

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION

IHE response to HESA's consultation on the review of the Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR) and Student record expansion (England and Wales)

August 2023

Proposal 1: Expansion of the student record to collect data about partnership students.

1. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to expand the coverage of the student record to include data on partnership students?

Agree

2. Please complete your providers burden assessment for expanding the coverage of the Student record to include data on partnership students

3. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, in relation to the proposal to expand the coverage of the Student record to include data on partnership students

IHE supports the expansion of the student record to include data on partnership students as it increases transparency of this vital part of the UK's higher education offer. IHE members welcome the opportunity to demonstrate their student outcomes where they can be measured fairly, consistently and reliably, although note that the current student record and analysis model applied by regulators does not always ensure this is the case. IHE agrees that in most cases expanding the coverage of the Student record will, on balance, be a positive step for students, higher education providers and policy makers.

This change must however, be undertaken with careful consideration of the burden posed by this expansion on providers, some of whom are not currently regulated and therefore are not able to be directly supported by HESA/Jisc as the designated data body. Other providers impacted include those with small subcontract provision but larger validated provision, who

already provide some data to their awarding provider but who will see the volume of this data increase significantly. The result of this change will be that those providers in validation partnerships, who register and teach the student awarded by a regulated partner, will need to bear the burden of collection, storage and transfer of data to the awarding partner for submission.

These HE providers are often very small, and do not have access to student funding or finance which has granted the resource to other providers to develop student data systems, staff capacity and expertise. They cannot access the benefits of regulation through their awarding partner.

They also have no regulatory obligation currently to collect data from these students, and it remains unclear how the regulatory responsibility for data collection, which allows regulated HE providers to collect and store this data, can pass to unregulated providers, especially where the contract with the student does not sit with the awarding body. To be effective HESA/Jisc must consider how they can support the quality of data and create a relationship with awarding bodies which incorporates the teaching provider.

IHE members currently submitting data to the student return note that ongoing queries of their data cause considerable burden. Many IHE members offer unique and flexible programmes, and do so through academic partnerships. These courses, and the students who choose them, don't always fit the higher education mould and cause significant persistent queries which need to be resolved in the data submission system, every year. IHE members specifically noted the field which collects 'periods of engagement' cannot accept the level of flexibility required for many of their flexible delivery courses. Regardless of how the query was resolved the previous year, it must be addressed annually. The system needs to adapt to reduce these or any new proposals will only increase annual burden.

IHE members who remain outside of regulation deliver models which meet the needs of their student demographic or industry partners. Without the restraints of the funding system, which preferences a three year on-campus full time delivery model, these courses have diverged from the more traditional offer. IHE members who are not directly regulated are concerned that they will be forced to change their delivery model as to ensure the data does not give negative perceptions of quality.

Example: An IHE member delivers qualifications in allied health under a validation arrangement. Their main student demographic are existing health care practitioners augmenting their knowledge base by studying on the providers online modularised offer. Students can study by module, build towards a qualification or sign up for a Degree, and switch between these options during the course of study. As most are employed on a full or part time basis, students have full flexibility to pause or re-take modules, and flexible entry dates facilitate this.

HESA/JISC and regulators may consider a phased introduction of these proposals to incorporate any changes required with the introduction of funded modular delivery from 2025. This would reduce burden, allow additional time to increase data capabilities within smaller, non-regulated providers, and support a model of data collection which accurately captures the flexibility of these HE courses and their students.

IHE members have also expressed concern that existing data systems for smaller providers do not transfer data easily to the larger systems used by awarding providers. This may mean teaching providers need to adopt more expensive and unnecessary systems to transfer data to awarding providers. Many will gain none of the funding offered through regulation to resource these systems.

It is for these reasons that IHE strongly recommends that data collection where the teaching provider registers the students, but are not regulated are submitted only once per year. This will reduce burden and reflect the self-funded nature of this delivery.

Proposal 2: Expansion of the student record to collect data about TNE students.

4. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to expand the coverage of the student record to include data on TNE students?

Agree

5. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, in relation to this proposal.

IHE members support the extension of the student record to include data on TNE students with the noted changes to data fields. There is a need for more clarity on which students are returned, as many IHE members teach courses delivered with accreditation or Royal Charter overseas, and students on these qualifications are not normally returned in the Student return.

Many IHE members are part of wider transnational higher education providers, and it is not clear which of these students should be returned to the UK system. We encourage greater clarity on eligible students, in particular where students may study with a parent organisation, or where students may spend a short period of time at the UK higher education provider.

IHE members have expressed concern that the expansion of this data will result in considerable burden. For most of our online providers there are far more students studying outside the UK than in. Many of our members are part of larger groups, with more students studying awards on international campuses than in the UK. For a small provider here in the UK, this could be a significant increase in their return, resulting in the need for new or more advanced student record systems to cope with the increase in submission. Several report that they will need to move from the manual entry tool, to buy or build a system capable of delivering the larger volume of data reliably.

For IHE members this proposal also comes at a time when they are expanding their online and blended offer. Increased interest from overseas has seen a boost in the diversity and volume of teaching partnerships. Some suggest this change may delay new partnerships as they wait to understand the data burden.

Proposal 2 (continued): What are the different types of Transnational education (TNE) in the sector?

6. Do these scenarios accurately reflect TNE provision in your experience? Are the combinations of programme type and venue type ones that you recognise?

Partly.

7. Are the registration, delivery, and awarding arrangements as expected in each case?

8. Are you aware of any models of TNE provision that fall outside of these scenarios?

Our members commonly work in TNE arrangements with multiple UK partners, and in particular in joint teaching arrangements which should be included.

Some of our members are a London campus of a larger group and what may be commonly considered 'study abroad' is a common model. This may include a programme designed for several months of study across a number of campuses globally. This model may also have joint awarding powers with another campus. Due to regulatory requirements our members in the UK are incorporated separately, with their own awarding partnerships or powers, so would be considered a separate entity from the main campus, based outside of the UK.

Example: Sotheby's Institute of Art has UG students moving through their campus as part of a planned programme with study at several Sotheby's Institutes around the world. These students are not explicitly defined as TNE students.

We feel blended learning provisions could be better defined within the models presented to understand more specifically the time spent in the UK.

Some of our members are working with industry to develop apprenticeships style models overseas and it would be useful to be able to identify these within the model to ensure they are regulated appropriately.

9. To what extent would you agree that the proposed definitions provide a useful means of classifying TNE provision?

Agree

10. Please provide any contextual information to support your answer above, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered about collecting type data.

These definitions are useful in focusing on the registration and awarding responsibilities however they are broad and we expect some further guidance will be needed to ensure that all providers are interpreting these data fields in the same way.

The TNE scenarios broadly reflect TNE provision for regulated qualification, though do not reflect the majority of TNE which our members undertake, which is often teaching partnerships or delivery of short courses, some of which is not part of a regulated qualification in the UK. As these types of courses are not currently part of the student return we do not expect they would be collected in this expansion, but there is value in considering how they might be collected in future to support better insight into TNE and its value.

We also note that the scenarios are largely aligned to qualifications aligned to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), but are unlikely to match TNE delivering accredited courses on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). This would require the addition of

an accrediting rather than awarding provider, and IHE members were concerned the teaching and registering roles are not clear enough to reflect the RQF relationships. Given the regulatory responsibilities in England and Wales are increasingly focused on all HE from 4+ we urge further clarity on if regulators intend for these courses to be included

We also note that many scenarios do not where there are multiple UK partners alongside overseas partners. As most IHE members, and over half of the OfS register do not have their own awarding powers, this could be the most common model reported.

Proposal 3: Changes and additions to specific areas of the student data model.

11. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to add the Registration entity to the Engagement entity?

Agree

12. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, about collecting registration data.

We welcome the inclusion of registration, and that there is opportunity to identify where the student is registered with two entities. The definition of registration is often contextual to the national regulatory context and may not be consistent with the UK's definition of registration. It may be that this could be explored further to ensure that a consistent approach to defining registration is being used across providers, especially where the teaching provider is partnering with another UK awarding provider.

13. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to amend the Awarding Body Role entity to collect the awarding body name?

Strongly agree

14. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, about collecting awarding body data.

IHE supports collecting awarding body information to increase transparency. Our members suggest that greater transparency for both awarding and registering bodies will improve perceptions of quality and support confidence in UK regulators by overseas entities.

15. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to amend the Course Role and Venue entities to collect course delivery data and country data in particular?

Agree

16. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, about collecting data on who delivers the course.

IHE members include UK entities operating TNE activities overseas and providers who are part of global organisations, perhaps considered TNE to the UK. CourseRole and Venue can be challenging where course design is global, allowing maximum mobility for students, and choice in that mobility. Proposals to amend CourseRole and Venue may need to consider this level of mobility and develop definitions to support a consistent but accurate reflection of where the student has studied over the instance period.

Example: An IHE member delivering primary postgraduate programmes, operates several courses where students may change venue up to three times in a single instance period, allowing them an award from each of the providers they studied with, all part of the wider organisational structure. In the UK this provider is regulated as a UK entity and would return the Student return as any provider in the appropriate regulation category. It is unclear what the expectations would be for Venue where a student moved campus regularly.

17. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to amend the Study Location entity to collect the country of study location?

Agree

18. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, about collecting distance learning location data.

As question above

Proposal 3 (continued): Data item no longer required – PRINONUK field

19. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to remove the PRINONUK field?

Agree

20. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to add a TNE flag to the Engagement entity to identify TNE students?

Agree

21. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, about collecting a flag field to identify TNE students.

IHE welcomes the addition of a flag field for TNE students. Our members noted that flags are very useful tools as users of the collected data, and encourage HESA/JISC to consider implementing them more widely.

IHE also supports the expansion of the Student record to TNE in part to make this data more accessible to policy makers and better understood by regulators. A TNE flag will meet this need.

22. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to collect the proposed student identifiers data for all TNE students?

23. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers about the proposed student identifier data items for all TNE students.

IHE members already face significant challenges in the data system and there is concern that this expansion of the TNE record will result in similar burden to the existing model. IHE members noted that their data consistently results in significant error notification due to the unique nature of their delivery, which is often replicated in their TNE models. This has been accepted as a necessary burden for domestic regulation, however extending these fields to TNE would multiply this burden, in some cases significantly. With no additional resources from TNE provision to accommodate this change, additional data would be managed by the domestic data staff member who would need to manage all the quality queries. IHE urges HESA to consider where system changes could reduce repetitive error messages that need to be resolved to reduce the burden of both the domestic and TNE student collection.

IHE members expressed specific concern of the inclusion of Engagement data, which poses a challenge for many IHE members in the current Student return, where they deliver flexible courses. We propose that HESA/JISC review how ENGEXPECTEDENDDATE and ENGSTARTDATE are currently used, and if there are any changes which could be made to the collection to accommodate modular, flexible including multiple cohort models, and joint venture models.

Also of concern is the proposed changes will necessitate considerable investment in data systems and processes to incorporate overseas partners data and establish data sharing agreements.

24. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to collect the proposed personal characteristics data for TNE students?

Agree

25. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, about returning the proposed personal characteristics data.

IHE welcomes HESA's work with the sector to identify personal characteristics which reflect the global nature of these students. Any future proposals should consider how collecting of data on personal characteristics could impact the safety, security and wellbeing of students within the country they are studying.

26. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to collect the proposed course and qualification data for all TNE students?

Agree

27. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, about collecting course and qualification data for all TNE students.

IHE agrees that course and qualification data is important to collect however notes some concern from members on how technical qualifications at level 4+ might be collected in future. Members with flexible or stackable modular qualifications, primarily delivered in an online or blended delivery model, expressed concern that the current Student data model does not adapt well to the flexibility they seek to give their students. As noted before, this could result in a significant increase in burden as annual returns would have the same errors to manage, to allow the data return to accommodate the unique delivery. As these models tend to attract more students studying overseas than in the UK, this could represent a significant burden for smaller providers.

We would also welcome clarification on teaching which is not part of a regulated qualification in the UK, but may form part of a regulated qualification in the location of delivery, and if courses delivered as part of a Royal Charter should be included.

28. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to collect the proposed Engagement and Student course session data for all TNE students?

Agree

29. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, about collecting Engagement and Student course session data.

IHE members recognise the importance of this information to regulators and policy makers however it was noted as the area which represents the highest level of data burden for our members. Flexible, accelerated, blended and industry focused models all return the same errors and quality issues when submitting data within these fields. Under these proposals these issues would carry to the TNE delivery.

This is highly problematic for IHE members as this data would need to be collected by partner institutions and is not part of the current data sharing agreement. Similarly errors which appear in the HESA submission may need more clarification with the partner to resolve, creating a lot of back and forth between the overseas partner and the individual or small team in the UK higher education provider submitting the data. IHE members are very concerned about the timelines proposed to manage the additional data alongside their domestic Student return.

30. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to collect the proposed leaving data for all TNE students?

31. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, about collecting leaving data.

IHE members with multiple annual intakes expressed concern that this represents a high volume of data moving between providers over the course of the year and it does not match the current data model they have with partners. It would require a re-negotiation of their data

sharing processes and an increase in the data burden over the year. Providers with multiple cohorts also offer high flexibility to support students to complete their programmes, allowing them to move between cohorts through implementing study breaks. This adds to the data burden and often returns errors or requires a resubmission of the student into the return, adding to the data burden.

32. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to collect the proposed personal characteristics data for TNE students on primary medical qualifications overseas?

N/A

33. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, or any alternative approaches you think should be considered, about collecting personal characteristic data from GMC regulated students.

IHE has only one member provider who offers GMC regulated courses overseas. They will complete their own submission.

Proposal 3 (continued): Further optional data items – TYPE field

34. Do you have any comments on the derivation for types of TNE provision proposed above?

IHE's current academic partnerships project has identified a similar challenge with defining types of partnership, and like the proposals, we chose to look more closely at where student contracts and awards were held to define partnership types. This avoided the existing confusion we found with terminology like 'joint venture' 'subcontract' and 'validation'. We found considerable issues with definitions applied abroad, and challenges with providers setting up new offers in the UK, in understanding the UK's terminology around partnerships. We do not feel using any of the included definitions would add value to the TNE discussion but likely increase confusion on the nature of partnerships overseas.

35. Which of the following five options detailed above would be your preference for identifying different types of TNE provision?

Option one: derivation only

36. Please explain the reasons for your preference, and any alternative approaches you think should be considered for collecting programme and venue type data.

While we do support expanding the Student record to include TNE that is unlikely to match the limited definition of regulated qualifications, we do not feel the definitions proposed add clarity or value to the return. We support further investigation into TNE which is not covered by the existing derivation and scenarios to understand if any of these proposals could capture this accurately without reducing the clarity and use of the existing data set.

37. Which, if any, of these data items do you consider that it could be worthwhile to collect within the student record for the purposes of gaining contextual information about TNE students?

StudentCourseSession.PLACEMENT
StudentCourseSession.PREPFLAG

38. Do you consider that it would be feasible for your provider to return data on these items for TNE provision?

StudentCourseSession.PLACEMENT
StudentCourseSession.PREPFLAG

39. Please explain the reasons why you think that collection of activity data (including the Placement field, Preparatory and Study Abroad flags and Intercalation field) would or would not be worthwhile or feasible.

IHE members currently use both data fields to support contextualisation of student outcomes, in particular where there are existing professional criteria attached to the course. Student placements requirements can delay completion and localised issues can impact placement availability. IHE members consider this field important for the industry-relevant courses they deliver abroad.

Preparatory fields are not only important contextual information, but very useful for wider uses of TNE data to understand the types of delivery and the added value of this delivery to expanding student choice and diversity. The specialist nature of some IHE members often necessitates a pre-sessional period to support students in transitioning to the full qualification.

IHE represents a broad range of international pathway providers, who offer the preparatory student options as part of their own or a partners course. They are critical to understanding flows of international students into UK qualifications abroad as well as the role these courses take in supporting students to eventually study part or all of their qualification in the UK. They add considerable value to UK education exports, not only to the providers who deliver them, but as part of a wider ecosystem of HE provision to international students. IHE members support including them in this return.

40. Please provide any contextual information to support your above answers, about collecting activity data.

Proposal 4: Timing of the expanded Student Return

41. On which frequency do you consider that it would be feasible for your provider to submit the full student record return proposed for partnership students?

Once per year

42. Please provide any contextual information to support your answers about collecting partnership and TNE student data once or twice per year. If you think there are particular opportunities or challenges associated with either of these timing requirements, please explain these, and any alternative approaches you think should be considered.

The regulatory drivers for the student data futures model of data return, which increased the return from one to two instances per year, largely not apply to self funded students, the largest new student group to be returned under these proposals. They will not be eligible for student finance, nor will they need to be included in data for grant funding. They largely follow non-traditional academic years, for which the proposed date range will not apply. This could cause further burden for partner providers, having to collect and return data for multiple years. It is important to reduce burden for these non-regulated providers wherever possible, to increase the amount of student fee spent on the student. It is for these reasons we do not support two data collections per year for these students.

IHE members have expressed concern on timescales proposed for collecting information from multiple partners, often operating on a different academic year model from our UK member. Two returns would further compress the timescale.

Most members suggest that local regulation of their TNE partners mandates only one data collection per year where data is collected. It would be easier to align to their data collection model with a single data collection.

43. Do you have any other comments on the collection method of the data?

IHE remains concerned that there is not a UK wide approach to this data. For our members, whose UK partners can be based across any of the four UK nations, diverging systems of data collection add unnecessary burden and complexity. For example, one of our members with an awarding partner in Northern Ireland, who deliver teaching for a university overseas would need to prepare data for two separate versions of this return. With less than 500 students they don't have the data systems or internal expertise to prepare data for the same students in multiple ways.

IHE is hopeful that this data can be used beyond the needs of regulatory bodies, and can support the development of international education policy and contribute to education export data. We believe that funders and regulators have a shared responsibility to support data collection where it can contribute to the development of policy and support for students, education providers and global collaboration. To this end we support further consideration of this data set for these purposes but also urge a UK wide approach to ensure the UK as a consistent approach to supporting international education and students on UK qualifications around the world.