

13 November 2023

Dear Accountable officer

CC: Student data contact

Update on Data Futures

I'm writing with an update on the continuing challenges we are all facing from the implementation of the Data Futures programme, and to provide some information about the steps we're taking to address these challenges. These include making changes for related data collections, explaining our approach to using the 2022-23 Student data, and revising our plans for in-year student data collection in 2024-25.

2022-23 Student data collection

I know that colleagues at Jisc and providers are making significant efforts to deliver the submission of high quality data by the upcoming, extended deadline of 22 November 2023. We are encouraged to see greater stability in the platform following the updates released over the last week, strong levels of engagement with the submission process, and some institutions being able to submit and sign off their data.

However, we are aware that the consequences of the earlier issues continue to affect some providers. We would encourage you to submit your data as soon as possible, but we can discuss extensions for those providers that are concerned about their ability to meet the deadline. Short individual extensions will not need a detailed justification. However, we will need to more closely scrutinise any request for an extension beyond 6 December, to ensure we have the data we need to work effectively and to ensure providers are able to move on to other priority work.

We encourage you to get in touch with your OfS contact as soon as possible if you are concerned about your readiness to meet the 22 November 2023 deadline.

Related data collections

The sign-off deadline for the **2023-24 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES23)** return was set out in the Notice we issued to all registered providers on 6 July 2023.¹ I can now confirm that the deadline for submission of the HESES23 return is **extended from 11 December 2023 to 18 January 2024** for all providers required to submit the 2022-23 Student data return to Jisc. The corresponding HESES23 sign-off deadline for these providers is also extended, from **31 January 2024 to 29 February 2024**. As a consequence of these extensions, our announcement of mid-year funding allocations for 2023-24 (to support Level 4 and 5 provision) will be delayed until after all HESES23 data has been signed off. The extensions may also mean a delay to our 2024-25 grant announcements, although we are working hard to avoid this if possible.

Deadlines for the submission of **contact details for students related to Cohort A of the Graduate Outcomes survey (24 November 2023) and the 2024 National Student Survey (1 December 2023) will remain unchanged**. We encourage you to make and sign-off submissions of contact details at the earliest opportunity but to get in touch with your OfS contact if you are concerned about your readiness to meet these deadlines and wish to discuss any extensions that your particular circumstances may warrant. Any such extensions would be capped at a maximum of five (Graduate Outcomes) or seven (NSS) working days after any extended deadline for the 2022-23 Student data return, or 12 January 2024, whichever is earliest. Extensions to deadlines for the submission of student contact details may result in a delay to the start of the survey(s) for your provider and so a compressed survey window for fieldwork to take place. We expect to mitigate this where possible, which could include reallocating providers to different start weeks for the NSS survey, revising our approach to approving requests for additions and removals to the NSS target list, or requiring additional phone calls to maintain response rates.

Implications for 2022-23 Student data quality

It is important that our regulatory work is underpinned by reliable data, and the OfS's status as a producer of official statistics underlines the need to take data quality extremely seriously. We take great care to ensure we use appropriate data in our regulatory decision-making. The challenges experienced with the implementation of Data Futures create additional risks to the quality of data delivered by Jisc at the end of the process, and we were already planning on the basis that material changes to data collection systems can result in a reduction in the data quality that can be achieved. I want to reassure you that we are alive to this possibility and, as such, we expect to deploy and extend our normal approach to identifying concerns about data quality.

We're aiming to deliver our work in this area with minimal disruption for the OfS and providers. We will have a clearer view of the extent of any issues after we receive data from Jisc. We will work with Jisc, sector bodies and other stakeholders to understand what we can learn about data quality from the operation of the data collection process, as well as analysis of the resulting dataset. We want to ensure that these insights about the quality of data this year are communicated coherently and consistently so all future users of the data understand any issues.

There are various actions we can take in response to concerns about data quality. For example, we can publish clear explanations of known weaknesses in the data, suppress or remove data, or require a provider to submit data amendments to correct the most serious issues. As we do each year, we will consider those actions on a case-by-case basis, informed by the nature and severity of any data error and its implications for how we want to use the data.

¹ See [Deadlines and requirements for 2023-24 data returns - Office for Students](#).

We continue to operate our [data amendments process](#) and anticipate that there may be greater call for, and additional grounds for, data amendments this year to resolve any significant data quality weaknesses in areas that are important for our use of the data. If you have queries about the data amendment process, please contact Ella Cross in the OfS data team, at dataamendments@officeforstudents.org.uk.

I also want to remind you of the important role that context plays in our regulatory approach. Whether through the narratives included in access and participation plans, or the dialogue involved in our assessments of student outcomes, the OfS would not normally expect any single year of student data to be determinative of a regulatory decision. We expect that the data quality that has been possible for the 2022-23 Student data return may contribute relevant contextual information for some of our assessments.

Providers anticipating submitting an access and participation plan as part of Wave 2 of the equality of opportunity reforms should be aware that we anticipate launching updated guidance this calendar year and will provide further information about our use of this year's student data at that time.

2024-25 in-year Student data collection

While conclusion of the 2022-23 Student data collection will be a significant and important milestone, there is still much work to do to deliver the next phases of the Data Futures project. We had planned to move to in-year collection of student data from 2024-25, with an end-of-year 2023-24 return and a first in-year 2024-25 return in close succession in autumn 2024.

However, the collection of an in-year Student return represents a further significant change in data reporting requirements, and to facilitate this, Jisc must deliver a stable data platform with full functionality, a complete and stable set of quality rules, and enhanced data quality tools, guidance and resources.

The OfS has now decided that **the implementation of in-year returns will not go ahead for 2024-25 Student data collections for providers in England**. We are pausing implementation until we have completed an independent review of the current issues with the delivery of the Data Futures programme and can be confident that the move to in-year data collection can be achieved effectively for providers and the OfS. We hope this will give you and your colleagues time to build confidence and greater familiarity with the new data model before it is applied to in-year collections.

Why have we taken these steps now?

Data Futures has been and remains a complex project, with numerous dependencies and multiple actors. It aims to transition student data systems and expertise to new, unfamiliar specifications for the first time in more than two decades. The programme has been subject to a number of delays over the years, and we have become increasingly concerned about key milestones not being met following technical challenges encountered by Jisc this year.

We know this is having a significant impact on providers, Jisc and bodies reliant on the data, including the OfS. We are therefore taking the steps set out in this letter –extending deadlines where we can, pausing the shift to in-year data collection, and commissioning an independent review into what has happened and how we can all learn lessons from it – in order to support providers that are struggling with the system and to ensure that the issues experienced this year are not repeated.

Yours sincerely

David Smy
Deputy Director of Enabling Regulation

Annex: Deadlines for upcoming data returns affected by Data Futures challenges

Submission	For which providers	Deadline
Student (Data Futures) record (2022-23)	All providers	22 November 2023, unless otherwise determined on an individual basis through discussion with the OfS
Graduate Outcomes Survey (2022-23): Cohort A contact details – for providers that have completed the Student (Data Futures) record	For providers with a 22 November 2023 sign-off deadline for the 2022-23 Student (Data Futures) record	24 November 2023
	For providers with an OfS-agreed further extension to the sign-off deadline for the Student (Data Futures) record (2022-23)	Revised Student (Data Futures) record (2022-23) deadline + 5 working days or 12 January 2024, whichever is earliest
National Student Survey (NSS) contact details – for providers that have completed the Student (Data Futures) record	For providers with a 22 November 2023 sign-off deadline for the 2022-23 Student (Data Futures) record	1 December 2023
	For providers with an OfS-agreed further extension to the sign-off deadline for the Student (Data Futures) record (2022-23)	Revised Student (Data Futures) record (2022-23) deadline + 7 working days or 12 January 2024, whichever is earliest
2023-24 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES23) – for providers that have completed the Student (Data Futures) record	For providers with a 22 November 2023 sign-off deadline for the 2022-23 Student (Data Futures) record	29 February 2024 (following submission by 18 January 2024)
	For providers with an OfS-agreed further extension to the sign-off deadline for the Student (Data Futures) record (2022-23)	29 February 2024 (following submission by 18 January 2024)