

Cylchlythyr | Circular

National Student Survey and Unistats: Updated timetables and changes for 2018

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Other interested parties
Response by: No response required
Contact: Name: Nicola Hunt
Telephone: 029 2085 9735
Email: nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular sets out revised arrangements and timetables for publication of the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS), the processes and timetable for the Unistats data collection for 2018 and upcoming changes to the Unistats website and dataset.

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Introduction

1. In March 2018, via circular [W18/04HE: National Student Survey 2018: Publication of data](#), we set out the timetable for institutions to be able to access their 2018 National Student Survey (NSS) results via the data dissemination portal and the publication of NSS data on the Unistats website.
2. This circular sets out revised arrangements and timetables for publication of the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS), the processes and timetable for the Unistats data collection for 2018 and upcoming changes to the Unistats website and dataset.
3. The administration of the NSS and the Unistats website was previously undertaken by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on behalf of the other UK funding bodies. As of 1 April 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) replaced HEFCE in England with most of HEFCE's functions transferred to the new organisation. This included the NSS and the Unistats website.

Changes for 2018

4. The OfS is expected to be designated as a producer of Official Statistics by July 2018 and will therefore apply the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to its data publication in anticipation of designation. OfS have advised us that this has implications for the pre-publication access that can be granted to NSS outcomes and Unistats data, as these will now be treated as official statistics. As a consequence, the OfS will now publish the NSS public dataset, on behalf of the funders, at the same time as providers are able to access their own data on **27 July**. There will also be no provider preview as part of the annual Unistats data collection and publication process, and data available in system reports will be limited to that essential for quality processes associated with the Unistats return.
5. In June 2018, the OfS will add earnings data from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset for English providers to Unistats. In line with the Code of Practice for official statistics, LEO statistics on Unistats will be labelled as experimental statistics to reflect that these are new statistics and are still being developed. We have some concerns regarding whether students will be able to fully understand and interpret the LEO statistics as they are experimental, not benchmarked, and require contextualisation. Following consultation with Universities Wales, we therefore have not given our consent for this to be included on the Unistats website for Welsh providers. Instead, a message will be included which will indicate that no LEO statistics are being made available for Welsh providers but that this does not reflect on the quality of the course. LEO statistics will not be available for providers in Scotland and Northern Ireland either.

6. The Unistats website will be updated in June 2018 to include Year three outcomes from the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.
7. As noted in Circular W18/04HE, the UK funding bodies will begin to use the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH), developed for the Higher Education Classification of Subjects, to present data on Unistats from September 2018. Data on the NSS dissemination site and OfS website will be presented using CAH and previous subject classifications.
8. All providers will be required to have signed off their Unistats data by noon on **Friday 17 August 2018** for publication on the Unistats website on **Thursday 30 August 2018**. The date of publication for Unistats data has not changed.

Changes to the publication of 2018 NSS data

9. Following its expected designation as a producer of Official Statistics, OfS will need to make changes to the schedule to align the approach with the Code of Practice for Statistics. This will therefore mean that providers will no longer be able to have prior access to the data. OfS have advised us that this will apply to all providers in the UK as OfS produces and publishes the data.
10. The OfS will now publish the 2018 NSS public dataset at the same time as providers are able to access their own data at 09.30 **Friday 27 July 2018**. Aside from the publication schedule, other arrangements for NSS 2018 are unaffected.
11. We acknowledge that this revision to the publication timetable will impact on providers and require changes to be implemented. We have therefore tried to minimise this disruption by ensuring providers do not have to wait longer than previously planned for access to the 2018 NSS results.

Table 1: Revised timetable for the 2018 NSS publication

Original date	Revised date	2018 NSS results
27 July 2018	27 July 2018	Providers are able to access overall provider-level and subject-level question responses and open text comments, via the data dissemination portal.
3 August 2018	27 July 2018	Providers are able to access all providers' NSS results at provider and subject level via the data dissemination portal. Access to the OfS public dataset via the data dissemination portal is also available.
8 August 2018	27 July 2018	The OfS will publish the 2018 NSS public dataset on its website.

Changes to subjects used for Unistats for the 2018 dataset

12. The Unistats website currently uses a three-level subject hierarchy for display and aggregation of data which is based on Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) codes. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects ([HECoS](#)), has been developed to replace JACS, and a Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) to which both JACS and HECoS codes can be mapped has also been developed. HECoS will be adopted by UCAS from May 2018 for 2019 entrants, therefore in order to provide consistency for prospective students the funding bodies will begin to use the CAH to present data on Unistats from August 2018.
13. The impact of this change on the data return is limited to new courses. Where courses are linked to historic course records in the Unistats data, we will map the JACS codes for the linked courses to the CAH. For new courses, higher education institutions, alternative providers and further education institutions in Wales will need to return HECoS codes where they currently return JACS codes.

Unistats 2018 data collection: process and timetable

14. In previous years, it has been possible for providers to see the data that would be published on Unistats for the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey and the NSS through the reports that providers can generate from the data collection system to assist them in quality checking their returns. As the data on Unistats will now be covered by the Code of Practice for official statistics (through OfS), these reports will no longer include the NSS and DLHE. The reports will continue to show the number of students represented by the data associated with each course and, where relevant, the level at which the data has been aggregated. These reports should only be used for quality assurance purposes and the data within them should only be shared with individuals who need it for this purpose.
15. The funding bodies will no longer be able to offer a provider preview period through the Unistats website. We would encourage all providers to engage with the reports available through the HESA Unistats collection system to carry out checks on their data. As there will be no further opportunity to check the data this year, we have decided to set the sign-off deadline later in August than in recent years to allow additional time for engagement with the system reports. This year's Unistats timetable is set out below. Please note that this differs from the timetable previously published on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) website.
16. Providers are responsible for the quality of their Unistats data. The dataset for publication should initially be signed off by the accountable officer, but formal responsibility for signing off any subsequent updates may be delegated to another member of the senior management team.

Table 2: Timetable for the 2018 Unistats collection

Date	Activity	Notes
24 May 2018	Data collection systems open.	
11 July 2018	National Student Survey (NSS) and DLHE data added	NSS and DLHE data will be added to the data collection systems and will be visible in reports. This data is restricted to the number of students and aggregation level associated with each Unistats course record.
12 July 2018	Valid data submission required.	By this date, providers are required to have submitted a dataset which passes validation and contains the majority of their courses.
17 August 2018 (noon)	Deadline for sign-off of data.	Providers are required to have signed off as accurate a dataset which has passed system validation and is suitable for publication.
30 August 2018	Update of Unistats website with the 2018 dataset.	
Early September 2018	Collection systems re-open for updates.	The Unistats dataset is dynamic and it will be possible to make amendments on a weekly basis from September, as it is currently.
29 September 2018	Deadline for update of widgets to reflect new course data.	There are no changes to the coding of the Unistats widget this year, but providers should update these for new courses or changes to course codes.

Replacement of Unistats

17. Following consultation on the outcomes of the Review of Unistats in 2015, the funding bodies are working together on options for a replacement for the Unistats website. This new resource would draw on the findings from the review about decision-making behaviour and the information needs of different groups of prospective students. We will progress this work in stages – ensuring that it is developed in a way that meets the needs of prospective students across all countries of the UK – and will provide the sector with periodic updates, the first of which will be in summer 2018.

18. Further information on the Unistats data submission process and where to find guidance and support can be found in **Annex A**.

Further information / responses to

19. For further information, contact Nicola Hunt (tel 029 2085 9735; email nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk). For contact details at OfS, contact Rose Spicer (tel 0117 931 7148, unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk) for Unistats queries and Rob Denny (0117 931 7078, nss@officeforstudents.org.uk) for NSS queries.

Annex A: Further information for higher education institutions, Welsh further education institutions and alternative providers of higher education

20. Higher education institutions, Welsh further education institutions and alternative providers of higher education should submit Unistats data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
21. Detailed guidance on submitting Unistats data is available on the [HESA website](#). Access to the HESA data collection system is managed through the [HESA Identity System](#).
22. HESA monitors the data collection system to ensure providers are progressing well and not encountering difficulties. For assistance with the submission process, contact HESA's institutional liaison (tel: 01242 211144, email: liaison@hesa.ac.uk, web: www.hesa.ac.uk/liaison).
23. Published Unistats data is based on the provider at which a course is taught, regardless of funding arrangements. The principle is that each student is recorded, for the purposes of Unistats, against the provider at which they studied in their first year. This means that where providers receive funding through a variety of routes they must submit a Unistats return even if they do not directly receive HEFCW funding. Therefore, registering providers should make their partners aware of their responsibilities in relation to Unistats. For further guidance, see the 'Collaborative provision' [guidance document](#) on the HESA website.
24. HESA and the OfS will liaise with providers' Unistats contacts about the provision of Unistats data, and will direct further communications to them. It is essential that providers ensure their Unistats contact details are up to date. Please note that the OfS and HESA hold separate lists of Unistats contacts, as these have slightly different purposes for each organisation. Providers are responsible for ensuring that their Unistats contact details are up to date on both the OfS's and HESA's records. HESA has an online contact management system through which providers can update the details of their nominated HESA Unistats contact. Providers should communicate any change in staff to the institutional liaison by email to liaison@hesa.ac.uk, and will then be given access to HESA's online system so that they can make the necessary changes. Providers can amend their OfS Unistats contacts by emailing unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk.