Office for Students

OfS

Westward House
Lime Kiln Close
Stoke Gifford
BRISTOL
BS34 8SR
0117 931 7317
www.officeforstudents.org.uk

28/05/2025

Dear

In-year data collection of student data

I'm writing to share more information about our approach to in-year data collection.

You'll be aware from when I wrote to you on 3 March 2025 that our ambition is to do an initial in-year collection of student data for the 2027-28 year, led by close engagement with data professionals from across the sector.

We have been working closely with Jisc and the other UK funding and regulatory bodies to develop plans for how to deliver this successfully. In this letter and its annexes, I set out our proposals for how we will approach the project from now until 2029.

The journey to in-year data

We will implement the transition to in-year data in phases to enable feedback, reflection and learning from each phase to shape the next. This collaborative approach will enable us and Jisc to identify the practical steps higher education providers must take to submit the required data, allowing us to design an efficient system that minimises the burden on providers.

The three phases are:

Phase 1 – summer 2025 to autumn 2025: We will seek input from your data colleagues to test and then confirm the details of the data we will collect in-year, how in-year collections will operate initially, and how we anticipate they will evolve over time.

Phase 2 – autumn 2025 to autumn 2027: During this phase, Jisc will continue to develop its systems, and providers (and their suppliers) will have time to prepare for a trial collection of in-year data in 2027-28. Jisc will be on hand to help providers prepare.

Interim Chair – Sir David Behan   **Chief Executive** – Susan Lapworth

Phase 3 – autumn 2027 to autumn 2029: We will trial in-year data collection and evaluate the success of the exercise, with a view to learning lessons for future collections. By autumn 2029 we will have begun to embed in-year data collection as a routine part of our regulation.

You can find more information on these phases of work, together with a timeline, in Annex A.

As we move through the phases, Jisc will publish routine updates on the latest progress and developments. These updates will include details on the specific areas of the student data model that are under consideration at any particular time, to help data teams and software suppliers to plan their work effectively.

Jisc will also provide regular updates on how the development of its systems is progressing so your teams will know what functionality and data quality tools to expect and when. You and your data colleagues can sign up to the HESA weekly update.

Jisc has also launched new governance arrangements for the project, which will help keep us on track and accountable as we move through these phases. A summary of the discussion points from each of these meetings will be published on the HESA website.

Why in-year data is important

Delivering in-year data for 2027-28 will require time and resources from all of us, and especially data teams in providers. We need to make sure that this short-term investment will bring long-term benefits across the sector.

We've spoken to a number of institutions about the value of in-year data to them. All saw the importance of the shift, and many highlighted the value of being able to benchmark themselves against their peers and emerging sector trends to inform their strategy and planning decisions.

This is in addition to the importance of the Office for Students (OfS) and statutory bodies having access to the right data, at the right time, to support regulatory decisions in the student interest. In Annex B, we have set out a list of potential benefits that we have heard from colleagues. We want to test this list further, and would welcome your thoughts and feedback. Colleagues can share thoughts via hesastudentdata@officeforstudents.org.uk, and we will continue to refine this with you over the coming months.

Reducing burden

We, Jisc and other statutory customers are reviewing our requirements for data collected via the Jisc Student records and we are committed to reducing burden where we can.

For example, we want to reduce the complexity of the student data model in advance of the introduction of in-year reporting requirements. This will include making some data fields optional, working with Jisc to implement a smoother process for data quality assurance, and clearly signalling for providers where data quality is most important.

This is in addition to the steps already taken to remove burden through our revised approach to collecting data on transnational education and award-only partnerships data.

2024-25 student record collection

While we make progress towards realising the benefits of in-year data, we need to ensure the timely and effective completion of the autumn 2024-25 data collection. As well as planning for in-year collection, we know your data practitioners are also undertaking this important work.

As we said earlier in the year, our expectation is that all providers will submit their data on time by the 5 November 2025 deadline. If your institution would like support, please do contact Jisc's liaison team at liaison@hesa.ac.uk.

I hope the information in this letter gives you a clear view of what to expect from the OfS and Jisc as we develop this programme. We are keen to hear your feedback on the challenges and opportunities in-year data presents for your institution; please do feel free to discuss the move to in-year data in any upcoming engagements you are having with OfS colleagues.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Alison Brunt at hesastudentdata@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Josh Fleming
Director of Strategy and Delivery

Annex A: Phases of work to implement in-year data collection of student data, and initial timeline

This annex sets out more detail on each phase of work towards implementing in-year data collection between now and autumn 2029. The need for any further phases of work beyond autumn 2029 will be kept under review as work progresses.

Phase 1: summer to autumn 2025

In this phase, we want to confirm a 'minimum viable product' version of in-year data collection which we will trial in 2027-28. The trial, taking place in Phase 3, will use this minimum viable product to test that systems and processes work effectively, and identify areas of strength or challenge in the data definitions being used.

Jisc will work with your data practitioners to help shape, critique and test what data we will collect in-year, and how we will collect it. Through a series of workshops, student record officers and student record system software suppliers will help us to develop both the minimum viable product data model we will trial in 2027-28, and the mapping for its evolution. Further details will be shared soon via the HESA website and HESA's weekly update.

Phase 2: winter 2025 to autumn 2027

In Phase 2, we and Jisc will continue to engage with your student data teams to support their readiness for the trial in 2027-28. We will also use this engagement to help us confirm data requirements for as many of the 2028-29 to 2030-31 in-year collections as possible. Having this information at the earliest opportunity will enable you to plan appropriately for the continued evolution of the data landscape.

During this phase Jisc will design and test a range of guidance, training materials and data quality tools to equip your teams and software suppliers with the information, support and advice they need to prepare. Jisc will also build and thoroughly test the functionality of its systems to accommodate submissions of in-year data.

Jisc may run a technical consultation during this phase to gather providers' insights and requirements in relation to the proposed data model, system features or support resources.

Phase 3: autumn 2027 to autumn 2029

Phase 3 will include a trial collection of in-year data over autumn and winter 2027, for the 2027-28 year, a lessons learned exercise following the trial, and further engagement between Jisc and your data teams to ensure the support provided is effective and continually improving.
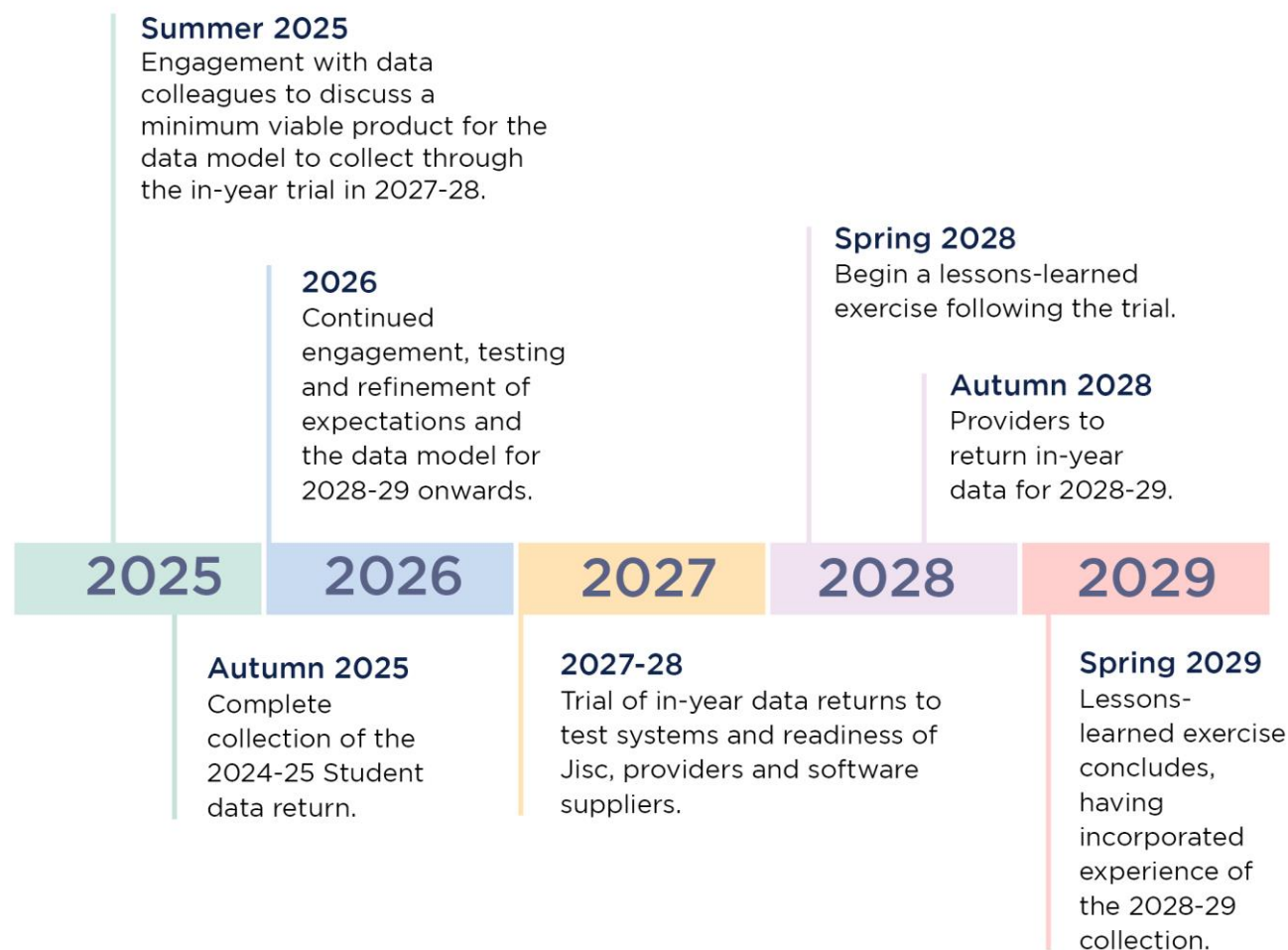
Following the trial, we will iteratively improve the data model for in-year collection over the subsequent three or four years. During Phase 1, we will start mapping how future data requirements might change, so we can maximise the time your data teams and software suppliers

will have to adapt. In Phase 3 we will aim to confirm data requirements up to the 2031-32 in-year collection at the earliest opportunity and, if possible, for later collections too.

The activities we progress in this phase will be informed by further engagement with data professionals across the sector, lessons learned from the trial and feedback received each year. The move to a sustainable in-year data system is a shared endeavour and we must make sure we continuously testing, improving, and working collaboratively with colleagues across the sector.

Timeline

This diagram sets out the proposed timeline, the details of which will be confirmed following further feedback and engagement with sector colleagues.

Summer 2025
Engagement with data colleagues to discuss a minimum viable product for the data model to collect through the in-year trial in 2027-28.

2026
Continued engagement, testing and refinement of expectations and the data model for 2028-29 onwards.

Spring 2028
Begin a lessons-learned exercise following the trial.

Autumn 2028
Providers to return in-year data for 2028-29.

2025 **2026** **2027** **2028** **2029**

Autumn 2025
Complete collection of the 2024-25 Student data return.

2027-28
Trial of in-year data returns to test systems and readiness of Jisc, providers and software suppliers.

Spring 2029
Lessons-learned exercise concludes, having incorporated experience of the 2028-29 collection.

Annex B: Potential benefits of in-year data collection

From our conversations with institutions, Jisc, the programme board and sector bodies, we think in-year data will deliver a range of benefits to different stakeholders. The tables below set out our current view of these benefits, over the short or longer term. We are keen to hear your reflections on the benefits of in-year data collection and which you think should be prioritised. Colleagues can share thoughts by contacting Alison Brunt at HESAStudentData@officeforstudents.org.uk, and we will continue to refine this list with you over the coming months.

Table 1: Benefits of in-year data (what it will enable)

In-year data will enable:	Funders and regulators	Higher education providers	Others including data users and the public
Regulatory, policy and funding decisions informed by more timely data	Yes	Yes	Yes
Providers' internal funding and planning decisions based on the latest figures to support more effective use of funds		Yes	
More up to date data in Heidi+ and tailored datasets		Yes	Yes
Addressing long standing concerns about the timeliness of higher education student data	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support continual improvement aims regarding quality of provision, widening participation and reducing inequality	Yes	Yes	
Confidence in the effective and appropriate use of public funding invested in higher education	Yes	Yes	
Removal of other collections that could be satisfied by in-year data, e.g. HESES, thereby reducing burden for providers	Yes	Yes	
Reduction in burdensome ad-hoc data requests that do not support UK-wide comparison	Yes	Yes	

Note: HESES = Higher Education Students Early Statistics.

Table 2: Benefits of in-year data (what it is expected to support)

Specifically, in-year data is expected to support…	Funders and regulators	Higher education providers	Others including data users and the public
More timely information for policy and strategic decision making, including for providers' governance, planning and marketing purposes	Yes	Yes	Yes
More timely insights on emerging sector data, risks or issues, including for benchmarking against peers and competitive advantage	Yes	Yes	Yes
General monitoring of recruitment, access and retention	Yes	Yes	
More timely student outcome measures to inform regulatory assessments, including in TEF	Yes	Yes	Yes
Better informed financial health monitoring of providers	Yes	Yes	
Better informed funding decisions, including spending reviews	Yes	Yes	Yes
Informing the distribution and protection of public funding for higher education	Yes	Yes	Yes
NSS target lists and process simplification	Yes	Yes	
Student survey coverage expansions, including to postgraduate taught students	Yes	Yes	
Understanding the impacts of exceptional events (e.g. pandemic, industrial action)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Understanding the impacts of change in fees and fee status	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quicker understanding the delivery and impacts of government policy initiatives (e.g. LLE)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Improved workload distribution for provider data teams by spreading work across the year		Yes	
Improved data capabilities and increased use of automation raises data maturity, improves data quality and reduces burden		Yes	
More timely data informing student-facing resources, such as Discover Uni, league tables etc.		Yes	Yes

Note: TEF = Teaching Excellence Framework. LLE = Lifelong Learning Entitlement.