



Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

The Scottish HE Data Landscape

An overview of: HESA returns

Type and scope of the data

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collect, process, quality assure and publish data about higher education in the UK. HESA is the designated data body for England, and also collect the data on behalf of the devolved funding bodies across the rest of the UK (including the Scottish Funding Council). The HESA returns include data about students, staff and graduates; finances and estates; academic departments and courses; public engagement and commercial enterprises.

Time period of data renewal

The data are currently collected annually across a series of thematic data collections. The full data collection schedule can be found on the HESA website: www.hesa.ac.uk/collection

Questions that the data can help to explore or answer

HESA aims to be 'the analytical powerhouse for the UK HE sector, and the trusted source of national HE statistics and public information'. The data can help build a picture of the sector, subject areas and disciplines, and of individual institutions. As the definitions are quite clearly defined, analysis of the HESA data can compare institutions on a fair basis. The data therefore present a source of sector-wide data unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

Important caveats, exclusions etc.

Due to the annual cycle for collecting the data, some items (for example, information about entrant students) can be up to two years out of date by the time it is published. The HESA Data Futures programme aims to deliver a 'modernised and more efficient approach to collecting data, to deliver better output for a wider range of data users' by switching to a series of in-year submissions. The initial focus is on the student data collection. The standardised HESA definitions do not always satisfactorily describe nuances and exceptional/unusual provision.

Publications/analyses which use the data

HESA data are used widely across the sector, and by innumerable stakeholders and interested parties including universities themselves, governments, funding bodies (for example, the Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreements), the media and league table compilers. Uses of the data include benchmarking, market analysis, informing funding allocations, quality enhancement frameworks and league table publications.

Where to find the data and any further published analysis

Further information about the suite of data collections owned and facilitated by HESA can be found on the HESA website: www.hesa.ac.uk. HESA publish a wide number of data tables, summaries and analyses: www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis. HESA also make more detailed data available to the sector through HEIDI (please see separate description).