HESA Data Futures Project

Summary

Why are we doing this?

Annually, all Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are required to return information to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on their student population. This information is used in a variety of ways, including benchmarking across the sector, league tables, and to drive funding for research and teaching, amounting to c. £30m of University income each year.

HESA are redesigning the way that student data[1] is collected from HEPs through a programme called Data Futures. The move, from a system of discrete and retrospective annual data collection, to a model of continuous data collection is a substantial change to the way that student data is returned. We need to be able to submit accurate data throughout the year and collect more detailed information about off-venue activities and funding sources as well as change in circumstances such as dates of suspension.

What will this mean for you?

With the introduction of in-year submissions to HESA our Data Quality team will lose the long-lead in times to quality control the data. There will therefore be more onus on the teams managing data at source to ensure that data held in the central student record system is current and highly accurate at all times. To support those involved in student records management and to ensure data quality is retained you will see the introduction of more efficient and streamlined processes; be equipped with the right tools to do your work; find that more data is stored in eVision rather than in different formats across multiple systems; and see improved visibility of data. These changes may require additional training.

The requirement to capture a greater depth and breadth of information will provide more timely high quality data furnishing the University, divisions and colleges with a clearer understanding of who our students are, what they are doing and their interactions with the university, enabling better decision making at all levels. For instance, we will have to share full information about a student's activity connected with their course which is not happening at the University ('off-venue activity').

There will be opportunities for you to be involved with the design of this new functionality and improved processes. If you are interested in getting involved, please email hesa-student@admin.ox.ac.uk.

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[1] Although the Data Futures programme at HESA focuses on the Student Return initially, it is expected to be applied to other returns (Staff HESA, Financial HESA etc.) in the long term once proof of concept has been established.

Project Background

Current HESA Student Return

The current HESA Student return is an annual single exercise looking back at the previous year. Currently data is returned to HESA at the end of following October and we have twelve months to manually collect, cleanse and quality assure over 24,000 student records, each with typically over 200 data attributes. It utilises data both within the central student record system (SITS: eVision) and a number of local systems, Access databases and spreadsheets, across the collegiate University. Data that is held within SITS is not always held in 'standard' functionality (used by other HEPs) due to flexibility required or challenges with the Oxford process, and so complex transformations for data across the system are required in order to make data 'usable' for the HESA return.

Data Futures

The new student return process is scheduled for implementation in 2019/20 and requires substantial changes to the way student records are maintained at Oxford. The new student data collection model is a major change for all HEPs, moving to in year reporting, initially linked to three reference periods a year with a view towards live reporting in future years. Data will be related to events (e.g. enrolment, exams) and will have to be submitted within the reference period when the event occurs.
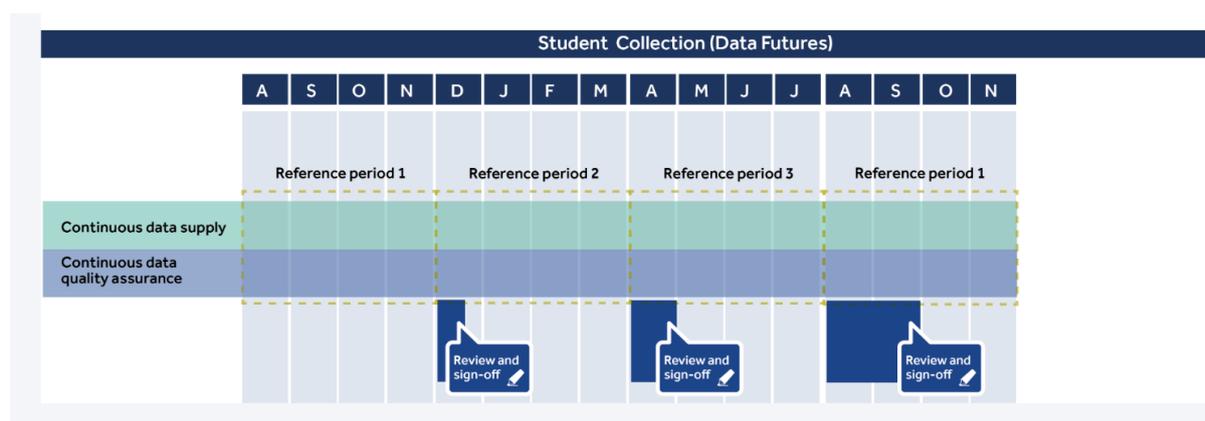

Figure 1: HESA are implementing an on-going update approach, where data is submitted continuously, accumulating to build towards a complete picture over time.

Compared to the existing timescales for gathering and quality assuring data, HESA Data Futures will drastically reduce the amount of time available. For example, by November (Reference Period 1) in the Academic year (~ week 6 of Michaelmas Term) we will need to submit registration and enrolment data and changes to organisation structure, courses (programmes) and modules. This compares to the current HESA return where information is submitted the following October.

In addition to the change to in-year collections, HESA Data Futures has a much broader scope and increased requirements in terms of the types of data required and the level of information required. For example, there will be a significant expansion of data on financial support required, with all offers of financial support required to be reported for all students. This compares to the current return where only support >£50 and for Home/EU UG and PGCE students is reported.

HESA Data Futures at Oxford

In order to implement this change, Oxford has commissioned a joint project between Student Registry and the Education IT Programme. Approved in April 2018 by the IT Committee, the HESA Data Futures project will address a series of key areas surrounding how Oxford currently collects, stores and processes student data.

To support detailed work around the key areas of student data in the new format return, the project is comprised of five workstreams; W1: Student Journey, W2: Course and Module Data, W3: Qualifications, W4: Off Venue Activity, W5: Fees and Financial Support (see Appendix for details).

Much of the project will address areas of data which are currently held off system in Departments and Colleges, other databases and spreadsheets, by streamlining their collection to reduce manual intervention in the return.

The project requires IT development to provide updates to existing eVision functionality and deliver new solutions, change in some processes, and a training and communication strategy to inform student records users of the implications of these changes.

Timeframe

18/19	• New functionality will be developed in the student record system. During MT18 and HT19 Departments and Colleges will be invited to input into the changes being delivered. • A series of go-lives of new/updated eVision functionality in June, July and August 2019. Changes will need to be in place before September 2019, as this is when student registration opens for the 2019/20 academic year (where a significant amount of data capture linked to HESA occurs).
19/20	• Simultaneously prepare for Data Futures and submit and the last old-style HESA return, by end October 2019. • Oxford's first mandatory trial submission of the new HESA Data Futures style return January - April 2020 (timescales still to be determined by HESA).
20/21	• Final full submission of 2019/20 data due by October 2020. • First submission of 2020/21 data due by November 2020.

It will take until November 2021 for all HEPs to have completed their first full HESA return under the new Data Futures system.

Further Information

Further information about the scope of the changes, across the five workstreams of the HESA Data Futures project are available here https://projects.it.ox.ac.uk/edu-it-hesa-data-futures . For direct questions to the project team, please contact hesa-student@admin.ox.ac.uk

Appendix