

Changes to 2026 student data surveys to inform funding

Notification of changes to HESES and MDS

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Summary

1. This document provides notification of the changes that we are making to two OfS data collections. These are the Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) and the Medical and Dental Students (MDS) surveys.
2. This document refers to academic years (August to July), unless otherwise specified.

The HESES survey

3. All providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in the Approved (fee cap) category are required to complete the HESES26 survey, which will collect data on the number of students registered with the provider in 2026-27.¹ This data is used to inform the calculation of OfS funding for 2027-28.
4. This document provides notification of the changes that we intend to make for the HESES26 survey but does not contain the full technical specification of our data requirements and definitions. We will confirm these when we publish the full HESES26 guidance in autumn 2026. There are a limited number of changes to the HESES return this year, primarily relating to HESES definitions. These changes to the HESES return will:
 - a. Support the changes made to OfS funding methods, introduced following the Secretary of State's notification on Strategic Priorities Grant funding for the 2026-27 financial year.²
 - b. Align the collection of data through HESES to align with the introduction of provision delivered under the lifelong learning entitlement from 1 January 2027.

Providers are recommended to make any necessary preparations for these changes before the main guidance is released.

Please email any questions to heses@officeforstudents.org.uk.

¹ For information, last year's guidance for the 2025 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES25) survey can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/heses25/.

² See the 'Guidance to the Office for Students on Strategic Priorities Grant recurrent (programme) funding for the 2026-27 financial year and associated terms and conditions', at [Guidance from government - Office for Students](#).

The MDS survey

5. All providers which offer pre-registration courses in medicine and dentistry are required to complete the MDS26 survey. This is an annual, UK-wide survey which the OfS conducts on our own behalf and on behalf of other stakeholders.
6. The MDS survey is used to monitor medical and dental recruitment and collect data on the intakes in the current and previous academic years. Providers that do not have eligible medicine or dentistry courses are not required to submit this return.
7. MDS data is also used by the OfS, DHSC and NHSE as an early indicator of medical and dental intakes, including to support DHSC and NHSE workforce planning and to inform monitoring of regulated intakes. For providers in England, the OfS also uses the data to inform funding allocations.
8. This document provides notification of the changes that we intend to make for the MDS26 survey, which will be asking higher education providers in the UK to provide data on the intake of medical and dental students in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 academic years.

Please email any questions to mds@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Changes to HESES26

The HESES26 data collection process

9. All providers registered with the OfS in the Approved (fee cap) category are required to complete the HESES26 data survey. Where such providers do not have students registered with them in the 2026-27 academic year (1 August 2026 to 31 July 2027), they should contact the OfS funding team to arrange for a blank return.
10. The HESES26 data return will use the following key dates:
 - a. Further education and sixth form colleges and academies will use a census date of 1 November 2026 and must submit their data by **noon on Friday 13 November 2026**.
 - b. All other providers will use a census date of 1 December 2026 and must submit their data by **noon on Friday 11 December 2026**.

All providers must have their data signed off by their accountable officer by **Friday 29 January 2027**.

11. This timeline is similar to last year's funding data collection timetable.

Overview of changes to HESES26 definitions and funding calculations

12. The Secretary of State for Education wrote to the OfS on 6 July 2026; this guidance letter placed terms and conditions on the OfS that we must comply with when distributing funding for 2026-27 and beyond. Of particular note are:
 - a. We are required to no longer provide high-cost subject funding to subjects in price group C1.1 or C1.2.
 - b. We are required to no longer allocate funding for: clinical consultant's pay; senior academic general practitioners 'pay; NHS pension scheme compensation.
 - c. When calculating high-cost subject funding and student premium funding allocations, we must not count students taught under a subcontractual relationship unless:
 - i. the teaching partner provider is registered with the OfS in the Approved (fee cap) category OR
 - ii. the teaching partner provider falls into one of the exempt categories identified by the government.³
13. In addition to these requirements, from 1 January 2027 there will be introduction of provision delivered under the lifelong learning entitlement (LLE).⁴ In 2023, the government enacted legislation to enable the introduction of a new system of funding for student finance, the LLE.

³ See 'Exempt providers' at [Franchise arrangements for higher education providers - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ See [Lifelong learning entitlement \(LLE\): secondary legislation - GOV.UK](#) for the three statutory instruments required to implement the LLE fee limit and funding system.

The LLE will replace the current post-18 student finance system. From September 2026, learners will be able to apply for LLE funding for courses and modules starting from January 2027 onwards. This means that where eligible students start courses delivered under the LLE funding system from 1 January 2027, such provision will be considered countable in HESES.

14. In light of the above requirements imposed on the OfS, we have considered carefully how these might impact HESES26, and we intend to make changes to the definitions in the HESES26 guidance only. We do not intend to implement any changes to the structure of the HESES26 workbook.

Changes to HESES definitions arising from introduction of exemptions to the subcontracted partner requirements

15. As noted in paragraph 12.c, DfE has placed terms and conditions on us that require us to amend our guidance for when franchised provision should be recorded as non-fundable. As such, we will be updating the HESES guidance to make clear that franchised provision should be recorded as OfS-fundable when:
 - a. It is delivered by a teaching provider registered with the OfS in the approved (fee cap) category. (This rule was in place for HESES25 and is not new). OR
 - b. It is delivered by a teaching partner that falls into an exempt category defined by the government. Providers should review the exempt categories published by the government to see if any of their franchise partners are affected.⁵ We will not be publishing a list of exempt providers.

Changes to HESES definitions arising from introduction of LLE

16. As noted in paragraph 13, from 1 January 2027 undergraduate provision will be delivered under the new LLE student finance system. As a result, we will need to ensure that relevant sections of the HESES guidance are updated to account for such provision. This will include:
 - a. Annex B: Recognised courses of higher education for OfS funding purposes.
 - b. Annexes C1 and C2: Counting student activity.
 - c. Annex D: Mode of study.
 - d. Annex E: Level of study.
 - e. Annex F: Residential and fundability status
17. Summary details of the updates we intend to make to each of these annexes are shown below.

Changes to Annex B: Recognised courses of higher education for OfS funding purposes

18. Annex B defines the recognised higher education courses which students must be studying if they are to be included in HESES. It also details the treatment of students on higher, degree

⁵ See [Franchise arrangements for higher education providers - GOV.UK](#).

or advanced apprenticeships which include both recognised higher education and other elements.

19. The Annex will be updated to reflect the introduction of the LLE and to refer to relevant legislation. Continuing provision which is not supported through the LLE will remain eligible where they meet existing definitions.

Changes to Annexes C1 and C2: Counting student activity

20. Annexes C1 and C2 give the definition of a year of engagement and explain how to count them. They include the criteria for counting a year of engagement in HESES, as well as other definitions and guidance regarding how years of engagement should be counted. We will update the guidance in both annexes to clarify how LLE provision should be counted in HESES26.
21. Full courses, studied on a full-time or part-time basis, funded through the LLE will continue to be returned in line with previous HESES returns. Where students are undertaking any modular study, for HESES26 we expect providers to return only one part-time year of engagement for that student, split between the relevant subject groupings of the forecast modules.

Changes to Annex D: Mode of study

22. Annex D explains how to determine, for the purposes of HESES, the mode of study for a year of engagement (full time, sandwich year out or part time).
23. One of the core aims from the introduction of LLE is to enable greater flexibility in higher education by enabling students to receive funding for modular study as well as full courses. As such, we will update the guidance to address how to determine the mode for LLE provision.

Changes to Annex E: Level of study

24. Annex E explains how to determine a student's level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate) for the purposes of HESES. It also explains how to separate postgraduate students into the different categories of postgraduate taught and postgraduate research.
25. At launch the LLE will only be available for:
 - a. full courses at Levels 4 to 6,⁶ such as degrees, higher technical qualifications, and designated distance learning and online courses, and
 - b. modules of high-value technical courses at Levels 4 and 5, and modules from full Level 6 qualifications which align to priority skills needs and align to the government's industrial strategy.
26. We will review the definition of undergraduate to reflect this.

⁶ See [What qualification levels mean: England, Wales and Northern Ireland - GOV.UK](#)

Changes to Annex F: Residential and fundability status

27. Annex F provides guidance on identifying the residential and fundability status of a student for the purposes of HESES26. It includes guidance on fee status (which students should be classified as home fee, and which as overseas), fundability for home fee students (whether students are OfS fundable or non-fundable) and how to determine the fundability status of students aiming for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ), and of those supported from other UK or EU public sources.
28. Although the main residential and fundability definitions will continue to apply following the introduction of LLE, the rules relating to ELQ have been removed for LLE provision. As a result, we will update the guidance to amend the definitions on ELQ to make clear that they do not apply to provision delivered under the LLE student finance system.

Multiplication factors

29. In 2023-24 we made changes to the process by which we derived student full-time equivalent (FTE) data to inform OfS funding calculations. This took student headcount data and applied multiplication factors (individualised to providers) to reflect part-time study intensity and non-completion forecasts. Providers were given the opportunity to submit representations to inform us of any significant changes in their provision, following which multiplication factors were agreed for all providers.⁷
30. In 2024-25 and 2025-26, the representations process was run in parallel with the HESES process. Providers were again given the opportunity to submit representations if there had been significant changes to their provision.
31. For 2026-27, we will repeat this parallel representation process and the HESES26 workbook will again contain tables to support this. As before, providers will only need to engage with the representations tables of the workbook if there have been significant changes to their provision and they believe that the multiplication factors determined by the OfS should be adjusted accordingly.
32. Where a provider does not have sufficient relevant or accurate historic data for a particular student category, we will use relevant average figures for an aggregation of categories for the provider to inform the multiplication factor, for example by aggregating all price groups together. This may occur where a provider is recording new provision in HESES26.
33. Where we have been unable to determine a relevant provider average figure for a particular student category using the provider's own data, we will use relevant sector average data for each category to inform the multiplication factor. This may occur where a provider is new, or because the comparable relevant data for the provider is insignificant for averaging purposes.

Multiplication factor representations process

34. Providers should review the proposed multiplication factors which will be displayed within the relevant sections of the tables in the HESES26 workbook. If they are considered to

⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-collection/multiplication-factors/.

appropriately depict the provider's provision for the 2026-27 academic year, then no action is required.

35. If a provider believes that one or more of the multiplication factors may no longer be appropriate, then representations can be submitted to the OfS for consideration.
36. Providers will be able to submit representations when they upload HESES26 data up until the deadline of **noon on 12 February 2027**. Representations can be submitted after the HESES student data sign-off deadline of 29 January 2027. The representations process will only consider the last version of any representations received before the February deadline.
37. We reserve the right to use our own estimates of the data if we consider the data returned by a provider to be inaccurate. Where multiplication factors are based on sector averages, rather than a provider's own data, we will not make adverse changes to funding allocations for the provider if those sector averages change.
38. Further detailed guidance on the multiplication factors and the representations process for 2026-27 will be made available to providers in the autumn of 2026.

Changes to the HESES workbook

39. As set out above in paragraph 14, we are making no changes to the data we collect in HESES26. This means that we will be collecting data via the table structure implemented for HESES25, which consists primarily of four HESES tables for completion (one of which will be automatically filled). These are:
 - a. Table 1: Count of full-time and sandwich year out years of engagement by subject grouping
 - b. Table 2: Count of part-time year out years of engagement by subject grouping
 - c. Table 3: Total counts of years of engagement and estimated completed FTEs for 2027-28 funding
 - d. Table 4: Counts of years of engagement for home fee students on pre-registration health courses and estimated completed FTEs for 2027-28 funding.

Each of these tables is described below.

Table 1: Count of full-time and sandwich year out years of engagement by subject grouping

40. This table will collect data on the full-time and sandwich year out years of engagement, broken down by subject grouping, level and fundability. Providers will be expected to report on the total years countable and the number of new entrants included in the total years countable.

Table 2: Count of part-time years of engagement by subject grouping

41. This table will collect data on the part-time years of engagement, broken down by subject grouping, level and fundability. Providers will be expected to report on the total years countable and the number of new entrants included in the total years countable.

Table 3: Total counts of years of engagement and estimated completed FTEs for 2027-28 funding

- 42. Section A (years countable) and section B (new entrants) of this table will be automatically filled based on the data collected in Tables 1 and 2 and will report the data set out by mode, price group, level and fundability.
- 43. This table will also include the optional multiplication factors representations section setting out the calculation of estimated completed total FTEs that we will use for 2027-28 funding.

Table 4: Counts of years of engagement for home fee students on pre-registration health courses and estimated completed FTEs for 2027-28 funding

- 44. This will collect data on the years of engagement for home fee students on pre-registration health courses, broken down by mode, profession, level and fundability. It will also enable providers to report the number of 'starters in 2026-27'. This table will also include the optional multiplication factors representations section to set out the calculation of estimated FTEs of home fee students on pre-registration health courses.

Training on HESES26

- 45. We will run a webinar on the changes to HESES26 on 17 September 2026. This event is for those who already have some previous experience of HESES. After the event, a recording will be made available on the OfS website.⁸
- 46. We will also be producing a series of video presentations on the completion of HESES26. More information on these will be available in due course on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/heses/.

⁸ See [HESES26: essential updates for experienced staff - Office for Students](#)

Changes to MDS26

The MDS26 data collection process

47. The Medical and Dental Students survey (MDS) requires UK higher education providers with pre-registration medicine or dentistry courses to provide data on the intake of medical and dental students in the previous and current academic years.
48. This is an annual, UK-wide survey that the Office for Students (OfS) conducts on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England (NHSE), the Scottish Funding Council, Medr (Wales's Commission for Tertiary Education and Research) and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland.
49. Only providers with eligible medicine or dentistry courses will be asked to submit this return; a nil return is not required from other providers.
50. Data from this survey is used by the OfS, DHSC and NHSE as an early indicator of medical and dental intakes, including to support DHSC and NHSE workforce planning and to inform monitoring of regulated intakes.
51. For providers in England, the data is used to monitor the 'maximum fundable limits' and to inform funding allocations.
52. MDS26 will ask higher education providers in the UK to provide data on the intake of medical and dental students in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 academic years and will use the following key dates:
 - a. **Census date:** Friday 9 October 2026.
 - b. **Submission date:** Wednesday 21 October 2026.
 - c. **Sign-off deadline:** Tuesday 10 November 2026.

All providers completing MDS26 must have uploaded a completed valid workbook by the submission deadline and their data must be signed off as correct and fit for purpose by the sign-off deadline.

53. This timeline is similar to last year's MDS data collection timetable.

Overview of changes to MDS26 definitions

54. In MDS25 we introduced to collection of additional data on 'exempt' students for the 2025-26 intake; **this was only applicable to providers in England.**
55. The MDS guidance states that:

'All international students are counted against a provider's maximum fundable limit unless the DHSC has granted an explicit exemption. Explicit exemptions set out approval to exclude specific cohorts of (typically international) students from being considered against a provider's

maximum fundable limit. These exemptions are granted on a year-by-year basis by the DHSC in response to requests from providers.'

56. In MDS25, we also set out that:

'From the 2025-26 intake, such exempt students should be included in the MDS survey. Therefore, for MDS25 they should be reported as part of the 2025-26 initial intake numbers in columns 1 and 2 and reported as part of the column 3, 'intake of exempt students'. We will use the data reported in column 3 to ensure that such students are not counted against a provider's maximum fundable limit.'

57. From MDS26, we will therefore also be implementing the collection of additional data on 'exempt' students for the 2026-27 intake; **this will only be applicable to providers in England.**

58. The workbook will be updated to allow 'exempt' students to be separately reported against the 2025-26 medical confirmed intake and dental confirmed intake and the 2026-27 medical initial intake and dental initial intake. These 'exempt' students will **not** count towards the maximum fundable limits; data is collected for planning and verification purposes.

59. For 2025-26, 'exempt' students will also include any students undertaking medical doctor degree apprenticeships.

Changes to the MDS26 workbook

60. In line with the changes set out above, we will amend the tables in MDS26 as follows. **These changes will apply to English providers only.**

Changes to the 'medical confirmed intake' worksheet

61. We will amend the column which previously collected data on the first cohorts of medical doctor degree apprentices to collect data on all students exempt from a provider's maximum fundable limit (either an explicit DHSC exemption or an apprenticeship intake).

Changes to the 'medical initial intake' worksheet

62. There are no changes to the medical initial intake worksheet for MDS26.

Changes to the 'dental confirmed intake' worksheet

63. We will introduce a new column to collect 'confirmed' data on all students exempt from a provider's maximum fundable limit (either an explicit DHSC exemption or an apprenticeship intake).

Changes to the 'dental initial intake' worksheet

64. There are no changes to the dental initial intake worksheet for MDS26.

Changes to the MDS summary worksheet

65. We will transition the column on 'maximum fundable limit exempted intake' to the 2025-26 confirmed intakes (which was included on MDS25 as part of the 2025-26 Initial intakes), replacing the 2024-25 confirmed intakes 'apprenticeship intake' column from MDS25, to

enable us continue to exclude these from the assessment of adjustments to grant arising from over-recruitment.



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