
Data Assurance

January 2013



Why is data important?

Against the backdrop of the new tuition fee arrangements, the accuracy, completeness and currency of data, and in turn the reporting of this data on statutory returns continues to increase in importance to:

- ensure accountability for funds to be or already received;
- support students and other stakeholders in their decision making; and
- help institutions themselves to make sound business decisions

Sector developments

The Regulatory Partnership Group

The Regulatory Partnership Group (RPG) created by HEFCE and the SLC and including representatives from HESA, OFFA, the QAA and the OIA is currently examining the way higher education data is collected and used. They aim to increase the efficiency of data collection, the effectiveness of data analysis and the visibility of data to sector stakeholders.

In consultation with key stakeholders, the recommendations of the RPG are to be taken forward, to develop a governance framework for data exchange across the higher education sector.

The project's objectives are to redesign the data and information landscape in order to meet the needs of the wider group of users and reduce the duplication that currently exists, resulting in timelier and more relevant data, and a more effective system of data governance. A final draft of the framework is due in March 2013. For more on the RPG and this project please see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/about/intro/wip/rpg/redesigningthedatalandscape/#d.en.75428>

Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC)

A recent HEFCE publication consults on proposals for streamlining the requirements of TRAC, and for providing greater transparency on the costs of activities in HE. Key aspects of the consultation include:

- seeking alternative suggested approaches to costing – although TRAC is foreseen to continue;
- understanding why TRAC is not universally used by institutions to support decision making;
- asking for suggestions to reduce the burden of data collection; and

- exploring proposals to give greater transparency for stakeholders in the presentation of TRAC data including producing data on costs at course level and the provision of information on how tuition fees are spent.

Responses to this consultation will be considered by the TRAC Review Group in early 2013, which will then make recommendations to the HEFCE Board in spring 2013. It is envisaged that implementation plans will be taken forward in collaboration with the HE sector and other stakeholders.

HEFCE current areas of focus

HEFCE are currently performing data audit work in the following areas:

- Access to Learning Fund (ALF)
- Post-16 Initial Teacher Training Bursary (FE-ITT)
- Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)
- Key Information Sets (KIS)
- Outrun data (for example completion status of students)
- Learndirect Codes
- Assignment to cost centres and price groups
- Key HESA fields
- QR Charity support fund
- QR Business research element

Generally, HEFCE audit institutions based on a risk analysis of the data, identifying institutions where data is showing unexpected results.

In new areas of data audit activity, such as DLHE and KIS, HEFCE are carrying out pilot studies to identify areas of good practice or areas of difficulty, which will be used to produce feedback to the sector and to shape the future guidance provided to institutions.

HEFCE continue to develop their approach and areas under review in response to changes in the sector and as new areas of risk are identified.

How can Uniac help?

Uniac's data assurance team has an extensive and proven track record in providing data assurance and consultancy services to our member Universities and other institutions, as well as delivering training on the principles and specifics of data audit and assurance to other internal audit professionals within the sector. We work closely with HEFCE including developing our and their audit methodologies and have undertaken data audits on their behalf.

We have substantial knowledge and experience of auditing most of the current areas of HEFCE focus:

- Key Information Sets (KIS)
- DLHE
- Access to Learning Fund (ALF)
- Post-16 Initial Teacher Training Bursary (FE-ITT)
- Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)

- Outrun data (for example completion status of students)
- Assignment to cost centres and price groups
- Key HESA fields

Uniac also has significant experience in performing data audit work across the following additional statutory returns:

- Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey (HESES)
- Student HESA Return
- Staff HESA Return
- Teaching Agency - Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Return
- NHS Pre-registration
- NHS CPD
- Research Excellence Framework (REF)
- Finance Statistics Return (FSR)
- Higher Education - Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) Survey.
- Estates Management Statistics (EMS)
- Aggregate Offshore Return
- TRAC
- TRAC (T)
- Annual Monitoring Statement (AMS)
- Skills Funding Agency (SFA) Return
- Ross Group and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (Ross-CASE) Survey

We can and do provide real-time assurance for individual statutory returns at the point of compilation. This allows institutions to tailor their approach and revise their data prior to submission, ensuring the return is accurate, complete and compiled in accordance with the published technical guidance and requirements as the return is prepared.

In auditing one or more of your statutory returns, we can help support the Audit Committee in forming its opinion on the University's management of the accuracy of data and provide you with assurance that often detailed and complex return requirements are being complied with; ensuring there are no surprises further down the line.

For more information or an informal conversation on any statutory return or data audit in general, please get in touch:



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