023 student data surveys to inform funding.⁴ Using sector-level data is consistent with how we will calculate funding for other providers which are completing HESES23, but where we have limited or non-existent HESES22 data.

⁴ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/changes-to-2023-student-data-surveys-to-inform-funding-notification-of-changes/.

How to use this document

15. This document provides guidance on how to complete the HESF24 survey and summarises the funding rules and definitions for OfS-funded higher education, with links to further guidance. This document has three parts.

Part 1: Guidance for completing the survey

16. This part explains how to download the survey and describes the data to enter into each table. It also explains the process for verifying and signing off the data, as well as considerations for data assurance.

Part 2: Funding rules and definitions

17. This part defines the student population covered by the HESF survey and gives guidance on what is 'countable' in HESF24. This ensures we can collect information on students counted for funding purposes.

- Data returns must be prepared using the OfS funding rules set out in our guidance and not according to your own academic regulations. There are often, quite reasonably, differences between individual providers' academic regulations and the rules relating to the counting of students for funding purposes. Links to definitions and more detailed information provided in our HESES23 guidance document are given throughout this document.

Part 3: Appendices

18. The appendices contain detailed technical information to support the HESF24 tables:⁵

- Appendix 1 provides guidance on using the OfS portal and workbook submission
- Appendix 2 describes the validation checks on HESF24 data.

⁵ The appendices will be available on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-collection/hesf/.

Part 1: The HESF process and instructions on completing the workbook

Contents of this section

The HESF process:

- Overview of the HESF24 process
- Before completing your survey
- Notes on completing your survey
- Submitting your survey
- The data verification phase
- Signing off your data
- What happens after the data is signed off
- Data assurance
- Good practice

Self-check questions

Guidance for completing workbook tables:

- Selecting students to include in the survey
- Definitions
- The tables in the HESF24 survey workbook
- Data to enter into the tables

The HESF process

19. This part describes the whole HESF process, from compiling and submitting the survey, through the data verification phase, to the point where the data is signed off. It also gives details of our data audit programme and recommendations on good practice.

Before completing your survey

20. In preparation for completing the survey, we recommend that you read this guidance thoroughly. When completing the survey, you will need to follow the definitions described in Part 2. You will also need to refer to the guidance given in the HES23 survey, which is available on the OfS website.⁶

⁶ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/heses23/.

21. We have also released a number of online training materials, which are available from our website at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-collection/heses-training-materials/>.
22. Your provider should nominate a member of staff to act as our 'Student data contact' for the HESF24 survey. This person will be our primary point of contact during the HESF process, though it is possible for your provider to nominate alternative contacts. It is important that your contact details are correct. If you want to check or amend them, please contact us at recurrentgrant@officeforstudents.org.uk. We recommend that more than one person is involved with completing the survey, so that expertise is spread across your staff.
23. We will write to you when the workbooks are released. The HESF24 workbook is a Microsoft Excel file (.xlsx) that will be available to download from the OfS portal (<https://extranet.officeforstudents.org.uk/data>). Please note that before you can access the workbook, the OfS portal user administrator at your provider will need to grant you access. Appendix 1 provides further information on how to use the portal and the role of the user administrator.

Notes on completing your survey

24. When completing the workbook, any validation errors will be automatically highlighted. This indicates where data is not feasible; for example, where a negative number has been entered in a column. Validation errors need to be corrected before the workbook is submitted.
25. After completing the workbook, it is good practice for someone else to review the data. You should also:
 - a. Have a senior member of the provider check the return and agree that it is a realistic forecast of the student numbers that the provider will have in 2024-25.
 - b. Use the set of [self-check questions](#) (page 12) as a final check on your data and processes.

Submitting your survey

26. When you are satisfied that the data is complete and credible, you should upload the workbook to the OfS portal. Please note that the portal usually sees heavy traffic on submission deadline days, which can cause the upload process to take longer than usual. You can submit the workbook to us before the submission date, and it is possible to submit the workbook multiple times, though we will only use the most recently uploaded version.
27. After the HESF workbook has been successfully uploaded to the portal, you will be able to download a results package. This contains the latest processed copy of your HESF workbook with an updated 'Information' worksheet that will show the submission date and a version number. You should always download the results package, as we will refer to the most recent version of your workbook during the rest of the HESF process.

The data verification phase

28. We use the data verification phase of the HESF process to make sure that we are confident in the accuracy of your data and that we understand the basis for the predictions you have made.

29. Before your HESF data can be signed off, any data verification queries we have will need to be answered. Your data will need to be signed off as a realistic forecast of the student numbers you will have in 2024-25. It is advisable to have more than one member of staff involved with completing the HESF survey and the data verification phase.
30. After the submission deadline, we will review your HESF workbook and will email your provider's student data contact with our initial queries. This initial email will contain a letter with full instructions, along with our specific queries set out in a separate document.
31. We expect your response to our initial queries to be returned within five working days and emailed to dataverification@officeforstudents.org.uk. We will then review your response and, if necessary, respond with further queries. Several rounds of queries are often necessary before your data is ready to be signed off.
32. During data verification, it may become apparent that part of your workbook needs to be amended. If so, we will provide directions for resubmitting your data.

Data queries

33. Generally, data verification queries allow us to gain assurance about your forecast numbers and data handling processes. We may ask questions to check that you are using the correct definitions, or to confirm the data you are using to inform your predictions. We may also compare your HESF24 forecast with information you have provided for OfS registration purposes and with student numbers that you have previously taught on behalf of another registered provider under any subcontractual arrangement.
34. When you respond to our queries, we are looking for responses that directly relate to the query, provide an appropriate level of detail, and show an understanding of the relevant OfS funding definitions.

Signing off your data

35. When our queries have been answered and any amendments to your data have been processed, we will ask for your data to be signed off by your provider's **accountable officer**.
36. We will send you a verification form by email. Please check that the date and version number match those in your most recent HESF workbook. Your accountable officer will need to sign this form, which should then be emailed back to us.
37. Immediately after the sign-off deadline, we will start using your HESF data to calculate your grant for 2024-25.

Recalculation of 2024-25 funding based on updated 2024-25 student numbers

38. Providers completing HESF24 will be required to complete an in-year survey of their student numbers in autumn 2024 (as will all other providers receiving OfS funding for 2024-25). The exact form of this survey will be confirmed in summer 2024. We will use this in-year data return to recalculate and adjust your funding (up or down) to reflect your actual student numbers in 2024-25. This will ensure that you are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by a forecast that turns out not

to reflect the actual position. Further details of how this recalculation process will work will be released at a later date.

Data assurance

39. Data assurance is an essential part of how we can ensure our approach to regulation is appropriate and effective. Providers are responsible for the quality and accuracy of the data they submit to us and other bodies. We do not approve or agree their data submissions, but we monitor the reasonableness and credibility of data, including by comparing and reconciling between different datasets and carrying out audits. We will require providers to amend their data submissions, if we believe there are errors which would significantly and materially affect our use of the data. This may include requiring changes to how providers use subject classifications and hence how students are assigned to price groups for our funding purposes.
40. It is essential to keep an audit trail when filling out your HESF return, recording how your decisions have been made and the data used to support them. One example of an area we may look at as part of our regulatory responsibilities is whether there is sufficient data for any estimates, forecasts or judgements.
41. Our data assurance activities, including audits, test the systems and processes used by a provider to prepare specific aspects of their data. This may involve requiring and reviewing documentation in support of the return and testing the values included.

Good practice

Audit trail

42. You should keep an adequate audit trail for the compilation of your HESF and future data returns, for at least five years. It should be possible to provide a clear rationale for the figures, and to supply any data used to support your estimates along with any relevant electronically stored data, printouts and working papers used in completing the return. Source documents such as registration forms should also be retained, including information on their qualifications on entry.
43. Where your provider is involved in subcontractual or other partnership arrangements, your audit trail must contain evidence for the inclusion or exclusion of students (including details of the partnership arrangements between providers) and for the categorisation of students that are included.

Knowledge management and staff training

44. It is advisable to have **at least two people** who know how to prepare data returns, including HESF. Where the knowledge required to prepare OfS data returns is undocumented and lies with only one person, this creates a risk that in that person's absence, particularly at crucial times of the year, the provider may not be able to prepare the return on time and to the appropriate standard. A good audit trail helps to reduce this risk, but we also consider it good practice for all providers to manage it by ensuring that at least two people can produce the information for the return and prepare the return itself.
45. All relevant staff, including experienced staff, should consider the relevant OfS guidance each year and make any necessary changes to their systems. Providers should also ensure that the relevant processes are adequately documented and that this documentation is kept up to date.

46. Staff should prepare data returns using the OfS funding rules set out in our guidance and not according to their own academic regulations. There are often, quite reasonably, differences between providers' academic regulations and the rules relating to the counting of students for funding purposes. It is essential that individuals involved in completing student data fields used for funding purposes fully understand the fields they are completing in the student record.
47. Your data collection and recording procedures should be **applied consistently** across the provider. Although providers have academic regulations and procedures for managing student data in their student record systems, practice within providers can be inconsistent. In general, provider practices for collecting and recording data should be applied consistently across all departments and faculties with the same data requirements. However, some departments may have additional requirements to meet. For example, faculties of health studies often have requirements beyond those of the rest of the provider.
48. Your staff should **understand the funding rules** and how they relate to the provider's student record system. Data quality will be improved if staff who input data into, manage and maintain the student record system understand and take into account the requirements of its users. Such staff should be trained in the provider's data requirements, with reference to any differences between academic regulation requirements and funding rule requirements, so that they understand why they are asked to perform particular tasks.

Management information

49. In gaining assurance we do not ask for any reports that could not reasonably be expected to be used in everyday activity. Providers should ensure that their student record system holds the required data and that they are able to extract it.
50. Developing exception reporting, and using it to highlight data issues for review and subsequent amendment, will help to ensure that high-quality data is returned. Data quality is also enhanced by data management reviews by those with a good understanding of the data.

Self-check questions

Please ensure that you can answer 'Yes' to all these questions before submitting the completed HESF24 return.

- Q1. Have you complied with the OfS's funding rules, as set out in Part 2?
- Q2. Have you considered the good practice tips contained in this document?
- Q3. Have you kept an effective audit trail?
- Q5. Have you passed all of the validation checks on each table? (See Appendix 2 for further information.)
- Q6. In your forecasts, have you included all students that **will be beginning** their year of engagements in the 2024-25 academic year? (Using the OfS definition.)
- Q7. Are the forecasts and estimates you have made as part of your HESF return made from robust and accurate past performance data where this is available, for example where the provision was previously taught on behalf of another provider under a subcontractual arrangement? Have you kept an audit trail for these decisions?
- Q8. Have you excluded years of engagement which will be subcontracted in?

Guidance for completing the workbook tables

51. The following paragraphs provide guidance on how to complete the HESF survey workbook. The survey table is contained in an Excel workbook. There is one worksheet to complete:

- Table 1 – Forecast of years of engagements for 2024-25.

52. In this table you will provide a forecast of student numbers you expect to **recruit** for 2024-25 on higher education courses recognised for OfS funding purposes. The forecast you make should represent the most realistic and likely outcome and should not be overly ambitious or pessimistic.

Content and structure of the workbook table

53. In HESF24 you are specifically forecasting the number of **years of engagement** that **start in the academic year 2024-25**. Only years of engagement generated by **new entrants** who are **OfS-fundable** should be counted. You should only be forecasting students that you expect to be **registered with your provider** and who will be actively pursuing studies for a course that meets our definition of **recognised higher education** for OfS funding purposes. Information on these terms is given in Part 2.

54. The HESF table has one section in which you need to enter the estimated years of engagement for the academic year 2024-25.

The table is further broken down by price group.

55. Further information on the definitions used in HESF is given in Part 2 of this document.

56. The table contains two different cell types:

- white cells, where we require data to be entered where appropriate to your provider
- blue cells, which have either been pre-populated with data from another source, or pre-filled by an underlying calculation.

57. When entering data into the table, you may also see a red highlighted message above the table. These validation failures indicate where the data you have entered is not feasible; for example, if you enter values to more than two decimal places. If any validation checks are triggered, you should check your data and make any necessary corrections. We will not accept a workbook with validation failures.

Forecast of years of engagement for 2024-25

58. In this table you are providing a forecast of the students you are expecting to start studying, and therefore beginning their first year of engagement, in the 2024-25 academic year. We will use this information when we calculate initial funding for 2024-25. A partial screenshot of the table is shown in Figure 1.

59. When completing Section 1, you need to enter a forecast of the total years of engagement for new entrants in 2024-25. You will need to further break down the years of engagement by:

- a. Mode of study (Full-time or Part-time) – see paragraphs 85 to 88.
- b. Length of year (Standard or Long) – see paragraphs 94 and 95.
- c. Level of study (UG (Level 4 and 5), UG (Other), PGT (UG fee), PGT (Masters' loan) or PGT (Other)) – see paragraphs 89 to 93.
- d. Price group (A, B, C1.1, C1.2, C2 or D). You may need to split years of engagement across price groups. If this is the case, up to two decimal places can be used but the total years of engagement must be a whole number – see paragraphs 96 to 98.

60. **Validation failure** messages will occur for Table 1 if:

- a. The table contains a negative number.
- b. The totals in the table do not add up to whole numbers. If you have courses that are split across price groups the totals must still be a whole number.
- c. You record numbers to more than two decimal places.

Figure 1: Table 1 – Forecast of years of engagement for 2024-25

Table 1: Forecast of years of engagement for 2024-25

Provider name

Validation checks are described in full detail below the table.

Validation: OK

			Section 1						
			Forecast of years of engagement for new entrants for academic year 2024-25						
			Price group						Total
Mode	Length	Level	A	B	C1.1	C1.2	C2	D	
Full-time	Standard	UG (Level 4 and 5)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		UG (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (UG fee)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Masters' loan)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Long	UG (Level 4 and 5)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		UG (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (UG fee)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Masters' loan)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Part-time	Standard	UG (Level 4 and 5)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		UG (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (UG fee)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Masters' loan)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Long	UG (Level 4 and 5)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		UG (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (UG fee)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Masters' loan)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		PGT (Other)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	UG (Level 4 and 5)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	UG (Other)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	PGT (UG fee)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	PGT (Masters' loan)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	PGT (Other)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Part 2: Definitions and further guidance

65. This document provides a summary of OfS funding rules and definitions, but does not provide the complete guidance on them, as this has already been provided for the HESES23 survey. You should consult the HESES23 guidance document for further information when completing your HESF24 survey.⁷
66. OfS funding rules and definitions are given in the annexes contained in Section 2 of the HESES23 guidance document. These are listed in Table B.

Table B: Contents of the HESES23 guidance annexes

Section of HESES21 guidance	Content and key definitions
Annex A	Defines the student population and who should be counted in the survey.
Annex B	Defines recognised courses of higher education for OfS funding purposes, and also describes how we treat students studying as part of an apprenticeship.
Annex C1	For further education and sixth form colleges and academies only : Describes how we count student activity on the survey and defines a year of engagement and when students are considered to be new entrants.
Annex C2	For all other providers : Describes how we count student activity on the survey and defines a year of engagement and when students are considered to be new entrants.
Annex D	Describes how to determine the mode of study for a year of engagement.
Annex E	Describes how to determine a student's level of study.
Annex F	Describes how to determine the residential and fundability status of a student.
Annex G	Describes how to assign a year of engagement to a price group.
Annex H	Describes how to determine if a year of engagement should be classified as 'long'.
Annex I	Describes how to determine if a year of engagement is classified as a year abroad.
Annex J	Discusses how pre-registration courses in certain healthcare professions are recorded in the survey.

The HESF24 population

67. In HESF, you are forecasting the number of **years of engagement** that start in the **academic year 2024-25**, for students that you expect to be **registered with you**. The HESF survey should include only years of engagement generated by students who are:

- new entrants

⁷ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/heses23/.

- actively pursuing studies for a course that meets our definition of recognised higher education for OfS funding purposes
- **not studying for most of their course outside the UK** (including by distance learning), unless certain exceptional circumstances apply (set out in Annex A of the HESES23 guidance)
- OfS-fundable.

The highlighted terms are defined in paragraphs 68 to 83.

Academic year

68. The academic year is the 12-month period from 1 August to the following 31 July. The academic year 2024-25 therefore means the period from 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025.

Year of engagement

69. An **engagement** is a student's commitment to an educational aim (the award of a qualification or credit or the completion of an apprenticeship) and its realisation over time. This shares the same definition as used by the designated data body (DDB).⁸ The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) guidance for recording higher education data notes that several fields in the ILR higher education entity refer to 'instance' and that this can be considered as equivalent to the concept of 'engagement'.⁹ For HESF purposes, an engagement can be split into one or more years of engagement. The number of years of engagement recorded by a provider within an academic year will be used in determining a measure of how much teaching activity that provider is delivering. How to define and determine years of engagement is set out in Annex C1 (further education and sixth form colleges and academies) and C2 (all other providers) of the main HESES23 guidance.

70. To be counted in HESF, a year of engagement will need to begin within the 2024-25 academic year.

The provider that registers the student

71. The **provider with which a student is registered** means the provider that has the full contractual responsibility to the student for the provision of educational services. This applies whether the provider provides all the teaching for the course, or subcontracts some or all of that teaching out to another body.

- Where fee payments from the Student Loans Company are concerned, this will also be the provider that collects the student tuition fee.
- Where payments from the ESFA for apprenticeships are concerned, this will also be the provider that is paid by the ESFA.

⁸ See <https://codingmanual.hesa.ac.uk/22056/entity/Engagement>.

⁹ See <https://guidance.submit-learner-data.service.gov.uk/23-24/psm/article/additional-guidance-for-he>.

72. The HESF survey should therefore:

- a. **include** years of engagement for students who will be taught on your behalf by another provider (subcontracted out).
- b. **exclude** years of engagement for students that you will be teaching on behalf of another registering provider under a subcontractual relationship.

73. Because the HESF survey is for completion by providers that **do not** have higher education provision recognised for OfS funding purposes in 2023-24, the forecast numbers for inclusion in the survey for 2024-25 should be only new entrants (see paragraph 76). Some providers may, however, already have provision that is subcontracted in, whereby they teach students of another provider under a subcontractual arrangement. These subcontracted-in students should not be included in HESF24.

74. The responsibility for reporting student data rests with the provider with which a student is registered, which is (as set out in paragraph 71) the provider that has full contractual responsibility to the student for the provision of educational services. Students should not, other than in exceptional circumstances, change the provider they are registered with, and no change should be made to which provider reports data on students who are continuing on the same course without each student's informed agreement. In reporting student data to us, providers will be confirming their contractual responsibilities for the provision of education to students.

75. Where a provider wishes to offer provision directly that they have previously subcontracted in, we would expect this to apply to successive entry cohorts of students, rather than to continuing students who entered under the subcontractual arrangement. However, where we are satisfied that all parties (the providers and students concerned) agree, we will be prepared to allow transfers of continuing students to reflect changes in registering providers, including for our funding purposes. The HESF survey **should not** be used to implement such transfers, as it is limited to the reporting of new entrants. Providers should email recurrentgrant@officeforstudents.org.uk for guidance about the separate process for implementing transfers of continuing student numbers between providers for funding and data reporting purposes.

New entrants

76. We define students as new entrants when they first generate a countable year of engagement for a higher education course recognised for OfS funding purposes (see paragraph 83) and have not been active at the same broad level (undergraduate or postgraduate) as a student of the same registering provider in either of the two previous academic years. See Annex C1 (further education and sixth form colleges and academies) or C2 (all other providers) of the HESES23 guidance for further information.

Actively pursuing studies

77. A year of engagement should be counted in HESF only if the student is actively pursuing studies with the provider and these studies fall at least partly in the academic year 2024-25. This excludes years of engagement falling in the year that are entirely 'writing up', or where the only activity is assessment.

Recognised higher education courses for OfS funding purposes

78. Recognised higher education courses for OfS funding purposes:

- a. includes courses that are designated under the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011
- b. includes 'courses of higher education' as defined in Schedule 6 of the Education Reform Act 1988, other than leading to a qualification in the Register of Regulated Qualifications.

79. Study for higher education-level credit (rather than towards a specific qualification) may be included if it meets the criteria in Schedule 6 of the Education Reform Act 1988 and either:

- it is not credit that may count only towards a qualification in the Register of Regulated Qualifications
- it is credit that may count towards a course that is designated under the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011.

80. Years of engagement for students on an apprenticeship may be included in HESF where they are undertaking activity that meets our definition of recognised higher education courses for OfS funding purposes during the year of engagement. Only the activity spent in study or learning that directly contributes to their recognised higher education qualification should be counted.

Study outside the UK

81. Student engagements should be included in HESF only if no more than half of the active study time for the whole engagement is spent outside the UK (including through distance learning), unless any of the following apply:

- a. There is a clear academic reason for studying abroad rather than in the UK. Even where such a reason exists, we must specifically sanction the course as eligible.
- b. The student is temporarily and unavoidably abroad and remains liable to UK tax on their earnings, or is a dependant of such a person. This includes members of HM Forces and their dependants.
- c. The student is receiving UK student support from the Student Loans Company for the year.

82. Engagements for sandwich students working abroad and language students on years abroad should normally be included in the HESF population, because the year abroad will not constitute most of the engagement.

OfS-fundable students

83. Only students who are OfS-fundable should be returned in the HESF survey. To be considered as OfS-fundable, students will need to:

- a. Meet criteria for Home fee status according to both nationality and residency requirements set out in regulations.¹⁰ Student Finance England provides a practitioners' helpline (0300 100 0618) for detailed information about policy and regulations or for help with more complex assessment, eligibility or circumstantial questions. If Student Finance England says that a student is eligible, this means that the student is also regarded as a Home fee student for HESF purposes.
- b. Not fall into any of the 'non-fundable' categories given in Annex F of the HESES23 guidance. In summary, these categories of non-fundable students include:
 - i. Those where another EU public source funds, or is responsible for funding, their provision. This includes all postgraduate research students and students on initial and in-service teacher training courses for school teachers. However, years of engagement that are undertaken as part of an apprenticeship should not be treated as non-fundable (and thus excluded from HESF) solely on the basis that funding for their apprenticeship is provided by the ESFA.
 - ii. Those on courses commissioned and funded by an NHS organisation, where the course fee charged to the student is zero because an NHS organisation is meeting the full costs of the course. This does not include students on courses studied as part of an apprenticeship, which remain fundable as long as all other fundability criteria are met.
 - iii. Those on a 'closed' course. This is a course which is not open to all suitably qualified candidates, typically because it is open only to employees of a particular company. This does not apply to apprenticeships.
 - iv. Those aiming for a qualification of an academic level that is no higher than one they have already achieved (an equivalent or lower qualification), unless an exemption applies.¹¹

¹⁰ Schedule 1 of the Education (Fees and Awards) (England) Regulations 2007 (Statutory Instrument 2007 No. 779), as amended. See www.legislation.gov.uk/.

¹¹ Current exemptions, for OfS funding purposes, include: students aiming for foundation degrees; those aiming for a qualification in certain public sector professions, such as medicine, nursing, social work or teaching; and those receiving Disabled Students' Allowances. The policy also applies for Student Loans Company student support purposes and in defining qualifying persons on qualifying courses that are subject to regulated tuition fees. However, implementation of the policy, and exemptions to it, can be different for those other purposes.

How years of engagement are counted and categorised in HESF

84. In the HESF table, you should report years of engagement broken down according to **mode of study**, **level of study**, whether the year of engagement is **long**, and the subject-related **price group** for the activity. The highlighted terms are defined in paragraphs 85 to 98.

Mode of study

Assessing attendance for mode

85. 'Attendance' means that the student is required to be at a provider location, or other specified location (such as a partner provider, or defined workplace) to undertake periods of study, tuition, learning in the workplace, or sandwich work placement. These locations are expected to be collective for all students on the course (that is, we do not consider virtual attendance to meet the definition of attendance), except where alternative arrangements are made because a student is unable to attend for a reason that relates to their disability.

Determining mode

86. The mode of study for a year of engagement of a new entrant will be either **full-time** or **part-time**. To be counted as full-time, a year of engagement must meet **all** of the following criteria:
- a. The student is normally required to attend (see paragraph 85) the provider, or elsewhere, for periods amounting to at least 24 weeks within the year of engagement.
 - b. Within that time they are expected to undertake periods of study, tuition, learning in the workplace, or sandwich placement which amount to an average of at least 21 hours per week.
 - c. Full-time fees are chargeable for the course for the year.
87. If years of engagement forecast in HESF24 do not meet our definition of full-time, they should be reported as part-time. See Annex D of the HESF23 guidance for further information. This also provides information on a third mode of study, 'sandwich year out'; however, we do not expect this to be relevant for new entrants and hence for HESF24.
88. Learning in the workplace is a structured academic programme, controlled by the higher or further education provider and delivered in the workplace by the academic staff of the provider, staff of the employer, or both. Unlike work experience, which is one element of a course such as a sandwich placement (whether for all or part of a year), learning in the workplace is at the heart of a student's learning programme and must be subject to the same level of academic supervision and rigour as any other form of assessed learning. It includes:
- the imparting of relevant knowledge and skills to students
 - opportunities for students to discuss knowledge and skills with their tutors
 - assessment of students' acquisition of knowledge and skills by the provider's academic staff, perhaps jointly with an employer.

Learning in the workplace should be substituting for learning that under other circumstances would normally take place within the provider. The inclusion of an element of learning in the workplace should not, therefore, extend the normal duration of a course.

Level of study

89. A student's level of study can be **undergraduate** or **postgraduate**.

Undergraduate

90. Undergraduates are students on higher education courses for which it is not a normal condition of entry that they are already qualified to degree level: that is, they are not already qualified at Level 6 of the 'Sector-recognised standards' or 'Frameworks for higher education qualifications of UK degree-awarding bodies' (FHEQ).¹² They may be studying towards a first degree (including foundation degree), integrated masters' programme, higher education certificate, higher education diploma or equivalent, or registered for a higher education level credit that can be counted towards one of these qualifications.

91. There are two categories of undergraduate (UG) students:

- a. UG (Level 4 and 5): students on courses leading to qualifications that are designated at Level 4 or 5 of the 'sector-recognised standards'.
- b. UG (Other): students who do not fall into the above category.

Postgraduate

92. Postgraduate students are registered for courses or credits where a normal condition of entry is that entrants are already qualified to degree level: that is, they are already qualified at Level 6 of FHEQ. There are two main categories of postgraduate students:

- a. Postgraduate research (PGR) students are those whose qualification aim is a research-based higher degree. This is a postgraduate programme comprising a research component (including a requirement to produce original work) which is larger in terms of student effort than any accompanying taught component. Postgraduate research students are excluded from HESF24.
- b. Postgraduate taught (PGT) students are postgraduates who do not meet the requirements to be a research student. They are further divided into three sub-levels:
 - i. PGT (UG fee): students on courses that are designated under the undergraduate (UG) student support regime.
 - ii. PGT (Masters' loan): students on courses that are designated under the postgraduate masters' loan arrangements, but excluding those courses that may also be designated under the undergraduate student support arrangements.

¹² The sector-recognised standards that apply in England are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/. The FHEQ is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks.

iii. PGT (other): all other postgraduate taught students.

93. See Annex E of the HESES23 survey for further guidance on level of study.

Long years of engagement

94. A year of engagement can be classified as either standard-length or long.

a. For full-time courses, a year of engagement is counted as long if students are normally required to attend for 45 weeks or more within that year of engagement, not counting time spent on work experience or learning in the workplace. Otherwise the year of engagement will be standard-length.

b. For part-time courses a year is only counted as long if the equivalent full-time course is also long. The number of weeks attended within the year of engagement for part-time students is irrelevant in determining whether the year of engagement is long.

95. See Annex H of the HESES23 survey guidance for further information on long years of study.

Price group

96. The costs associated with teaching different subjects will vary. To account for this, we assign years of engagement to price groups which range from A (most expensive) to D (least expensive). Full details on how to assign years of engagement to price groups are given in Annex G of the HESES23.

97. Years of engagement in HESF24 are matched to price groups based on two criteria. Firstly, they may be one of a number of specific cases:

a. Sandwich years out

b. Clinical years of medical, dental and veterinary science courses

c. Pre-registration courses in nursing, midwifery and allied health professions

d. Courses leading to registration as a social worker

e. Initial teacher training courses.

Full guidance on the criteria for these specific cases, and how they should be assigned to price groups, is given in the HESES23 guidance.

98. Secondly, if none of the specific cases apply, they are assigned to price groups based on the subject of the course.

a. For further education colleges, sixth form colleges and academies, this is determined by the learning directory classification system (LDCS) codes for the learning aim of the course.

b. For other higher education providers, this is determined by the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) codes that describe the subject of the course.

Full guidance on how these codes are mapped to price groups is provided in the HESES23 guidance.

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
FHEQ	Frameworks for higher education qualifications of UK degree-awarding bodies
FTE	Full-time equivalence
HECoS	Higher Education Classification of Subjects
HESES	Higher Education Students Early Statistics survey
HESF	Higher Education Students Forecast
LDCS	Learning directory classification system
OfS	Office for Students
PGR	Postgraduate research
PGT	Postgraduate taught
UG	Undergraduate
UKPRN	UK Provider Reference Number



© The Office for Students copyright 2023

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/