

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Higher Education in England and the UK

*(produced by the Department for Business, Innovation
and Skills, the Higher Education Statistics Agency and
the Student Loans Company)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

Email: authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Myddelton Street
London EC1R 1UW

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment Reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, Reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment Reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment Reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment Report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics³. The report covers annual statistics on higher education (HE) in England and the UK that are produced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Student Loans Company (SLC):

- *Participation Rates in Higher Education (provisional)* – published by BIS⁴;
- *Higher Education Student Enrolments and Qualifications Obtained at Higher Education Institutions in the UK* – published by HESA⁵;
- *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education in the UK* – published by HESA⁶;
- *Higher Education Statistics for the UK* – a compendium report published by HESA⁷;
- *Student Support for Higher Education in England (provisional)* – published by SLC⁸; and
- *Student Loans for Higher Education in England* – published by SLC⁹.

1.1.2 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to the producers implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and BIS (on their behalf) reporting them to the Authority by May 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 BIS, HESA and SLC engage with users and data providers of higher education statistics in central government and the HE sector through various means,

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ http://stats.berr.gov.uk/he/Participation_Rates_in_HE_2008-09.pdf

⁵ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1578/161/>

⁶ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1775/161/>

⁷ http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_pubs&task=show_pub_detail&pubid=1709&Itemid=286

⁸ <http://www.slc.co.uk/pdf/slcsfr062009.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.slc.co.uk/pdf/slcsfr032010.pdf>

including user groups, consultation and general enquiries. There is less evidence of engagement with users in the wider community.

- 1.3.2 The producers present the HE statistics in an impartial way, with some commentary. The releases could be strengthened with a presentation of longer-term trends and information about the wider context.
- 1.3.3 The producers have detailed quality assurance and production procedures. The background information in the HE outputs could be extended to reflect how the statistics are collected and make clear the quality and reliability of the statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that BIS, HESA and SLC could strengthen their compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	BIS, HESA and SLC should engage with the wider user community and report the outcomes of user engagement (para 3.4).
Requirement 2	HESA should release <i>Higher Education Statistics for the United Kingdom</i> online without charge to users (para 3.7).
Requirement 3	SLC should publish a revisions policy for its statistics (para 3.9).
Requirement 4	HESA and SLC should provide more information about the quality and reliability of their HE statistics (para 3.15).
Requirement 5	SLC should publish its arrangements for protecting confidential personal data (para 3.19).
Requirement 6	BIS, HESA and SLC should improve the commentary in the statistical releases to aid interpretation, including providing an overview of trends in HE and charts where appropriate (para 3.26).
Requirement 7	BIS, HESA and SLC should ensure that the HE statistics are made available in a form that enables and encourages analysis and re-use (para 3.28).

- Requirement 8** HESA should provide the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in *Higher Education Statistics for the UK* (para 3.33).
- Requirement 9** HESA and SLC should publish a Statement of Administrative Sources (para 3.34).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 BIS is the department responsible for HE policy in England. HESA is the official agency for the collection of data and dissemination of statistics on HE in the UK. It was established in 1993. Its statutory customers comprise government departments, the devolved administrations, the HE funding councils and the research councils. SLC is responsible for administering student loans throughout the UK; it started trading in 1990. SLC assumed responsibility for producing statistics on student support and student loans from the former Department for Education and Skills in 2004.
- 2.2 HESA is an independent agency funded by the sector and SLC is an arm's length body of BIS. Both are producers of official statistics by virtue of the *Official Statistics Order 2009*¹⁰. The Government Statistical Service has agreed that in the case of arm's length bodies such as HESA and SLC, a lead officer within the body should be responsible for compliance with the Code of Practice. However, BIS works closely with HESA and SLC on the design, quality assurance and publication of HESA and SLC outputs and in this instance will take lead responsibility for ensuring that requirements from this assessment are met.
- 2.3 *Participation Rates in Higher Education* is produced by BIS and covers students who are domiciled in England and study at higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK, or who are pursuing courses at HE level in further education colleges in GB. Originating in 2004, it tracked progress against targets set by the previous government¹¹. It was the subject of a National Statistics Quality Review¹² which led to adoption of the current methodology. Age specific participation rates (for those entering HE for the first time) are summed to give a total participation rate – the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) – and are disaggregated by gender.
- 2.4 The three HESA releases have been produced since 1994/95 and provide statistics for HEIs in the UK and for each constituent country. The underlying data are used by the HE funding councils in allocating resources to HEIs and by the institutions themselves for benchmarking purposes (often in association with HESA's official statistics on performance indicators). The media use the HESA releases to illustrate trends in university entry and graduation (including the proportion of 'firsts') and in the employment of graduates. Potential students are more likely to use the Unistats website¹³. This contains data from HESA and other sources and can be used to compare universities and courses of study. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses some of the data underlying the HESA statistics (term-time address of university students) in its

¹⁰ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2009/draft/ukdsi_9780111473122_en_1

¹¹ Targets in this area are currently under review. The former government had a target to increase participation of those aged 18 to 30 towards 50 per cent.

¹² http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/quality_review/education.asp

¹³ <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>

new method¹⁴ for producing migration estimates at the local area level for England and Wales.

- 2.5 *Student Enrolments and Qualifications* covers trends in undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments (full-time and part-time, by subject area and domicile of student). The statistics on qualifications obtained at HEIs also include gender of student and class of degree. These data are obtained from the student records maintained by the institutions. There was a National Statistics Quality Review¹⁵ in 2002, as a result of which previously separate statistical outputs on enrolments and qualifications were merged into a single data release in January of each year.
- 2.6 *Destinations of Leavers* is derived from an annual follow up survey of students six months after graduation and includes information about employment (including location, occupation and salary), unemployment, and further study. The first publication in the series was for 1994/95. A fuller report from each survey is available in the form of a print publication (£55 for the 2008/09 volume) which also includes a CD of data tables. The printed publication does not form part of this assessment. HESA is currently reviewing the content, methods and coverage of the leavers' survey. Some student cohorts are followed up again after another three years have elapsed but these data are not included in any National Statistics release.
- 2.7 The compendium report *Higher Education Statistics for the UK* has also been published since 1994/95 and is available only in print format (price £36 for the 2008/09 volume) or as a CD (£39). It includes statistics from student, staff and finance records, the destinations survey, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), SLC, ONS's Labour Force Survey and international comparisons compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- 2.8 The SLC statistics are now published separately for each UK country, as a result of the growing divergence in arrangements for student support across the four administrations. *Student Support for Higher Education in England* covers a rolling period of three years and is published in the November of the academic year to which the latest figures relate. It includes statistics on support in the form of loans for tuition and loans and grants for maintenance. The statistics are labelled as 'provisional' because students can apply for support after starting their course (the deadline for applications is at nine months) so figures for the latest year are not finalised until the following November's release. The statistics cover English domiciled students studying for full-time undergraduate courses in the UK, and postgraduate students who are undertaking an Initial Teacher Training Course. EU students studying in England are also included if they receive support. *Student Loans* is published in June and covers the previous financial year. It provides statistics on the stock of loans, on

¹⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/mig-stats-improve-prog/comm-stakeholders/improvements-2008-pop-est/key-documents/migration-improvements-overview-of-package.pdf>

¹⁵ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/quality_review/downloads/NSQR15_report.doc

repayments, and on borrowers who have had their accounts cancelled or written off.

- 2.9 *Student Support and Student Loan* statistics are used to develop and monitor policy (for example, to estimate potential costs). The number of full maintenance grants that are awarded is a measure of the extent to which students from poorer families¹⁶ are entering HE. There is also much interest from politicians and the media in the size of student debt, the amounts that are being repaid and the reasons for debt being written off. The number of borrowers who are repaying gives an indication of the proportion of graduates who earn in excess of £15k.
- 2.10 The staff resource to produce these outputs is 286 person days – 111 for BIS, 100 for SLC and 75 for HESA. The amount for SLC includes development work each year to take account of changes to the student support system.

¹⁶ This is currently where the income of their parents or sponsor is below £25k

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 BIS, HESA and SLC have documented the uses made of the HE data but have not published these. We suggest that this information is published.
- 3.2 BIS statisticians primarily engage with the users within BIS working on policies to increase HE participation and on university and skills strategies. They obtain information about users' views and needs through reviewing parliamentary questions, customer enquiries and Freedom of Information requests. BIS is looking to improve its engagement with users, making more use, for example, of Royal Statistical Society (RSS) user forums. SLC and HESA told us that they rely on BIS to conduct wider engagement with users.
- 3.3 HESA engages with central government users and those in the HE sector through various groups. It has recently launched a national user group with representatives across the HE sector. It also has meetings three times a year with its statutory customers. Meetings with the devolved administrations and BIS are held to review the content and presentation of statistical releases. HESA has sought user views on its publications and is using the feedback to inform its statistical planning over the next five years.
- 3.4 SLC told us that its contact with users is largely restricted to those in BIS and the devolved administrations. It publishes a monthly bulletin¹⁷ for its stakeholders and partners on its website which mainly focuses on the collection of the data. SLC has developed an official statistics release¹⁸ on the number of Higher Education Student Support applications processed by Student Finance England, due to the high levels of public interest. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS, HESA and SLC should engage with the wider user community and report the outcomes of user engagement¹⁹ (Requirement 1).
- 3.5 BIS told us that a National Statistics theme group for education has recently been set up, led by the Department for Education (DfE). This group will review dissemination practices, and seek users' views. BIS would like to use the theme group to help produce a more coordinated approach across each of the departments in gathering user feedback. The Assessment team supports this approach to user engagement and recommends it to other producers of official statistics.

¹⁷ http://www.slc.co.uk/stakeholders/stakeholder_partner.html

¹⁸ http://www.slc.co.uk/statistics/officialstatistics2_page.html

¹⁹ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2 and 5 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.6 BIS, HESA and SLC publish the HE statistics in an impartial and orderly manner.
- 3.7 Each of the statistical releases are available free of charge, with the exception of the *Higher Education Statistics for the United Kingdom* compendium report which is available through the HESA website at a charge for both the hard copy and CD (no PDF of the report is made available). HESA charges for some of its outputs to recover the costs of producing the statistics. These reports are available free of charge to the statutory customers (such as some government departments and funding councils) and HEIs but not more widely. As part of the designation as National Statistics, HESA should release *Higher Education Statistics for the United Kingdom* online without charge to users²⁰ (Requirement 2).
- 3.8 The statistical releases are also accessible via the National Statistics Publication Hub and DfE's research gateway²¹.
- 3.9 BIS²² and HESA²³ have each published their revisions policies on their websites. SLC told us that it follows BIS's revision policy, but it does not make this sufficiently clear on its website. As part of the designation as National Statistics, SLC should publish a revisions policy for its statistics²⁴ (Requirement 3).
- 3.10 In correcting an error in *Student Support for Higher Education in England (provisional), 2009/10*, SLC included a corrections notice at the beginning of the PDF and on its website but did not highlight the changes in the respective tables. We suggest that BIS ensure that corrections are highlighted in the appropriate tables and sections of SLC statistical releases.
- 3.11 BIS, HESA and SLC each announce changes to methods ahead of their implementation on their websites and in the relevant publications.

²⁰ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 8 of the Code of Practice

²¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/>

²² <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/sd/Compliance1.htm>

²³ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1782/207/>

²⁴ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

3.12 No incidents of political pressure, abuse of trust or complaints relating to the professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.13 HESA provides useful guidance²⁵ for HEIs on its website about supplying the data that are used to produce these statistics. HESA also provides the definitions^{26,27} and footnotes included in the statistical releases alongside Excel data tables on its website. SLC gives some information on its website explaining the main definitions and the changes to the student support system²⁸. BIS provides little information on its website about the HE statistics. We suggest that BIS signpost users to explanatory information about the HE statistics.
- 3.14 BIS gives users an indication of the completeness of the participation rates and the impact of excluding students participating in privately funded HE in *Participation Rates in Higher Education*. The release also gives an indication of the reliability of the rates by age group.
- 3.15 The background information for the HESA and SLC statistical releases does not include sufficient explanation about the quality of the data and their strengths and weaknesses. HESA does present some information about recording problems for individual institutions. It also gives the sample size and response rates for the destinations survey and in particular highlights that there is a lower response for the salaries data. It would be helpful for users in interpreting the data if HESA described the consequences of survey design features such as the impact of the mode of data collection on the destinations of leavers' data, and whether the HEI data have any missing records or data items. SLC describes the statistics as robust but does not explain the basis for this judgment. As part of the designation as National Statistics, HESA and SLC should provide more information about the quality and reliability of their statistics²⁹ (Requirement 4).
- 3.16 BIS, HESA and SLA have detailed the steps taken to produce the statistical releases including the procedures for assuring the quality of the data they use to produce these statistics. HESA has achieved ISO 9001³⁰ accreditation for its quality management and quality assurance procedures. SLC audits its data, supporting the payment of student grants and loans. BIS told us that its statisticians are actively involved in the preparation and quality assurance of the statistics in the SLC and HESA statistical releases.
- 3.17 The producers have made improvements to each of the HE data sources and outputs in response to feedback and reviews, for example, following two

²⁵ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/602/241/>

²⁶ http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_datatables&Itemid=121&task=show_category&catdex=3

²⁷ http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_datatables&Itemid=121&task=show_category&catdex=0

²⁸ <http://www.slc.co.uk/about%20student%20finance/index.html>

²⁹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

³⁰ http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail?csnumber=46486

National Statistics Quality Reviews³¹ of HE statistics, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England's review³² of HEI data collection and quality.

- 3.18 The HESA statistical releases each include HE data for England and the devolved administrations individually, as well as for the UK as a whole. These reports do not give comparisons between the countries of the UK. SLC presents the student support data for English domiciled students attending UK HEIs only, as the devolved administrations have different policies for funding student support. Consequently it presents statistics for each administration in separate outputs. The BIS *Participation Rates in Higher Education* release also covers students usually resident in England. The devolved administrations apply different methods for determining the participation rates. We suggest that BIS ensure that the HE releases from the four UK countries are signposted and document any differences in its approach.

³¹ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/quality_review/education.asp

³² http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2008/rd19_08/

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 3.19 BIS has assured us that appropriate arrangements are in place to protect the confidentiality of the HE data. BIS³³ and HESA³⁴ have published confidentiality protection policies on their websites. HESA shares data with ONS for use in migration estimates, and has a data sharing agreement covering these arrangements. HESA suppresses relevant data to prevent the disclosure of personal information and makes this clear in the footnotes to tables. SLC told us that it has taken the necessary steps to inform its staff of the appropriate ways of handling disclosive information but has not published its confidentiality protection policy. It shares the student level data with HE funding councils, governed by data sharing agreements. As part of the designation as National Statistics, SLC should publish its arrangements for protecting confidential personal data³⁵ (Requirement 5).
- 3.20 HESA and SLC told us that they use secure systems to transfer the data from data providers (including online completion of student support applications and the destinations survey). HESA shares data with BIS as part of its statutory function. BIS informed us that the data are linked to school records and have been used to develop measures of progression for individuals from low income backgrounds.

³³ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/sd/Compliance1.htm>

³⁴ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1781/207/>

³⁵ In relation to Principle 5 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 3.21 HESA and SLC both collect HE data for purposes other than the production of official statistics. There are no additional data requirements to meet the needs of the statistical releases. BIS draws on data from the HESA student record for *Participation Rates in Higher Education*. No separate collection is required for this output.
- 3.22 HESA collects data from HEIs to support the planning, development and funding of HE by the Government, devolved administrations and HE funding bodies. The HEI administrative data returns are mandatory under the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*³⁶. Participation in the destinations survey by students is voluntary and HESA seeks to minimise the amount of information collected by linking the survey with student records.
- 3.23 HESA conducts a review of the data provided by the HEIs in the student, staff, finance and destination of leaver records on a regular schedule and lists the amendments³⁷ on its website. These changes reflect the operational needs of its statutory customers. The changes made to the SLC collection also tend to be for operational reasons rather than to meet statistical needs. BIS is represented in discussions about both of the systems.

³⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/contents>

³⁷ http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/component/option,com_studrec/task,show_file/Itemid,233/mnl,09051/href,SummaryOfChanges.html/

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.24 BIS, HESA and SLC all told the Assessment team that adequate resources are available to produce the current catalogue of HE statistical releases.
- 3.25 Relevant competency frameworks and recruitment processes are used in BIS, HESA and SLC. BIS has adopted the Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistical competence framework.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.26 The HE statistical releases contain some commentary, outlining the main findings. The commentary is largely restricted to changes compared with the previous year and does not explain the longer-term patterns or relate the statistics to the wider HE context. *HE statistics for the UK* is a compendium that presents data tables on a wide range of topics but contains little commentary to give an overview of HE. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS, HESA and SLC should improve the commentary in the statistical releases to aid interpretation, including providing an overview of trends in HE and charts where appropriate³⁸ (Requirement 6). We suggest that BIS extend the information³⁹ on its website explaining the nature of HE and the range of available statistics.
- 3.27 HESA makes available free on its website a wide range of summary statistics relating to performance indicators⁴⁰, such as widening the participation of under-represented groups, and employment rates of graduates by subject, level and mode of study. These data tables are official statistics, but are not part of this assessment.
- 3.28 BIS publishes *Participation Rates in HE* as a PDF on its website and provides links to each of the other HE statistical releases. BIS does not provide the data tables from its release in a format that supports further analysis or re-use by users. HESA publishes its statistical releases on its website, alongside the data tables in Excel format and the associated definitions. The data tables from the *Higher Education in the UK* compendium volume are available on CD. HESA told us that it is planning to move to an online mechanism for dissemination of these data. SLC makes its two outputs available on its website in PDF. It does not provide the data tables in a form that supports further analysis. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS, HESA and SLC should ensure that the HE statistics are made available in a form that enables and encourages analysis and re-use⁴¹ (Requirement 7).

³⁸ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³⁹ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/he/index.htm>

⁴⁰ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1703/141/>

⁴¹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.29 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.30 BIS publishes a timetable of each of the HE releases⁴² for twelve months ahead.
- 3.31 BIS, HESA and SLC each release their HE statistics at 9.30am on their respective websites. The statistical releases are also available through the Publication Hub.
- 3.32 BIS has published a policy⁴³ on pre-release access on its website. BIS has reduced the number of people with pre-release access to the statistics. It provides pre-release access lists⁴⁴ for each of the HE outputs in a document on its website. SLC provides a link⁴⁵ to the BIS lists on its website. HESA has published its own statement⁴⁶ of compliance with the *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders*⁴⁷ which includes links to the lists for individual statistical releases.
- 3.33 With the exception of one HESA publication (the *Higher Education Statistics for the UK* compendium report) BIS, HESA and SLC give the name of the responsible statistician on each statistical release, although BIS and HESA do not provide contact details for the named statistician. As part of the designation as National Statistics, HESA should provide the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in *Higher Education Statistics for the UK*⁴⁸ (Requirement 8). We also suggest that BIS and HESA provide contact details for the statisticians named in their releases.

⁴² <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/he/index.htm>

⁴³ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/sd/Compliance1.htm>

⁴⁴ http://stats.berr.gov.uk/sd/Pre-release_access_lists_for_web.DOC

⁴⁵ http://www.slc.co.uk/statistics/national_statistics.html

⁴⁶ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1497/207/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/legislative-background/pre-release-access/index.html>

⁴⁸ In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

3.34 BIS has published a background note⁴⁹ on administrative sources which refers users to the Statements of Administrative Sources prepared by its partner organisations such as HESA and SLC, and which states that other BIS official statistics are produced using survey data. No statements of administrative sources are available on the HESA and SLC websites. As part of the designation as National Statistics, HESA and SLC should publish a Statement of Administrative Sources⁵⁰ (Requirement 9).

⁴⁹ <http://stats.berr.gov.uk/sd/Compliance4.htm>

⁵⁰ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the Code of Practice

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the HE statistics produced by BIS, HESA and SLC, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | BIS, HESA and SLC should publish information about the ways in which their HE statistics are used (para 3.1). |
| Suggestion 2 | SLC should highlight corrections in the appropriate tables and sections of its statistical releases (para 3.10). |
| Suggestion 3 | BIS should signpost users to explanatory information about the higher education statistics (para 3.13). |
| Suggestion 4 | BIS should ensure that the HE releases from the four UK countries are signposted and document any differences in its approach (para 3.18) |
| Suggestion 5 | Extend the information on the BIS website explaining the nature of HE and range of available statistics (para 3.26). |
| Suggestion 6 | BIS and HESA should provide contact details for the responsible statistician in each of their statistical releases (para 3.33). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from June to October 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Penny Babb, Amanda Charles and Jill Barelli – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of BIS, HESA and SLC in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 12 and 13 August. The Assessment team subsequently met the producer bodies in October to review compliance with the Code of Practice, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 16 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

BIS	8
Other government/devolved administrations	1
Higher education agencies	4
Higher education institutions/representatives	3

A2.5 The statistics generally met the needs of users and particularly positive comments were received from policy makers in BIS. Most users felt that the data and background material were presented clearly, although one queried whether they would be easy for a lay person to use.

A2.6 Some users would like the coverage of the HESA statistics to be widened to include private sector institutions and HE that is provided in a further education setting. Others would like more detail – for example, finer geographical breakdowns in the enrolments and qualifications statistics (by home address of students) and statistics on research council students. Users who were not statutory customers asked for HESA data to be free and on-line. Comments on the destinations survey and the SLC statistics similarly included requests for more detail, and for the survey to be extended to non-EU students. There was a suggestion that the SLC and BIS statistics should be available in spreadsheet form, and where appropriate at institutional level.

A2.7 Most users were happy with the level of user engagement, citing their membership of a technical group or their regular contact with producers. One person suggested that it would be useful to engage with all three producers from time to time, rather than having separate contacts with each of them.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

