

Data Futures

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the HESA Data Futures programme following the discussion at the board meeting on 9 March 2021. The paper and seeks approval from the board to fund the Data Futures programme until 31 March 2023 and to set aside budget of £38,422 in 2023-24 to support delivery of HESA Data Futures.

Recommendations/Decisions required by the board

2. The board is invited to:
 - a. Note the progress of the programme since March 2021.
 - b. Agree, subject to the availability of funds, funding of £2,634,547 (£3,252,527) for the period from 01 April 2022 until 31 March 2023 including
 - i. Core funding of £2,027,047 (£2,502,547)
 - ii. Additional rolled forward underspend of up to £121,500 (£150,000)
 - iii. Contingency of up to £486,000 (£600,000), comprising £250,000 planned for this period plus £350,000 contingency not used during April 2021 to March 2022
 - c. Agree in principle a budget of £38,422 (plus any unused funding from 2022-23) to fund HESA and Jisc from April 2023 to October 2023.

Issue

3. The board received an update on the HESA Data Futures programme at its meeting on 9 March 2021. That update included a detailed proposal covering the full Data Futures programme, copies of the September 2020 proposal and March 2021 paper are available in the resources section in Diligent.
4. The board agreed funding of £6,236,772 subject to agreement of milestones and future monitoring which was subsequently agreed on 17 March and reported to the board in May 2021. The March board paper included and indicative budget of £1,590,949 covering the period to April 2024. The board requested a further check in on programme delivery before committing this funding.
5. This paper provides an update on the programme to date and requests confirmation of funding up to 31 March 2023. Since confirming funding in March 2021 we have received confirmation from the devolved administrations that they will contribute to the costs of Data Futures, this

reduces the OfS contribution to the programme by 19%. Figures in the remainder of this paper reflect the OfS contributions with full cost figures provided in brackets. The total grant funding including contingency from September 2020 to October 2023 will not exceed £9,809,837 as set out in the proposal considered on 10 September

6. Since March HESA and Jisc have continued to work to deliver against the programme plan as set out in the proposal including delivery against all Milestones.
7. The proposed funding primarily relates to the investment in the technology uplift, core data collection capabilities which have been designed to be flexible enough to adapt to changing data specifications and frequency. We plan to consult later this month on the approach to in-year data collection, it is not yet clear the extent to which approaches to in-year data collection will diverge between the nations. Notwithstanding the flexibility in the solution, any divergence or radical change to the approach will lead to an overall increase in HESA's costs in delivering the information duties for 2023-24, these increased costs could be met through grant funding by the OfS and the devolved administrations or, in England at least and subject to compliance with section 66 of HERA, increased subscription funding. The board will be asked for a decision on the approach to funding the transition to an in-year data if this is the outcome of the burden review.

Discussion and options

Management and oversight

8. Following the March board, OfS oversight of HESA and Jisc's management and governance of the programme has rested with the risk and audit committee. The OfS was represented on the programmes quarterly review group by Gurpreet Dehal until September 2021, and by Margaret Monckton from September 2021 onwards.
9. The revised oversight arrangements are working well allowing the risk and audit committee to take assurance over the governance and effectively flag to the board where risks are escalating.
10. Staff from the data and IT teams continue to actively monitor the project. These staff are given full access to programme documentation and meetings with the teams at HESA and Jisc engaging with them openly and constructively.

Progress since March 2021

11. HESA and Jisc have continued to deliver the Data Futures programme against the agreed project plan and specification. Since March the programme has delivered a successful Alpha pilot. Although the structure of the pilot was revised it has delivered on its key aims. The final stage of Alpha is due to commence in early December 2021. It will allow providers to submit real data to the system providing the first fully realistic use of the system by providers ahead of a much larger beta phase early in 2022. The current programme RAG status is included at Annex A.
12. Recruitment and retention of staff has been an issue with a highly competitive market for certain technology roles. HESA and Jisc have actively managed the recruitment and implemented a number of strategies to reduce staff turnover and minimise the impact of staff

loss. These appear to be delivering the desired outcomes with overall project staffing improving in recent months. HESA and Jisc are continuing to actively monitor the situation.

13. The delay in filling posts has led to significant underspend on the programme to date which is reflected in grant payments which are linked to actual rather than planned expenditure. In June 2021 HESA wrote to OfS to request that £1.2 million of funding be reprofiled from the 2021-22 financial year to 2022-23, with a further roll-forward of £150,000 now requested. This re-profiling of grant reflects that, while the progress continues to be in line with spend, and key programme milestones have been met features that can be delivered later in the programme have been moved later in the plan. Moving work later in the programme inherently creates an increased level of risk – in that there remains more work to be done. This risk is largely mitigated by the decision to make the 2022-23 collection an annual retrospective collection. This means that the required go-live date for the system is at least 4 months later with the option to continue to extend development for a further 4 months.
14. Funding allocated for 2020-21 included £850,000 of contingency. The programme has rigorously tracked unplanned expenditure and allocated this to contingency spending in order to ensure that use of core and contingency spend is clear. The programme expects to use £500,000 contingency in 2020-21 and has requested that the remaining contingency is rolled in to 2022-23
15. Uncertainty over programme funding contributed to staff turnover early in 2021. In order to avoid these risks early approval of funding for the 2022-23 financial year is being sought now so that contractors and staff on fixed term contracts can be extended in good time.
16. Recommendation: The board is invited to
 - a. Note the progress of the programme since March 2021.
 - b. Agree, subject to the availability of funds, funding of £2,634,547 (£3,252,527) for the period from 01 April 2022 until 31 March 2023 including
 - i. Core funding of £2,027,047 (£2,502,547)
 - ii. Additional rolled forward underspend of up to £121,500 (£150,000)
 - iii. Contingency of up to £486,000 (£600,000), comprising £250,000 planned for this period plus £350,000 contingency not used during April 2021 to March 2022
 - c. Agree in principle a budget of £38,422 (plus any unused funding from 2022-23) to fund HESA and Jisc from April 2023 to October 2023.

Paper publication date

17. This paper can be published immediately

Richard Puttock, Director of data, foresight and analysis, richard.puttock@officeforstudents.org.uk, 2 December 2021

Annex A: Programme RAG status

1. Overall, the programme is currently amber, the programme board's risk assessment is given below. The assessment of the programme board and HESA is a fair reflection of the status of the programme and aligns with the view of the OfS staff involved in monitoring the programme. The main risks facing the programme are uncertainty caused by the burden review and provider readiness.
2. The proposed review of universal in-year data collection as part of the burden review continues to create uncertainty and risk for the programme. The review has led to the need to replan and re-prioritise work to ensure that the programme is agile and can respond to changing requirements.
3. There remains a risk around provider readiness. HESA are monitoring provider readiness and engagement with the programme and have significantly stepped up communications activity in recent months with both accountable officers and data contacts. The beta pilot phase of the project will provide a good opportunity to test provider readiness.
4. Data Futures represents a significant technology investment and is not without risk as indicated by the previous phases of the project. However, the revised approach significantly reduces the risk and progress to date has been good with many of the most significant challenges already having been overcome and the core end-to-end system having been stood up. As the programme moves forward the risk will reduce as the work remaining will become increasingly well understood.

| Key Aspects | RAG | Status |
|--------------|-----|--|
| Overall | A | Continuing good progress on delivery against roadmap despite resourcing challenges Beta Coding Manual milestone delivered on time, and on track for Alpha 2 before Christmas Detailed planning and prioritisation underway for next key milestones - Production Coding Manual (Jan) and start of Beta (Feb) Recruitment and resourcing situation improving with turnover stabilising. Covid risk remains along with some key gaps Updated roadmap with extended delivery window increases confidence in delivery for 22/23 |
| Scope | G | Roadmap fully functional and is being used by DF teams to drive priorities across the programme. Roadmap focused on scope required for different phases of Beta and Transition - focus on critical path Scope may be impacted by the outcome of the burden review (now expected late Feb/early March 2022) Sequencing of scope may be impacted by resource issues or critical path prioritisation |
| Costs | G | OfS Board agreed funding for April 2021 to March 2022 (including £600k underspend and contingency funding) subject to key milestones being agreed and monitored; payments received for work to March 2021; grant letters for this year being progressed Early contingency spend to mitigate resource risks agreed; continuing above expected underspend due to recruitment challenges Requested reprofile of £1.2M into FY Apr22-Mar23 to align with roadmap Estimate for additional costs for in-year data to be produced in advance of funding decision for Apr22-Mar23 |
| Schedule | A | Longer term challenge to schedule can be mitigated with strategic over-resourcing Roadmap reflects extended development window and sequencing of features not requiring provider testing in Beta Burden review now late 2021 with outcomes expected Feb/March 2022, further narrowing the window for in-year delivery |
| Resources | A | Funding decision and approval of contingency spend will help in the medium term given the impact of onboarding Turnover appears to be stabilising - more staff joining than leaving with some key gaps filled - some key gaps remain Couple of roles moved to BAU and BAU turnover indirectly impacts DF resourcing plans Increased contention with BAU potential over the autumn collection peak, with DF plans catering for this where planned |
| Stakeholders | G | Alpha progressing well with positive feedback from providers, and positive feedback on the Beta Coding Manual Continued engagement with Provider Forum and software suppliers, readiness concerns continue to be raised Sector communication and engagement increased and will raise awareness of requirements for providers and transition |
| Benefits | G | Updated in joint proposal for September; summary of benefits for Feb 21 Programme Board |
| Risks | A | Resourcing is the key issue impacting delivery - HESA and Jisc strategies to mitigate beginning to make a difference Risks to future milestones being mitigated with earlier detailed planning Continued risks due to burden review and potential divergence of SC requirements, although more flexibility indicated recently Limited, narrowing window to respond to outcomes of burden review increases risk for 23/24; resourcing will be a challenge Provider engagement with DF (Covid and burden review); clarity re 22/23 collection but readiness concerns remain Impact of Covid-19 on resource availability remains a risk, exacerbated by turnover to date |