

14 March 2024

Dear Accountable Officer

## Update on Jisc's Data Futures programme

I want to thank you and your colleagues again for your considerable efforts during autumn 2023 to submit the high quality student data that underpins our regulatory work. I am pleased to say that all providers in England have submitted and signed-off a 2022-23 Student record that can be used for this year's Graduate Outcomes and National Student Surveys. We know that this has been a significant achievement in light of the challenges experienced in this first year of data collection through Jisc's Data Futures programme.

I am writing to you now with an update on Data Futures, and the steps and decisions we have taken as a consequence of the delays in submissions. We will also be writing to your data colleagues soon to provide them with more information, and we have provided you with further details in Annex A of this letter.

Data Futures has been and remains a complex project, with numerous dependencies and multiple actors. We know it has had a significant impact on providers, Jisc and the bodies reliant on the data, including the OfS. I know that many of you will now, rightly, be turning your attention to preparations of the 2023-24 Student record returns and I want to reiterate that we remain committed to supporting Jisc to ensure that the issues experienced this year are not repeated.

## Collection and publication of 2022-23 Student data

The delays to the collection of 2022-23 Student record have affected the approaches we would normally take to understand, use and publish the data. This year we are:

- Working with Jisc to carry out enhanced data quality assessments of the 2022-23 Student data collection. I am pleased to report that so far, we are broadly reassured by the data quality we have observed.
- Working with a number of providers on potential data amendments where issues identified with the quality of their data will have a material impact on one or more of our onward uses.

- Considering our approach to OfS data publications. We will share indicative versions of some provider-level data publications with individual providers before publishing that data.
- Keeping our release schedule updated with revised timings for our data publications.

These steps will help to ensure that all future users have a shared understanding about the quality of data from 2022-23 when we use and publish the data in support of our regulatory activity.

We will separately write to your data colleagues to provide them with information on accessing the indicative data resources we share with you, and how they can provide feedback.

### **Independent review and in-year Student data collection**

In our 13 November 2023 letter we announced that we would commission an independent review of the issues with Jisc's delivery of the Data Futures programme, and that the implementation of in-year data returns would not go ahead for providers in England until that review had been completed.

We are currently finalising the terms of reference for a UK-wide independent review and anticipate it will take several months to complete. I will be able to share more details with you in the coming weeks and will keep you updated on progress of the review over the next few months. However, I can now confirm that providers in England will not be required to submit in-year student data to Jisc as part of the 2025-26 Student data return.

### **Review of the Staff record**

The anticipated review of the Staff record in spring 2024 has been delayed until the end of 2024. This is to ensure that the OfS, Research England and DfE have enough time to develop consultation proposals that are sufficiently futureproofed in relation to our emerging policy requirements.

### **Further information**

I hope that the information here and in Annex A is helpful. We will write to you with further updates on the Data Futures programme, and its implications, as needed over the coming weeks and months. If you have any questions about the update in this letter, please contact me at [regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk).

If you are concerned about the quality of your 2022-23 Student data, or your readiness to make a high quality return in the 2023-24 Student record, please talk to your OfS contact as soon as possible. If you have any general questions about Data Futures, please contact [liaison@hesa.ac.uk](mailto:liaison@hesa.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

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## **Annex A: Further information about the steps and decisions we have taken**

### **2022-23 Student collection**

We are currently working with Jisc to carry out enhanced data quality assessments of the 2022-23 Student data collection. These are particularly important this year because the issues with the collection this year mean that we tolerated additional risks for the quality of data in some areas. Our checks of this year's data quality are not yet complete, but we are broadly reassured by the data quality that we have observed to date.

We expect that a higher number of providers than usual may want to make amendments to their data this year, to ensure it is fit for the different purposes that we and other stakeholders use it for. We are already working with a number of providers on potential amendments where issues identified with the quality of their data will have a material impact on one or more of our onward uses of the data. If you think you might need to make data amendments, or have queries about the data amendment process, please contact Ella Cross in the OfS data team, at [dataamendments@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:dataamendments@officeforstudents.org.uk).

We are also considering our approach to OfS data publications. We want to ensure that when we publish data, insights about the 2022-23 data quality can be communicated coherently and consistently, so all future users of the data understand any issues. This includes ensuring we have a clear understanding of the quality of providers' 2022-23 Student data, when we use this in our regulatory activity:

- The enhanced data quality assessments we are working on with Jisc are helping us to understand the nature and extent of any data quality issues. We are focusing on the areas most significant for our onward uses of the data, and this work will inform any explanation of data quality for the 2022-23 data we publish alongside our data publications.
- The steps outlined in the next section of this letter are also – in part – intended to make sure that we understand this context. As a reminder, context plays an important role in our regulatory approach and we would not normally expect any single year of student data to be determinative of a regulatory judgement.

### **OfS data publications that use 2022-23 Student data**

The delays to the collection of 2022-23 Student record have affected the timings of some of our annual data publications. We updated our [release schedule](#) earlier this year to note that several data resources will not be published on the normal schedules, with revised timings to be informed by the enhanced data quality assessments. I can now expand further on the approach we will be taking to some of these publications.

Due to the issues with Data Futures, this year we will share indicative versions of some provider-level data publications with individual providers before publishing that data. We will do this where we consider it necessary to further check the quality of data in particular areas of the data model, and because we consider that providers themselves are best placed to identify anomalies in their own data.

All providers that returned a 2022-23 Student record to Jisc will receive their own indicative data. Your feedback on this will inform our understanding of the data quality and fitness for purpose of your data and our approach to publishing the data outputs in question later in the year. The first set of indicative data resources we will share will be the [access and participation](#), [student outcomes](#) and [size and shape of provision](#) data dashboards:

- These will be shared with you on **11 April 2024** via the OfS portal, and you will have one month (until **12 May 2024**) to identify and let us know of any data quality issues that could mean that the data is materially misleading to onward users. Where we agree that this may be the case, we will take this into consideration when determining when and how to publish your data. We may also ask you to submit data amendments to rectify the data quality issues as soon as possible or by **30 August 2024** at the latest.
- Your data will be subject to change as a result of any data amendments you submit. Your data may also change in some areas (such as the weighted sector averages that form benchmark values) if data amendments are submitted by other providers.
- The indicative data is not intended for operational purposes and, in line with the code of practice for statistics, should not be used or shared more widely.
- If you need to prepare a new access and participation plan for submission in 2024, you are not expected to use the indicative access and participation data dashboards in the development of that plan. Rather, the guidance included in John Blake's [blog post](#) states that you should continue to use the existing [access and participation data dashboard](#) for this purpose until an update is published.

Please note that a consequence of the exceptional approach we are taking this year is that the provider-level access and participation, student outcomes and size and shape of provision data dashboards, as well as related sector-level resources, are unlikely to be published before July 2024.

We will separately write to your data colleagues to provide them with information on accessing any indicative data resources we share with you, and how to provide feedback. We will update you on further sets of indicative data resources that we plan to share at a later date.

### **Independent review and in-year Student data collection**

In our [13 November 2023 letter](#) we announced that we would commission an independent review of the issues with Jisc's delivery of the Data Futures programme, and that the implementation of in-year data returns would not go ahead for providers in England until that review had been completed.

The independent review will ensure that:

- the OfS, Jisc and the higher education sector can be confident that lessons have been learned
- providers can be better supported

- the issues experienced this year are not repeated
- we have confidence that any move to in-year Student data collection could be achieved effectively for the OfS and providers.

We are currently finalising the terms of reference and planned approach for a UK-wide review. We currently expect to commission independent consultants in spring 2024 and for the review to be supported by a steering group. We expect it to identify the key factors in the delay to delivery of high quality 2022-23 Student data in the first phase of the Data Futures programme and to make recommendations for the next phase. It will be important for the review to understand providers' perspectives, including through the inclusion of representative bodies in the steering group membership.

We anticipate it will take several months to complete the review to ensure we can make informed decisions about the future of the programme. In line with our previous announcement, in-year data returns will remain paused until the review has been completed. This means it is not feasible that implementation of in-year collections could go ahead for the 2025-26 data collections. I can therefore confirm that providers in England will not be required to submit in-year student data to Jisc as part of the 2025-26 Student data return.

We will continue to keep you updated on progress of the review as it develops over the next few months.

### **Review of the staff record**

Jisc recently published a [summary of responses](#) to the evidence gathering exercise it ran during summer 2023 as part one of a major review of the Staff record. Jisc had intended to formally consult on proposals for the Staff record this spring, with a view to implementing changes for the 2025-26 collection.

Following careful consideration, including with colleagues at Research England, the Department for Education and across the devolved administrations, we have asked Jisc to delay this consultation until the end of 2024. This is to ensure that the OfS, Research England and DfE have sufficient time to develop consultation proposals that are sufficiently futureproofed in relation to our emerging policy requirements. We are all keen to avoid the need for one or more of us to implement material changes to the Staff record in successive years of its collection. We will continue to work together this year to develop consultation proposals, with a view to implementing changes to the 2026-27 Staff record.