



Office for
Statistics Regulation

Systemic Review Programme

**Exploring the
public value of
statistics about
post-16
education and
skills - UK report**

July 2020

Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers of official statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

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Executive summary

The role of the Office for Statistics Regulation

As the independent UK-wide regulator, we are in a unique position to take a broader look at issues of importance to society and to make the case for improved statistics across organisation and Government boundaries. This is supported by our ability to convene, influence and highlight best practice.

This review forms part of our programme of systemic reviews which, underpinned by the Code of Practice for Statistics, are aimed at driving improvements in the public value provided by statistics.

This review

Post-16 education and skills are areas of significant public and private interest, which affect the lives of millions of individuals each year. Good quality and accessible information are important to support the fair, efficient and effective provision of education and training which meets the needs of both individuals and employers.

Our review of post-16 and skills statistics began in 2018. Initially focusing on England, we published [Exploring the public value of statistics about post-16 education and skills in England](#) in April 2019. We then expanded the review to look across the whole of the UK.

This report, our second of this topic area, explores the public value of post-16 education and skills statistics in the UK. The report provides specific focus on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland statistics, and updates on changes specific to England since the publication of our first report in 2019.

Four key sectors comprise the majority of the post 16 education and skills statistics in the UK: workforce skills, universities and higher education, colleges and further education and apprenticeships. To our knowledge, this is the first time that the statistics that inform these sectors have been extensively researched at a UK-wide level.

Exploring the statistical landscape in this multi sector, multi country way has allowed us to not only identify the current challenges and potential improvements to statistics in each sector, but also to look across the UK to highlight areas of good practice and shared learning opportunities.

Through our extensive research of the current statistical and policy landscape and engagement with a broad spectrum of users of the statistics, in this report we:

- distil the findings of our extensive research in each statistical area, which we have summarised as our **key messages**

- explain the similarities and differences in the statistical and policy landscape across the UK
- explore the extent to which statistics about post-16 education and skills are **providing public value** - our research highlighted the following areas as being of greatest importance to this sector:
 - i. the **coherence** of the available statistics, how they inform the bigger picture
 - ii. the **accessibility** of the statistics to users
 - iii. how well the current statistics fully **meet the information needs** of users and understanding where there may be information gaps
- provide **recommendations** which would lead to improved public value in the statistics.

Our key messages on United Kingdom wide statistics

Workforce Skills

No national skills statistics can meet all types of user demand. Some niche surveys will always be required to provide the regional level, sector specific information needed to inform decisions on workplace skills policy and investment at a localised level.

It can be difficult to gain an overall understanding of the skills demand and specific skill shortages and gaps across the countries.

The Office for National Statistics's Labour Force Survey is the most important common source of statistics and data on skills and the labour market across the UK.

Scottish Government has opted out of the merged approach for the Employer Skills Survey continuing, for policy reasons, with the Employer Perspectives Survey in 2019.

There is limited longitudinal data to track individuals from school through to final destinations and outcomes. There is ongoing development in this area outlined within the report.

Universities and Higher Education

The majority of higher education statistics are comparable across the devolved administrations, as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) are a central data body for the UK.

There are variations in statistics produced by national bodies, such as the Scottish Funding Council and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, which are largely driven by funding priorities.

UCAS has adopted the Code of Practice for Statistics on a voluntary basis and has made significant improvements to the timeliness and accessibility of the statistics they provide. They are also looking at data linkage options and working with the devolved nations to ensure that they are aware of their country specific requirements.

There is a risk to the future coherence of higher education statistics in the UK. The establishment of the Office for Students as a regulator for England has resulted in the

introduction of voluntary collections for some previously mandatory HESA data. Voluntary and mandatory data can vary by country.

There is a perception that the Office for Students can sometimes take forward key data collection initiatives without taking on board the extent of the UK-wide landscape.

Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data captures earnings throughout the UK for university students. The data are collected by HESA and the Department for Education publishes multiple disaggregated datasets. However, as it is run by the individual countries' administrations, the different priorities in education systems can result in different presentations of outputs. There is not yet a LEO database for Northern Ireland although we understand plans for it are underway.

Higher education is also delivered by the further education sector. Due to the different statistical reporting in the sectors, it can be difficult to get a complete picture of higher education in one place.

Further Education

Statistics in this sector were historically largely driven by funding requirements, rather than wider user need. This is now changing and there is an increased focus on measuring student outcomes and experiences.

Data produced across the devolved nations varies considerably due to the diverse further education arrangements. This is the most diverse aspect of post-16 skills that we covered in our review and is much more distinct across the four nations than skills, higher education or apprenticeships.

Underlying this complexity however, the user requirements for each country are largely the same, namely:

- breakdown of attendance types e.g. full-time/part-time, age and ethnicity
- success rates of those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- why students drop out and whether their destinations are successful
- the ability to track students from colleges and their career choices
- the success rates of accredited courses as well as non-accredited courses.

Not all these requirements are being consistently met, though the picture differs in the UK's four nations.

Apprenticeships

Good comparable data on apprenticeships is limited and the statistics are dependent on the type of apprenticeship the country offers. These can be quite different across countries.

Due to the diverse arrangements across the UK it is difficult to compare the outcomes for apprenticeships across the nations.

Policies on widening access have meant that apprenticeships, colleges, and universities often encompass the same group of people. Comparability of statistics however across the sectors is limited.

Summary of recommendations

We have identified where we see there is a risk to the provision of **coherent** data and we encourage organisations to work together to reduce these risks. We want to highlight where gaps in statistics means that that statistics are **not fully meeting users needs**, and where improving the **accessibility** of information will make statistics easier for all to use. To deliver improvements in these areas, we have identified the following recommendations which are listed by sector and country.

	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
Workforce Skills recommendations				
RW1. The Department for Education in England, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland should work together to fund and maintain the Employer Skills Survey as a comparable source of data on skills across the UK.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RW2. Future Employer Skills Surveys are published as Official Statistics, with pre-announced publication dates and commentary that meets user needs.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RW3. Scottish Government consult all relevant organisations on the development of a Unique Learner Number and progress an implementation programme if applicable.	✓			
RW4. Welsh Government should seek user feedback on access to the Lifelong Learning Record Wales to help review guidance for the statistics.			✓	
RW5. NISRA should consider further requirements to facilitate increasing the sample sizes of their surveys to enable comparisons with other countries and better measure the impact of qualifications on employment including at a local level.				✓
RW6. We encourage Department for Education to improve how it communicates with users about the availability of statistics particularly the strengths and limitations of the ESS and consider how the needs of external users can be met.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Universities and higher education institution recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RH1. The Office for Students, HESA and the relevant organisations within the devolved administrations should work together to ensure that mandatory data collections continue to reflect current requirements and that any changes to data collections are collaboratively agreed.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH2. Regulators and funding bodies across the UK should continue to work together and with HESA to maximise consistency of UK-wide higher education data collection.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH3. HESA and UCAS should work with the respective further education funding bodies to capture higher education provision delivered in further education colleges in their statistical outputs.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH4. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Best Practice and Impact division should work with UCAS to support the collection of greater insight into care leavers progressing to higher education.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH5. We encourage UCAS in their collaborative plans to develop a Multiple Equality Measure specific for Scotland.	✓			
RH6. Statistical producers should consider producing data breakdowns focused on Scottish domiciled students studying at Scottish institutions and provide concise definitions across the different datasets.	✓			
RH7. We encourage Welsh Government to continue with their ongoing developments within the higher education and universities statistics.			✓	
RH8. The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland should provide an update to external stakeholders on the progress with producing LEO and provide an indicative timescale for when the dataset is likely to be available for analysis.				✓
RH9. Department for Education and ONS Secure Research Service should continue to work together to ensure the greatest value can be made of pupil level data.		✓		

Further Education and college sector recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RF1. The Scottish Funding Council should review whether including a glossary of terminology and information about other sources of data within the Infact database would be beneficial to users.	✓			
RF2. Skills Development Scotland should work with Scottish Government to consider if suitably anonymised data drawn from the 16+ Data Hub, beyond the data available via the Annual Participation Measure, could be made available for research purposes.	✓			
RF3. The Scottish Funding Council should review how they collect data about withdrawals from college courses, including seeking feedback from users about what information would be most useful.	✓			
RF4. Welsh Government should continue to seek user feedback around its definition of 'sustained employment' within the consistent performance measures and improve the guidance around its definition.			✓	
RF5. Welsh Government should continue to develop the destinations release to provide more detailed analysis for users.			✓	
RF6. The Department of the Economy should ensure that users are fully informed and aware of the implementation timescales of the new further education data collection system				✓
RF7. The Department for Education should test their improved datasets with external users and make these available, with documentation, to approved researchers.		✓		
RF8. The Department for Education should engage with users of the new Explore Education Statistics platform to ensure it is meeting user needs.		✓		

Apprenticeship recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RA1. Skills Development Scotland should explore developing official statistics on foundation and graduate apprenticeships, when deemed appropriate.	✓			
RA2. We recommend that Skills Development Scotland consider the feasibility of publishing additional information about apprenticeship providers and the consequent success rates of apprentices.	✓			
RA3. Welsh Government should look to improve the metadata in the Apprenticeships Started publication to explain it is possible for students to be counted multiple times, with a link to the data published using unique learner numbers.			✓	
RA4. Welsh Government should carry out user research to consider what further information they can provide on the destinations of those who complete apprenticeships.			✓	
RA5. The Department for the Economy should publish their plans for aligning the two apprenticeships datasets once the user consultation is completed.				✓
RA6. The Department for Education should continue to explore data linkage options to align apprenticeship starts with industry in order to facilitate the demand for smaller business apprenticeships.		✓		

Introducing the review

Why this review matters

Post-16 education and skills are areas of significant public and private interest which affects the lives of millions of individuals each year. Good quality and accessible information is important to support the fair, efficient and effective provision of education and training which meets the needs of both individuals and employers.



143 universities

336 further
education colleges



2.5 million higher
education students

3.6 million further
education students

Source: Education and training statistics for the UK: 2018, Department for Education

Education is a devolved policy, and responsibility for funding and delivery of all stages of education lie within the devolved administrations of each country. Whilst the collection of data about education up to the age of 16 is wholly devolved, the statistics landscape for post-16 education and workforce skills is mixed, with some data collected and published at a UK-wide level, and other data collected within each devolved nation.

Four key sectors comprise the majority of the post 16 education and skills statistics in the UK: workforce skills, universities and higher education, colleges and further education and apprenticeships. This review looks across all four sectors in all four countries of the UK. To our knowledge, this is the first time that the statistics that inform these sectors have been extensively researched at a UK-wide level.

Exploring the statistical landscape in this multi sector, multi country way has allowed us to not only identify the current challenges and potential improvements to statistics in each sector, but also to look across the UK to highlight areas of good practice and shared learning opportunities.

Our unique perspective

As the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), we regulate official statistics in the UK. This review forms part of our programme of Systemic Reviews, which aims to drive improvements in the public value provided by statistics and is underpinned by the Code of Practice for Statistics.

As the independent UK-wide regulator, we are in a unique position to take a broader look at issues of importance to society and to make the case for improved statistics across organisation and Government boundaries. This is supported by our ability to convene, influence and highlight best practice.

What we hope to achieve

We want to see statistics that provide a robust evidence base for national and local policy development and decision making. They should allow individuals and organisations to reach informed decisions, answer important questions, make the case for changes or hold government and official bodies to account.

Through this review, we hope to raise the profile of statistics about post-16 education and skills across the UK, and to highlight why good statistics in this area are important. We want to highlight where data and statistics are being developed to meet a wide range of user needs, to celebrate success and encourage learning across the statistics system.

We want to draw attention to areas where we see there is a risk to the provision of coherent data and encourage organisations to work together to reduce these risks. We want to highlight where gaps in statistics mean that policy priorities cannot be most effectively delivered, or the impacts accurately monitored and where improving the accessibility of information will make statistics easier for all to use. Alongside this report we will continue to engage with statistics producers to make the case for improved data and statistics.

Our approach

Our review of post-16 and skills statistics began in 2018. Initially focusing on England, we published [Exploring the public value of statistics about post-16 education and skills in England](#) in April 2019. We then expanded our review to look across the whole of the UK.

To inform this UK-wide research, we spoke to a wide variety of users of post-16 education and skills data. These users represented a range of education providers, parliamentary, charitable, regulatory, think tanks and academic organisations. In addition, we met with leads from the main statistics producers working in these areas across the UK.

This report

This report, our second of this topic area, explores the public value of post-16 education and skills statistics in the UK. The report provides specific focus on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland statistics, and updates on changes specific to England since the publication of our first report in 2019.

We explore the statistics and data in four key areas - workforce skills, universities and higher education, colleges and further education and apprenticeships.

Through our extensive research of the current statistical and policy landscape and engagement with a broad spectrum of users of the statistics, in this report we:

- distil the findings of our extensive research in each statistical area, which we have summarised as our **key messages**

- explain the similarities and differences in the statistical and policy landscape across the UK
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- provide **recommendations** which would lead to improved public value in the statistics.

Workforce Skills

This chapter explores the available statistics on workforce skills. Statistics and data in this area are critical for understanding how well the UK's education systems are meeting the needs of the economy and to focusing training in the sectors and regions where the need is greatest.

United Kingdom

Our Key Messages

- No national skills statistics can meet all types of user demand. Some niche surveys will always be required to provide the regional level, sector specific information needed to inform decisions on workplace skills policy and investment at a localised level.
- It can be difficult to gain an overall understanding of the skills demand and specific skill shortages and gaps across the countries.
- The Office for National Statistic's Labour Force Survey is the most important common source of statistics and data on skills and the labour market across the UK.
- Scottish Government has opted out of the merged approach for the Employer Skills Survey continuing, for policy reasons, with the Employer Perspectives Survey in 2019.
- There is limited longitudinal data to track individuals from school through to final destinations and outcomes. There is ongoing development in this area outlined within the report.

Statistical and policy landscape in the UK

The main source of UK-wide workforce skills statistics and data are as follows.

- The Employer Skills Survey - covering employers (not Scotland in 2019).
- The Labour Force Survey - covering individuals.
- The Annual Population Survey.
- The Employer Perspectives Survey – now been combined with the Employer Skills Survey in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The Millennium Cohort Study.

The UK Employer Skills Survey (ESS) and Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS) statistics were set up in their current form in 2010 by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) who administered and funded them. The purpose of the ESS was to provide labour market intelligence on the skills challenges that employers face, whereas the EPS focussed on what drives employers' decisions

around recruitment and people development. Both surveys ran across the UK on alternate years. Following the closure of UKCES in 2016, ownership of the surveys was transferred to the Department for Education (DfE) who, in 2018, commissioned a review of the two surveys. The review resulted in a merged survey under the title of the Employer Skills Survey (ESS) in 2019 only partially funded by the DfE.

The new combined survey was run for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2019. The Scottish Government, however, have continued to undertake the EPS due to their requirement for continuity and to meet their policy needs - this is the principal source for employer views on recruitment of young people, work experience, people development and apprenticeships in Scotland. The EPS for Scotland was published as an official statistic in December 2019.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS), conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), are the two main sources of information on the labour market in the UK. They are recognised as significant and important data sources on workforce skills by statistics users.

The LFS is a quarterly household survey collecting data on employment circumstances in the UK. Questions on qualifications held and training being undertaken are also included. The ONS are responsible for conducting the survey in Great Britain, while the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) conduct the survey in Northern Ireland. The APS provides more granular estimates of employment in the UK and enables users to monitor estimates between censuses. The APS uses data combined from two waves of the LFS and a local sample boost in England, Scotland and Wales and is not a standalone survey.

The Skills and Employment Survey was last carried out in 2017. It surveys a sample of British workers to explain the changing pattern of job quality and skills. This has been carried out approximately every five years and the geographical profile has varied according to the success of the campaign to raise funds for it.

In addition to these national surveys, our research identified that various organisations are running their own skills surveys to identify skills provisions gaps in their local economies or sectors. Whilst no national survey is likely to meet all user needs, relevant analytical teams may benefit from researching what alternative surveys are being run and why.

We found that statistics are being used to inform thinking about the skills landscapes across the UK in a broad range of settings, including by academic researchers, trade umbrella bodies and by organisations developing education provision. However, in a number of areas we found that the statistics available are not meeting user needs to the level we would expect.

Are UK workforce skills statistics providing public value?

We found that overall, the statistics are seen to be useful, but that there is scope for improvements to **coherence**, to allow users to access the bigger picture, and to the **accessibility** of the statistics.

Statistics need to be coherent to help provide the bigger picture

What is working well?

Users of the UK-wide Employer Skills Survey (ESS) (last published August 2018), were positive about the value that the statistics provided to them. They welcomed the quality of the data and the fact the statistics covered each of the devolved administrations, with additional regional breakdowns available (with the exception of Northern Ireland). The regional breakdowns were particularly welcome in Wales, as they are a key source of information for Regional Skills Partnerships. The ESS is referenced widely and is seen as a comprehensive source of intelligence on the skills challenges that UK employers face both within their existing workforces and when recruiting.

What are the main issues?

As outlined earlier, Scottish Government has remained out of the 2019 merged ESS. We understand that Scottish Government identified a need to maintain EPS data continuity and time series comparability. This has resulted in a loss of UK-wide comparable information, although we understand that Scottish Government plan to re-join the UK-wide ESS in the future.

There is a lack of available data which tracks cohorts of pupils through school and their subsequent education and employment choices, thus providing an understanding of outcomes and experiences of those taking different paths. Examples of this type of statistical data include Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) - which focus largely on higher education, longitudinal cohort studies and school leaver surveys. This can be an issue in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where study sample sizes are often smaller.

It is therefore currently difficult to compare the employment outcomes for similar pupils making different choices, for example taking an apprenticeship rather than A levels. It also means it is difficult to look at the outcomes of those who drop out of the education system at different points, for example to know about those who do not go to higher education, or who drop out before completing their course.

This means it is not always clear what the return on investment is for specific qualifications, which makes it difficult for pupils to make informed choices about what courses to take and for education providers to develop courses to equip students with relevant skills to lead to meaningful employment in the local job market.

What developments are in progress?

We heard from the Department for Education that when the ESS was developed by UKCES it was anticipated that further research would be conducted to understand the skills needs required on a sector and occupational basis. Thus, the ESS was not, and cannot meet all possible needs. Its purpose is to provide a starting point for comparisons across the UK and for further research by interested parties. The higher education sector asked for questions in the 2019 survey on degree-level qualifications

and for IT skills to be split into basic and advanced. It is unlikely, however, that the subgroups will be large enough for detailed examination of the skills gaps in these areas.

We also heard that Scottish Government are continuing to explore options around co-funding future waves of the survey, but that this is resource dependent.

The education section of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) was reviewed for 2019, with the aim of improving data collection. Respondents are asked a range of questions about their education and training including where they achieved their qualifications, the level of the qualifications achieved and also about education and training they are currently undertaking, including job related training.

We found that across the post-16 education system, and particularly for those studying at higher education institutions, data are improving about those who have been in care, particularly when this is required in a policy context.

Across the UK, government departments have addressed these and other issues through the development of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) datasets. The original LEO dataset focused on the outcomes for university students across England, Scotland and Wales. Information about specific outputs from LEO for each devolved administration and stage of education is given in the relevant sections of this report. Further information about LEO is detailed in Chapter 5, Universities and higher education statistics.

Recommendation

RW1. The Department for Education in England, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland should work together to fund and maintain the Employer Skills Survey as a comparable source of data on skills across the UK.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

The LFS and APS are the two main sources recommended for users for employment statistics. These surveys allow users to access data covering all aspects of people's work and include data on education and training needed to equip them for work. The large sample size of the LFS, approximately 40,000 responding households across the UK with about 100,000 individuals taking part each quarter, is one of the main strengths of using LFS data. Users, particularly academics, were very positive about the accessibility of the data, and those who use the data in Wales told us they found the APS particularly helpful due to its boosted sample.

Users were positive about accessing LFS data, with accessibility being described as 'quick'. While the survey asks questions on education and training and meets the needs of users looking to understand trends in areas such as work based learning, it does not ask if a respondent requires any of the education and training for their current employment.

What are the main issues?

A recurring theme was reported around accessibility and formats of the various ESS datasets. Once users had located the publication, they noted they were not as useful as when they had been produced by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills

(UKCES). Users commented that the publication produced by UKCES had helped them to better interpret figures in a UK-wide context.

What developments are in progress?

The Department for Education informed us that for ESS 2019, there will be a core report and four thematic reports covering Apprenticeships, Training, Current and future skills needs and the Skills Pipeline. This should make the findings more accessible for users and make best use of the newly amalgamated EPS/ESS questions. Time-series tables on core measures, to supplement the other outputs, will also be published. The core and thematic reports will present sector, occupation and country level breakdowns. There will also be Local Education Partnerships (LEP) and Local Education Agencies (LEA) level data tables in line with previous years. In Wales there will be a set of regional outputs.

Recommendation

RW2. Future Employer Skills Surveys are published as Official Statistics, with pre-announced publication dates and commentary that meets user needs.

Scotland

Our Key Messages

- The Annual Participation Measure reflects the participation status of the wider 16-19 cohort and is published by Skills Development Scotland to support the Scottish Government's Opportunities for All programme. A linked shared dataset, the Opportunities for All 16+ datahub, is used by named partners which includes local authorities, schools and colleges to track young people's destinations.
- Students do not have a unique learner number which follows them from early years through to employment, further or higher education. Whilst we understand that collaborative development work has been undertaken in this area, no proposals have been published by the Scottish Government.

Statistical and policy landscape in Scotland

In addition to UK-wide statistics, the main source of Scotland workforce skills data are as follows.

- The Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS), produced by Scottish Government.
- Regional Skills Assessments, Skills Investment Plans and the Annual Participation Measure, produced by Skills Development Scotland.
- Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations in Scotland produced by Scottish Government which reports on school leavers three and nine months after leaving school.
- The [Growing up in Scotland](#) cohort study is a longitudinal research study tracking the lives of around 14,000 of children and their families from the early years, through childhood and beyond. This research will include post 16 education choices.

Policy responsibility for skills and lifelong learning sits within the Scottish Government. Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council support the operational delivery of the government agenda. In 2016, an [Enterprise and Skills Review](#) was undertaken to ensure that public agencies were delivering sufficient enterprise and skills to support Scotland's economic performance. This resulted in the establishment of the [Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board](#) whose objective is to align and coordinate the activities of Scotland's enterprise and skills agencies. A new Director of Skills Alignment, working across Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, was appointed in 2019 to implement a new 5-step planning model aimed at aligning skills provision to the needs of employers, individuals and the economy.

Are Scotland workforce skills statistics providing public value?

We found that there were a number of statistics and datasets that were considered useful, but that improvements to information, particularly in **granularity of information**, could increase how well these statistics are meeting user needs.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

Skills Development Scotland manages and hosts the Opportunities for All shared dataset on behalf of its data sharing partners. This dataset incorporates information shared by local authorities, colleges, the Scottish Funding Council, the Department of Work and Pensions and the Student Awards Agency Scotland via a secure online portal known as the 16+ Data Hub. The shared information provided to partners named in legislation, which includes local authorities and colleges, primarily focuses on the education, employment or training status of young people aged between 15 and 25. The 16+ Data Hub allows these partners to monitor and plan for a young person's involvement in education, training or employment, or to provide advice or support to those young people.

Skills Development Scotland publish an Annual Participation Measure based on the data held on this shared dataset which reports on the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment. The measure is broken down by demographic and equality characteristics and by local authority.

In addition to the UK-wide data sources, Scottish stakeholders also told us about Regional Skills Assessments and Skills Investment Plans published by Skills Development Scotland. Regional Skills Assessments comprise a suite of products aimed at providing an evidence base for future investment in skills. They provide summaries of the labour market and include an interactive tool that can be used to extract data on skills demand, supply and mismatches at a Scotland, regional and local level. Skills Investment Plans describe the skills challenges and opportunities across Scotland's key business sectors and regions and include strategic objectives and action plans. Users found it helpful that both these sources draw on information such as education, health, crime and housing that would otherwise be difficult to link.

What are the main issues?

There is a lack of individual level data that deals with a whole cohort, and which would enable users to better understand how individuals' background and education impacts their economic outcomes in relation to others. Scottish Government, however, have a Data Access Panel whereby users are able to request individual data for research

purposes under data sharing agreements. The Growing up in Scotland survey data may fill this gap now the cohort are reaching the post 16 education stage in their lives.

What developments are in progress?

The Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland have jointly developed a skills alignment planning model, with the aim of aligning skills provision with industry, learner and economic needs. There are currently three skills alignment pilot projects underway – Early Learning and Childcare, Financial Services and the Glasgow College Region.

Skills Development Scotland told us that they have several useful datasets and are working to link them to help improve the value of their statistics, but that this requires other producers of statistics to establish data sharing agreements to allow appropriate access.

A significant barrier to linking administrative data in Scotland is that students do not have a Unique Learner Number which follows them from early years, through school exams, to further education, higher education or employment. We appreciate that due to the number of organisations involved implementing this is a complex process.

Recommendation

RW3. Scottish Government consult all relevant organisations on the development of a Unique Learner Number and progress an implementation programme if applicable.

Wales

Our key messages

- The statistics and data available seem to meet the needs of users we spoke to in Wales.
- The Regional Skills Partnerships play an important part in driving investment in skills in Wales.
- The Lifelong Learning Wales Record is a key dataset in Wales however, our research suggests it can be difficult to use.

Statistical and policy landscape in Wales

In addition to UK-wide workforce skills statistics, the main sources of Wales workforce skills data are as follows:

- Pupil Destinations from Schools in Wales, undertaken by Careers Wales on behalf of Welsh Government
- The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR).

Workforce skills are an important policy area in Wales and a key theme in Welsh Government's [National Strategy: Prosperity For All](#). It is the responsibility of the [Regional Skills Partnerships](#) to drive investment in skills in Wales. Each partnership has representation from higher education, further education, employers and regional stakeholders.

The partnerships have a focus on identifying the skills needs in their respective regions and produce a Regional Employment and Skills Plan based on employer perspectives and regional labour market intelligence. The partnerships make recommendations to Welsh Government on full-time college and apprenticeship courses and learner numbers, together with informing other policy areas.

The partnerships also carry out employer engagement which includes working with employer networks to provide regional level insight on issues and challenges facing businesses in Wales. National surveys, such as the Employer Skills Survey, are used to compliment the locally derived data.

Pupil Destinations from Schools in Wales is an annual survey of school leavers undertaken by Careers Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government. The survey allows users to understand the destinations of pupils who leave school in Years 11, 12 and 13, including whether they continue education in school, further education college or go into work-based training.

The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), is an administrative dataset used to produce statistics on learners studying post-16 education and training in Wales, including those who study at further education institutions, work-based learning providers and community learning, but excluding those who study post-16 education at schools. School data are collected elsewhere through the post-16 collection that Welsh Government require maintained secondary and middle schools with pupils who are in year 12, 13 and/or 14 to submit. The information is then used together with the LLWR to produce Welsh Government's Consistent performance measures for post-16 learning.

Are Wales workforce skills statistics providing public value?

Workforce skills data available across the UK and in sources specific to Wales meets a wide range of user needs, but improvements to the **accessibility** of the statistics could increase how well these statistics are meeting user needs.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

Our research indicated that the workforce data available is meeting a wide range of user needs. Data at a UK-wide level, such as the Employer Skills Survey, includes Wales, and this is supplemented by the presence of Wales specific data and statistics. The Regional Skills Partnerships within Wales play an important part in understanding skills within Wales.

What are the main issues?

Our research suggests that, as a dataset, the Lifelong Learning Wales Record can be difficult to use. There is therefore the risk that, if users do not understand the dataset, they are not able to exploit the full value from the data. It is likely that this is creating a barrier to use and is reducing the public value of the data.

Recommendation

RW4. Welsh Government should seek user feedback on access to the Lifelong Learning Record Wales to help review guidance for the statistics.

Northern Ireland

Our key messages

- Lack of granular detail and suppression of data arising from small sample sizes can be an issue for Northern Ireland statistics users, particularly when this limits comparisons with the rest of the UK.
- The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer provides information to inform the development of skills policy in an easily accessible format to a level of detail not seen elsewhere in the UK.

Statistical and policy landscape in Northern Ireland

In addition to UK-wide workforce skills data, further sources of Northern Ireland workforce skills data and information include:

- The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer
- Essential Skills Enrolments and Outcomes in Northern Ireland statistical bulletin.

Northern Ireland's current skills strategy, [Success through Skills – Transforming Futures](#) was published in 2011 by the Department for the Economy. The strategy explores the current skills base and provides a framework for the development of skills in Northern Ireland. The Department for the Economy has begun work on a new skills strategy for the period 2021 onwards and, in February 2020, published an [evaluation report](#) to inform the development and implementation of the next skills strategy.

Are Northern Ireland workforce skills statistics providing public value?

We found that there was a good awareness of the current limitations in existing data, particularly around the issue of sample sizes, but that improvements could be made to increase **how well statistics meet users' needs**.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What are the main issues?

There is policy interest in comparing workforce statistics between Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. We found it can be difficult for users to make statistical comparisons, as data are often collected in different ways.

Our research identified that there is academic interest in comparing Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK. Whilst this is usually straightforward, for some surveys the Northern Ireland sample is too small, and so figures have to be suppressed. In this case, we heard that researchers have to then make assumptions for Northern Ireland based on UK-wide figures.

What is working well?

The Department for the Economy commissioned the Economic Policy Centre at Ulster University to produce a [Skills Barometer](#), which is updated every two years. The research includes analyses by sector on the current skills gaps and where they are

likely to emerge over the longer term. The Skills Barometer provides information to inform the development of skills policy in an easily accessible format to a level of detail we have not seen elsewhere in the UK. The research informs public debate about sectors which are likely to be over and under resourced in the future and the qualifications and subject areas likely to be in demand by employers.

What developments are in progress?

Data which looks at the drivers of education performance are particularly lacking in Northern Ireland. This is due to Northern Ireland not currently having a longitudinal education outcomes dataset (see the following chapter on higher education for more information) and because, where Northern Ireland are included in cohort studies, for example the Millennium Cohort Study, the sample sizes are very small.

To address this, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has embarked on a programme to increase the sample size of its main surveys, including the Labour Force Survey, to help meet the demand from councils for lower level geography outputs. Data which links back to the life people have had, and socio-economic perspective would be useful for making a case for early years intervention.

Recommendation

RW5. NISRA should consider further requirements to facilitate increasing the sample sizes of their surveys to enable comparisons with other countries and better measure the impact of qualifications on employment including at a local level.

England

The section summarises the key messages and finding from our April 2019 report, [Exploring the Public value of post-16 education and skills in England](#), and updates on progress since the report was published.

Our key messages

- The main sources of data relied on to understand workforce skills in England are the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey and surveys run or commissioned by the Department for Education, in particular the Employer Skills Survey.
- Our April 2019 report encouraged the Department for Education to improve how they communicate with users about the availability of statistics in this area and to consider how the needs of external users can be met.

Statistical and policy landscape in England

The main source of England workforce skills statistics and data are:

- The Employer Skills Survey (now merged with the Employer Perspectives Survey)
- The Labour Force Survey
- Further Education and Skills statistics, Department for Education
- Skills and Employment Survey, Cardiff University

- The Adult Education Survey.

Our April 2019 report outlined that the main sources of data relied upon to understand skills in England are the Labour Force Survey, and surveys run or commissioned by the Department for Education, such as the Employer Skills Survey. These surveys have been discussed in detail in the UK Workforce Skills section. The further Education and Skills in England statistics also include the detailed statistics on non-apprenticeship and traineeship programmes.

Are England workforce skills statistics providing public value?

Since our report was published in April 2019, improvements have been ongoing to increase the public value of these statistics in England. We found however, that further improvements to the **available information** could increase how well these statistics are meeting user needs.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

The Employer Skills Survey (ESS) is an extremely valuable survey, providing robust quantitative evidence on the skills that employers demand, both from the labour market and their existing staff, how employers respond to their skills challenges through training and recruitment, and their views of and engagement with the skills system.

What are the main issues?

The currently available data does not give a full picture of the skill levels and in-work training provision in England – it does not provide information about numeracy and literacy levels, nor can it fully support planning of local or sector-level training provision. The main value of the ESS is to understand how sectors and localities vary against each other and the national average and provide a starting point for further work to understand differences. We would encourage the Department for Education to improve how it communicates with users about the availability of statistics in this area particularly the strengths and limitations of the ESS and consider how the needs of external users can be met.

What developments are in progress?

Since the publication of our April 2019 report, we have not noted any significant improvements in the statistics available in England to support the development of skills.

Recommendation

RW6. We encourage Department for Education to improve how it communicates with users about the availability of statistics particularly the strengths and limitations of the ESS and consider how the needs of external users can be met.

Summary of recommendations

Workforce Skills recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RW1. The Department for Education in England, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland should work together to fund and maintain the Employer Skills Survey as a comparable source of data on skills across the UK.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RW2. Future Employer Skills Surveys are published as Official Statistics, with pre-announced publication dates and commentary that meets user needs.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RW3. Scottish Government consult all relevant organisations on the development of a Unique Learner Number and progress an implementation programme if applicable.	✓			
RW4. Welsh Government should seek user feedback on access to the Lifelong Learning Record Wales to help review guidance for the statistics.			✓	
RW5. NISRA should consider further requirements to facilitate increasing the sample sizes of their surveys to enable comparisons with other countries and better measure the impact of qualifications on employment including at a local level.				✓
RW6. We encourage Department for Education to improve how it communicates with users about the availability of statistics particularly the strengths and limitations of the ESS and consider how the needs of external users can be met.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Universities and higher education institution statistics

This section focusses on the statistics which support an understanding of those studying for higher education qualifications.

United Kingdom

Our Key Messages

- The majority of higher education statistics are comparable across the devolved administrations, as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) are a central data body for the UK.
- There are variations in statistics produced by national bodies, such as the Scottish Funding Council and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, which are largely driven by funding priorities.
- UCAS has adopted the Code of Practice for Statistics on a voluntary basis and has made significant improvements to the timeliness and accessibility of the statistics they provide. They are also looking at data linkage options and working with the devolved nations to ensure that they are aware of their country specific requirements.
- There is a risk to the future coherence of higher education statistics in the UK. The establishment of the Office for Students as a regulator for England has resulted in the introduction of voluntary collections for some previously mandatory HESA data. Voluntary and mandatory data can vary by country.
- There is a perception that the Office for Students can sometimes take forward key data collection initiatives without taking on board the extent of the UK-wide landscape.
- Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data captures earnings throughout the UK for university students. The data are collected by HESA and the Department for Education publishes multiple disaggregated datasets. However, as it is run by the individual countries' administrations, the different priorities in education systems can result in different presentations of outputs. There is not yet a LEO database for Northern Ireland although we understand plans for it are underway.
- Higher education is also delivered by the further education sector. Due to the different statistical reporting in the sectors, it can be difficult to get a complete picture of higher education in one place.

UK Statistical and policy landscape

The two main producers of higher education data for the UK are the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and UCAS. They both have a data collection function that covers the whole of the UK, but they do not capture the whole of the higher education provision.

- HESA are responsible for collecting, assuring and disseminating data for the UK. They are the designated data body for England and work on behalf of higher education providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to help them fulfil their statutory data obligations. HESA are official statistics producers.
- UCAS provide the UK-wide undergraduate admissions service and manage all applications to full-time undergraduate courses. UCAS publishes a wide range of statistics and analysis reports, as well as providing a variety of data products and services. UCAS has recently committed to voluntarily adopting the three core principles of the [Code of Practice of Statistics](#) for their statistical releases.

Students who study higher education do not necessarily do so within their domicile country, but often choose higher education institutions based on reputation, subject availability and admissions criteria. Higher education funding is devolved in the UK, and student's funding entitlement is based on where they are domiciled.

The main sources of data used across the UK to understand the higher education sector are produced by HESA. These include HESA's student statistics, staff statistics and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education data which has been replaced by the Graduate Outcomes survey. Stakeholders noted that HESA datasets are particularly helpful and described them as readily accessible and straightforward to use. Users were positive about the fact the data are well established and well documented, offering some insight into UK comparisons which is particularly important for users in the devolved administrations. HESA's improved interactive open data tool formats allows stakeholders to point others to the data, meaning they do not have to extract the numbers themselves. In addition to data produced by HESA and UCAS, users of higher education data also valued outputs from the Student Loans Company and publications based on the LEO database.

At the time of writing our April 2019 report, which focused on England statistics only, information for students making decisions about entering university across the UK was available through the Unistats website. This included data from the National Students Survey, statistics from HESA, student records, Destination of Leavers from Higher Education data and LEO data, along with course entry information. Following a review of the Unistats website the Office for Students and the UK funding bodies have launched the new [DiscoverUni](#) website.

Are UK higher education statistics providing public value?

Higher education statistics have been developed and refined over a number of years with extensive consultation with users as well as throughout the sector. However,

improvements to **coherence**, the **accessibility** of the statistics and in ensuring the available **information meets users' needs** could enhance these statistics and ensure they meet user needs.

Statistics need to be coherent to help provide the bigger picture

What is working well?

The [Longitudinal Education Outcomes](#) (LEO) statistics bring together education data from a range of sources and links it with employment, benefits and earnings data from the Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC. As an example, university data from HESA was linked to LEO data with support from the Department for Education to show employment and earnings of higher education graduates at 1, 3, 5 and 10 years after graduation and data are broken down by personal characteristics, the university attended and the subject studied.

LEO initially faced a mixed reaction from users. On the whole, users welcomed the innovative steps to produce this data. Some users, however, have concerns with the way data was interpreted. For example, there were concerns that the earnings data for a given university were more a reflection of the region the student from that university went on to work in, rather than a reflection of the value added by gaining a degree.

The Department for Education have listened to user concerns and have recently produced more nuanced statistics on earnings for each university based on whether students stay in the same region as their university, move to London or move elsewhere. They are also encouraging comparability across the UK and publish provider data for England, Wales and Scotland.

What are the main issues?

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 created a new regulatory framework for higher education. It established the Office for Students and gave it responsibilities for regulating the higher education sector in England.

HESA continues to be the Designated Data Body in England and supports higher education providers in meeting the data requirements of the Office for Students. The Office for Students, however, has a more focused data remit in comparison to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and has sought to reduce the burden of multiple data collections on the sector. Some data no longer required by Office for Students has become optional but continues to be mandatory in other countries, for example the collection of specific estates data and some datasets about non-academic staff.

HESA consulted the UK home nations and established that these optional data are still considered important to some. As a result, HESA continues to collect and provide this data on a mandatory basis for the UK home nations that have confirmed ongoing requirement and on a voluntary basis for the home nations that have not specified the data as required. As the devolved nation data requirements often have different country specific requirements, it is important that they continue to work in collaboration with HESA to maintain consistent and relevant statistics.

Stakeholders highly value consistent data across the UK, and any further changes would be a loss for the higher education sector statistical system.

What developments are in progress?

There is an ongoing initiative to reduce the burden on higher education providers and improve the quality, timeliness and accessibility of higher education data and information run by the recently initiated Ministerial Data Group. This group is looking at data linkage across UCAS admission data, HESA continuation data, Office for Students outcome data and HMRC income data.

Recommendation

RH1. The Office for Students, HESA and the relevant organisations within the devolved administrations should work together to ensure that mandatory data collections continue to reflect current requirements and that any changes to data collections are collaboratively agreed.

RH2. Regulators and funding bodies across the UK should continue to work together and with HESA to maximise consistency of UK-wide higher education data collection.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

UCAS data was cited across the four countries as being used by stakeholders. Recent improvements to UCAS data were welcomed by users, particularly around improvements to how data are published by UCAS. Previously UCAS published their data using CSV files with PDFs, but they now include an interactive dashboard for all data releases.

What are the main issues?

Some stakeholders told us of difficulties of accessing some UCAS data. For example, data available for benchmarking exercises is at a high level and they may need to purchase data to help with carrying this out. In addition, navigating the UCAS website was described as difficult by some.

What developments are in progress?

HESA's bespoke data request service, Heidi Plus, enables researchers to carry out more detailed analysis. One user commented that they had been able to access multiple years of data at individual student level containing variables on where the students are from, what they are studying and their outcomes of study and destinations. However, another explained that this service is not freely available, and therefore it needs to be costed into research grants, which can be difficult if it is not known what data are available. This can deter new researchers who may have limited time to spend accessing data, particularly if they are doing a short Masters course. As of September 2019, this data analytics service is now carried out by [Jisc](#), who provide a technology focused national research and education network for its members.

We understand that both the Office for Students and HESA are currently in discussion with the Office for National Statistics about depositing key sets of student data into the Secure Research Service. This will significantly improve access to data for the academic research community.

Our research found that users would find it helpful to have all higher education data in one place, as information about higher education students studying in further education colleges is not published alongside university higher education data. We understand that both the Office for Students and HESA wish to establish regular flows

of data to HESA about higher education taught in further education colleges. UCAS currently publishes some further education college full-time enrolments depending on whether the college is a customer.

Recommendation

RH3. HESA and UCAS should work with the respective further education funding bodies to capture higher education provision delivered in further education colleges in their statistical outputs.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

Our research highlighted the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data as being of high public value. For example, by helping policy officials and researchers identify where students study and then where they go on to work after completing higher education. Users generally welcomed the move to the new Graduate Outcomes survey, published in summer 2020, with a recognition that data about students 15 months after graduation will be of greater value than the current 6 months post graduation data.

What are the main issues?

Some concerns were raised about the gap between the new Graduate Outcomes survey and the old DLHE publication. With the DLHE last published in June 2018, and the new Graduate Outcomes published in June 2020, stakeholders have experienced a lengthy gap between employability data being published. This decision was made in order to avoid surveying the same leavers twice at 6 month and 15 month points which would prove both costly and also risk low response rates.

Response rates in the Graduates Outcomes Survey were a concern for some users we spoke to, an example being whether there would be varying response rates from different institutions. HESA undertook extensive analysis of the survey data to assess any biases resulting from non-response and concluded that weighting of data are not necessary to mitigate any impact of bias. In 2020, we will work with HESA to support the new survey to meet the high standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Significant gaps exist in statistics and data on individual student circumstances, in particular, about whether students are care leavers or have care experience. This information is self-reported and the data quality can be poor. UCAS has worked with relevant charities and widening participation organisations to review the question that is asked of care leavers, including the phrasing, help text and associated resources to encourage accurate self-declaration and improve data quality. These data are important to support the policy announcement in 2019 to guarantee university places for care experience students who meet minimum entry requirements in Scotland. We recommend that the Government Statistical Service Best Practice and Impact Division work with UCAS to support the collection of greater insight into care leavers progressing to higher education.

There is a gap in the available data about applicants to higher education who do not apply through UCAS. For example, students who apply to part-time or postgraduate courses, applicants to higher education courses delivered within further education colleges or learners in Scotland who apply directly from college through articulation routes. We understand that UCAS have agreed the receipt of articulation data with the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government and will apply this data for 2019/20

reporting which will improve the overall reporting of higher education access in Scotland.

What developments are in progress?

HESA's Data Futures Project aims to increase the value of higher education data by improving the timeliness of data it releases on universities and students. With a new data collection platform and integrated technologies, it aims to ensure appropriate data quality for national statistics products and to provide fit for purpose data for regulation and statutory purposes. This work is currently underway and details on when Data Futures will be going live has not yet been confirmed.

We heard from Office for Students that they are undertaking further research into the quality of care leaver reported data during 2020 and have recently published research examining the differences in student outcomes for seven new student characteristics, which includes care experienced students, in their [Access and Participation Dashboard](#).

Recommendation

RH4. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Best Practice and Impact division should work with UCAS to support the collection of greater insight into care leavers progressing to higher education.

Scotland

Key messages

- Both HESA and the Scottish Government record and report on Scottish domiciled students for different purposes and there is sometimes a variance due to differences in definitions of data.
- UCAS is working with the Scottish Funding Council to develop a Scottish Multiple Equalities Measure (MEM) which will take account of multiple variables which the Scottish higher education sector will choose.
- Some users report a concern that the sector is getting more English-centric, as driven by the Office for Students regulatory functions, which are focused on England.

Statistical and policy landscape in Scotland

The two main producers of statistics and data for higher education in Scotland are, as with the rest of the UK, HESA and UCAS. Some users access HESA data directly, whilst others access it via the Scottish Funding Council. Some users also spoke about using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data which is published by Scottish Government.

Scotland has a diverse higher education sector which is comprised of 19 universities including four traditional ancient universities, four universities from the 1960s, with the remainder being granted university status under post-1992 legislation. This includes the most recent in 2011, the University of the Highlands and Islands which was created by integrating colleges and research institutions as part of a regional university structure. It is important to also recognise that a significant proportion of higher education in Scotland is delivered within colleges, as discussed in the further education and college section.

Scottish students attending university in Scotland are eligible for free undergraduate level study. This policy also applies for EU students but, for those living in the rest of the UK, tuition fees apply and are repaid after the student starts to earn. The Student Awards Agency Scotland provides student support for living costs. In 2017/18 a non-repayable bursary for learners with care-experience was introduced in higher education, thus requiring the need to qualify these students through self-declaration.

Scotland's universities work collaboratively with each other and with college partners to deliver six regional articulation hubs to help support learners moving from college to university and to expand the number of opportunities for them to do so

There is a significant policy drive towards widening access in Scotland, with Scottish Government setting a target of 20% of students entering university to be from Scotland's 20% most deprived backgrounds by 2030. The post of the Commissioner for Fair Access was created to help drive equal and fair access for disadvantaged learners.

Are Scotland university and higher education statistics providing public value?

We found that statistics in this sector were largely comparable across the UK. Improvements in **coherence** and in the provision of **additional information** could help meet specific requirements unique to Scotland.

Statistics need to be coherent to help provide the bigger picture

What is working well?

The [Report on Widening Access](#) produced by the Scottish Funding Council is widely used across the higher education sector in Scotland. Produced annually, it presents data about the Commission on Widening Access targets and on Scottish-domiciled entrants into both Scottish universities and higher education level courses in colleges by socio-economic deprivation, gender, ethnicity, disability, care experience and age. It covers the 20% most deprived backgrounds based on the Scottish Indicator of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

The report is widely used by Scottish universities to highlight and compare their progress to this initiative. It is also used by Audit Scotland to track the progress of universities towards meeting their targets in this area.

Users frequently cited this report when assessing their performance, although they felt that more information was required to help them identify these students for recruitment purposes.

What are the main issues?

UCAS data sources focus on direct entry to university from school. In Scotland there are large numbers of widening participation entrants who obtain higher education qualifications at college and then may progress to further qualifications in higher education. Historically, these students were not captured in the widening participation numbers. UCAS and the Scottish Funding Council are seeking to address this with the production of the Multiple Equality Measure (MEM) specific to Scotland.

What developments are in progress?

As mentioned in the UK higher education section, UCAS has agreed with the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government the receipt of all articulation data. UCAS plan to apply this data for 2019 cycle reports in summer 2020 to improve the overall reporting of higher education access in Scotland.

Users in Scotland welcomed plans to produce a Multiple Equality Measure (MEM) for Scotland. This is being progressed by the Scottish Funding Council working with UCAS in consultation with universities and will cover a wide range of variables that the sector will be involved in choosing.

Recommendation

RH5. We encourage UCAS in their collaborative plans to develop a Multiple Equality Measure specific for Scotland.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users**What is working well?**

We heard very positive comments about HESA statistics, particularly from those working within universities who use the data regularly for comparing and benchmarking performance between universities.

What are the main issues?

There are concerns that not all datasets (for example LEO and HESA data) allow users to focus on data for Scottish domicile students studying at Scottish institutions. One user reported that Scottish Government had differing numbers of students of Scottish domicile declared compared with what HESA had reported. There are also small differences between the HESA and the Scottish Funding Council standard populations. The Scottish Funding Council reports on all students enrolled during the academic year, whereas HESA excludes those that drop out within the first two weeks of the year. Furthermore, some users reported that some HESA datasets were only available Scotland wide and would be more beneficial if they were disaggregated further, for example by local authority area.

Geographic measures of disadvantage or deprivation, such as SIMD and POLAR, are widely acknowledged to be problematic in determining an individual's socioeconomic circumstances. In the absence of individual measures, geographic based measures are used in various statistics to assess progress in relation to under represented groups, such as widening participation in higher education. It is anticipated that the MEM will address some of these issues.

Higher education institutions are working to achieve the widening access targets set by Scottish Government and recruiting students from deprived backgrounds can be a significant issue. Given this, there is a need for improved localised data to highlight where outreach programmes are increasing recruitment.

Our research has highlighted questions specific to the higher education data landscape in Scotland, including an interest in which students have experienced care and hence are entitled to support, and questions relating of how much credit students get when they articulate from an HND to a university degree, and whether this varies from institution to institution.

What developments are in progress?

As discussed earlier, there is work ongoing with UCAS engaging the Scottish higher education sector to develop a Multiple Equality Measure suitable for Scotland.

Recommendation

RH6. Statistical producers should consider producing data breakdowns focused on Scottish domiciled students studying at Scottish institutions and provide concise definitions across the different datasets.

Wales

Key messages

- HESA data was welcome in Wales, as it allows cross UK comparisons of the sector.
- There is an interest in Wales to understand more about Welsh students who chose to study higher education in England as well as Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Statistical and policy landscape in Wales

Higher education in Wales contributes substantially to the Welsh economy and is delivered through Wales' eight universities. Some higher education courses are offered in Welsh further education colleges, allowing students to complete their first higher education course at a further education college with the opportunity to study further at a university.

A key strategy for higher education in Wales is Widening Access, aiming to widen access, inclusion and success within the provision. The initiative seeks to support and promote opportunities for people of all ages and of all backgrounds who could benefit from access to higher education.

Are Wales university and higher education statistics providing public value?

The statistics within this sector provide value to users within Wales. The statistics are well established however, they can sometimes be viewed as having an English focus, although there is work ongoing to include Wales in analysis **to improve public value**.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users**What is working well?**

HESA data was reported as straightforward to use and as being relatively accessible, especially as some users we spoke to had free access. It is well established and documented. For Wales it is particularly useful that HESA data offers insight into UK comparisons.

What are the main issues?

Our research indicated that data could sometimes be viewed as being more England centric, for example, LEO can sometimes be seen as having an English focus and our

research indicated that analysis for England may not always be expanded to Wales and the rest of the UK.

We found there was interest in knowing more about Welsh learners who study in England. While Welsh Government publish cross border flows statistics, our research indicated an interest in knowing more about those who cross the border, for example characteristics and domicile region. This includes Welsh domiciles who go to further education colleges to then study higher education in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The ability to compare these students with English domicile students can be difficult.

What developments are in progress?

Discussions are ongoing between UCAS and the Welsh Government with a view to producing a Welsh specific version of the Multiple Equalities Measure (MEM).

Welsh Government are working to include Wales higher education data in the LEO matching process. This should allow Welsh Government to carry out further analysis in this sector.

Recommendation

RH7. We encourage Welsh Government to continue with their ongoing developments within the higher education and universities statistics.

Northern Ireland

Key messages

- There is a legal requirement to report on equalities data for Northern Ireland domiciled students who study in Great Britain which means some questions require modification.
- The Department for the Economy are working towards having a LEO dataset available in 2021 depending on data sharing and governance arrangements in place.

Statistical and policy landscape in Northern Ireland

Higher education in Northern Ireland is delivered through three universities, as well as two university colleges which primarily specialise in teacher training.

Questions about higher education in Northern Ireland were often similar to those across the rest of the UK, however, two issues specific to Northern Ireland were raised.

The first related to an interest in reporting Northern Ireland equalities data, for example on Northern Ireland's protected characteristics which differ from those in England, and on understanding the demographics, including religions, of Northern Ireland domiciled students who study in Great Britain. The Department for the Economy requires this potentially sensitive information to: help it understand more about the Northern Ireland domiciled students who opt to study in Great Britain, and so inform policy development in relation to higher education provision; meet its equality monitoring obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; respond to questions from political

representatives, including Northern Ireland Assembly Questions; and, to produce related official statistics.

The second relates to understanding the value to the Northern Ireland economy of particular degrees, for example the difference in economic value of an engineering degree compared to a social science degree. Whilst this is possible to do through the LEO dataset for England, Scotland and Wales, the relevant provisions of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 do not extend to Northern Ireland. It was therefore not possible to include data for Northern Ireland.

Are Northern Ireland university and higher education statistics providing public value?

The statistics in this sector allow comparisons to be across the UK, however we identified that there are **information needs** specific to Northern Ireland that are currently not being fully met.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

As outlined in the UK section, much of the data on higher education is UK wide and this enables comparisons between countries. The strengths of these datasets also apply to Northern Ireland and positive feedback was received from Northern Ireland users.

What are the main issues?

As described in the UK section, the Office for Students (in England) are assuming new responsibilities which have a more tightly defined remit than its predecessors. This means the Office for Students will only collect data that are needed to meet their functions under the Higher Education Research Act 2017. This has left an information gap about students from Northern Ireland studying in Great Britain. Users in Northern Ireland require information about the religion of Northern Ireland domiciled students studying in England, Scotland and Wales.

It would be possible to achieve this data through the modification of an existing question on religious belief. However, this is seen by the Office for Students as too big a burden to ask across all English universities and they believe it would be more efficient to link records. This data issue has arisen as each devolved administration has different equality legislation.

What developments are in progress?

Work is ongoing by the Department for the Economy to establish data sharing agreements to allow development of the LEO database for Northern Ireland. As outlined above, the legislation which underpins the LEO data in Great Britain is not in effect in Northern Ireland. The data sharing negotiations are complex and progress is slow. The Department's aspiration is to have a LEO dataset ready for analysis in 2021, subject to all necessary data sharing and governance arrangements being in place.

Recommendation

RH8. The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland should provide an update to external stakeholders on the progress with producing LEO and provide an indicative timescale for when the dataset is likely to be available for analysis.

England

The section summarises the key messages and finding from our April 2019 report, [Exploring the Public value of post-16 education and skills in England](#), and updates on progress since the report was published.

Key messages

- There is a significant amount of good quality data available in this sector, as higher education institutions and private providers are required to provide data to register and access public funding.
- As multiple organisations in England produce official statistics and analysis about higher education, there is a risk of confusion for users and inconsistencies in published data. In our April 2019 report, we encouraged producer bodies to continue to work to ensure each is clear on their roles and responsibilities and to improve the ease of access to data for approved purposes.
- In our 2019 report, we outlined the challenges for researchers to gain timely access to linked datasets. We welcome the progress with the roll out of the Secure Research Service.
- The Office for Students in collaboration with the other UK funding bodies have launched a new website, [DiscoverUni](#), to help prospective students understand available data on higher education institutions.

Statistical and policy landscape in England

Statistics and data on the higher education sector in England are available from several different sources and include the following.

- Researchers can request student-level data from HESA. However, to fully explore questions around widening participation, it is necessary to link this to National Pupil Dataset (NPD) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications data.
- The Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey enable analysis of graduates' earnings and outcomes. The DLHE has recently been replaced by the Graduate Outcomes Survey.
- Student loans statistics from the Student Loans Company and Student Loan forecasts produced by the Department for Education.
- Other statistics in this area include statistics about participation rates and higher education staffing.

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 created a new regulatory framework for higher education. It established the Office for Students and gave it responsibilities for regulating the Higher Education sector. Office for Students was broadly a replacement for the [Higher Education Funding Council for England](#).

Researchers are interested in a wide range of aspects of higher education including why people choose the providers that they do, the reasons why disadvantaged students are less likely to go to top universities and the factors that affect students experience, along with the impact of tuition fees. Universities are interested in using data to support and inform widening participation activities. The sector has questions around the factors that contribute to universities being awarded top awards in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and whether these awards impact on student choice. We also found interest in how to present information to help students to make informed decisions, the impact of unconditional university offers and on the earnings premium of graduates.

Are England university and higher education statistics providing public value?

Overall, university and higher education statistics in England provide public value. There have been improvements to the **accessibility** of data to users and these should continue.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

We heard that HESA's individual-level datasets are easier to access, and easier to use, than other individual-level student datasets. Those with an interest in high-level information about earnings, for example average earnings in a sector, find Longitudinal Education Outcomes data (LEO) very helpful. The Department for Education has made the LEO dataset available for research to some non-Government organisations, such as the Centre for Vocational Education Research, increasing the value of the data.

What are the main issues?

UCAS use their own unique identifier to identify schools and colleges, which means that when researchers are able to access the data, it can be difficult to match up to other sources of information. With multiple organisations in England producing official statistics and analysis about higher education, including HESA, Office for Students, UCAS and the Department for Education, there is a risk of confusion for users and inconsistencies in published data.

Researchers have found gaining access to the National Pupil Dataset (NPD), Individual Learning Records and HESA datasets to be very slow. Data providers and researchers hope that improved data governance processes across the Department for Education will speed up access to the data. Some researchers spoke to us about difficulties with accessing linked NPD and UCAS individual-level data once they had secured approval to use the data. These delays have been caused by the closure of the Administrative Data Research Network and the difficulties with the role out of the ONS Secure Research Service.

In the past, researchers reported that UCAS did not provide enough support or guidance to help them interpret the data, making it difficult to analyse.

What developments are in progress?

The Department for Education has put in place agreements and processes to securely provide access to linked NPD data via the ONS Secure Research Service, however, more work is still required to enable the greatest value to be made of pupil level data.

UCAS is improving its information systems which will enable more flexibility in the information that it collects and subsequently publishes. UCAS is developing a single data platform which will allow it to provide more, and more open, access to its data for approved purposes.

Recommendation

RH9. Department for Education and ONS Secure Research Service should continue to work together to ensure the greatest value can be made of pupil level data.

Summary of recommendations

Universities and higher education institution recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RH1. The Office for Students, HESA and the relevant organisations within the devolved administrations should work together to ensure that mandatory data collections continue to reflect current requirements and that any changes to data collections are collaboratively agreed.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH2. Regulators and funding bodies across the UK should continue to work together and with HESA to maximise consistency of UK-wide higher education data collection.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH3. HESA and UCAS should work with the respective further education funding bodies to capture higher education provision delivered in further education colleges in their statistical outputs.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH4. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Best Practice and Impact division should work with UCAS to support the collection of greater insight into care leavers progressing to higher education.	✓	✓	✓	✓
RH5. We encourage UCAS in their collaborative plans to develop a Multiple Equality Measure specific for Scotland.	✓			
RH6. Statistical producers should consider producing data breakdowns focused on Scottish domiciled students studying at Scottish institutions and provide concise definitions across the different datasets.	✓			
RH7. We encourage Welsh Government to continue with their ongoing developments within the higher education and universities statistics.			✓	
RH8. The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland should provide an update to external stakeholders on the progress with producing LEO and provide an indicative timescale for when the dataset is likely to be available for analysis.				✓
RH9. Department for Education and ONS Secure Research Service should continue to work together to ensure the greatest value can be made of pupil level data.		✓		

Further Education and college sector statistics

This section focuses on the statistics and data which support an understanding of those studying at colleges and further education institutions, regardless of the level of study.

Further education is broadly defined as the education of people who have left school but who are not studying at a university or other higher education institution. Study can be at any level from entry to higher level qualifications, including Higher National Certificates (HNCs), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and foundation degrees. In light of the differences in policy, statistical collection and publication in the devolved administrations, we have reviewed each separately.

United Kingdom

Key Messages

- Statistics in this sector were historically largely driven by funding requirements, rather than wider user need. This is now changing and there is an increased focus on measuring student outcomes and experiences.
- Data produced across the devolved nations varies considerably due to the diverse further education arrangements. This is the most diverse aspect of post-16 skills that we covered in our review and is much more distinct across the four nations than skills, higher education or apprenticeships.
- However, underlying this complexity, the user requirements for each country are largely the same, namely:
 - breakdown of attendance types e.g. full-time/part-time, age and ethnicity
 - success rates of those from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - why students drop out and whether their destinations are successful
 - the ability to track students from colleges and their career choices
 - the success rates of accredited courses as well as non-accredited courses.
- Not all these requirements are being consistently met, though the picture differs in the UK's four nations.

Statistical and policy landscape in the UK

Further education is a fully devolved policy area, and therefore policies and practices relating to further education vary between the devolved administration. As a result, data collected are largely not directly comparable across the UK. However, the Department for Education in England do publish an annual statistics publication [Education and training statistics for the UK](#), which provides some high level

comparisons (with appropriate caveats) - for example, on the number of students in further education by country of study, mode of study, gender and age.

Our research identified a number of similarities in information needs across the UK. These include the need to understand how many students are full-time and part-time, how many are in STEM subjects and an interest in what level and type of qualifications are being taken. Our research also identified that there is a need for information to enable students to be tracked so that their destinations can be understood. At further education level, it is particularly important to understand whether students are moving to jobs with better long-term prospects

Scotland

Key messages

- The concept of a ‘modern college’ is central to the further education sector in Scotland. As part of the modern college concept, there is an emphasis on meeting the demand of local skills and courses that meet local employers’ requirement due to largely competitive landscape.
- In contrast to other parts of the UK, 42% of full-time college activity in Scotland is at a higher education level.
- Information on articulation (when students move from college directly to a university degree course) has improved with the production of the Scottish Funding Council’s National Articulation Database and report on articulation.
- Student satisfaction surveys have low response rates, yet tracking and finding out where students go is very important. There are some issues around how student withdrawal are captured and how these can often be positive destinations rather than negative.

Statistical and policy landscape in Scotland

The main producer of colleges statistic and data in Scotland is the Scottish Funding Council. During our research and engagement with users of statistics, the following Scottish Funding Council produced statistics and data were highlighted as key sources of information on the further education sector.

- College Performance Indicators – this annual report provides a broad coverage of college teaching activity. Included in this is an analysis of student outcomes for those students enrolled on courses leading to recognised qualifications. The College Region national tool allows users to see individual college breakdown of outcomes of those studying on part-time courses, which is also broken down by the number of hours and by higher education and further education.
- The National Articulation Database (NAD) – provides information on the articulation of college HNC/HND students, their movement to Scottish higher education institutions and the prior academic credit they attain. This was

published for the first time in April 2019. The Infact Database provides current and historical data on students and courses in colleges in Scotland.

In Scotland, the college sector is largely delivered through 26 further education colleges, operating in 13 regions. They offer a mix of further and higher education level courses which is unique to Scotland. In contrast to other parts of the UK, [42% of full-time college activity](#) is at a higher education level. Colleges play a key role in delivering the priorities set by Scottish Government for the 15-24 Learner Journey Review and Developing the Young Workforce initiative

Studying at a college is common in Scotland. Colleges offer the opportunity for individuals to progress into higher education either at college, or via articulation partnerships with Scottish universities. Articulation is commonly defined as the process whereby a student gains entry onto a degree course, after first having undertaken studies at a college. Articulation partnership arrangements in Scotland allow students to enter the second or third year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) or a Higher National Diploma (HND). It is an important route to university study for many individuals in Scotland.

Are Scotland further education and college statistics providing public value?

We found that consultation with users in the development and improvement of statistics is well established in this sector. However, users identified areas for improvement, particularly around issues of **accessibility** and **where information needs could be better met**.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

The Infact database is considered a valuable source for figures on the college sector in Scotland. It has data going back to 1998 and contains multiple variables which users can sort on to find the required dataset. Users generally reported that the database is an extremely useful tool and have used it to answer questions, such as the overall headcount of students at colleges in Scotland, as well as gender and age breakdown to address specific policy questions. It has also been used to assess the qualification aims of students and identify trends over a specific period. Users appreciated the ability to create bespoke datasets. The Scottish Funding Council provide comprehensive YouTube videos to support users to navigate the tool.

Overall, Scottish Funding Council's headline statistics are considered useful and accessible. In particular, users reported recent positive developments in understanding students articulating from Scottish colleges to Scottish universities, through the [new report on articulation](#).

In Scotland, we found wide ranging interest in statistics and data about the college education sector, both from within the sector, and from other official bodies and academics outside of the sector. Many colleges use official statistics for benchmarking against other education service providers and in promoting their college to prospective students.

What are the main issues?

To enhance understanding of outcomes for college leavers, the Scottish Government have recently published experimental statistics on [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes from Scottish Colleges 2016-17](#). This report presents employment and earnings outcomes for those successfully completing a Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) course at a Scottish college in 2012/13 and who went on to employment, with no further enrolments in tertiary education. This accounts for approximately 10% of the total full-time qualifying cohort at Scottish colleges. Scottish Government plan to develop the LEO college data to include those who have participated in other further education courses and those progressing into further study at university.

Studying part-time, which accounts for around three quarters of all college enrolments, is an important step in the learner journey for many individuals. Identifying what proportion of earnings are attributable to the college course, rather than from previous experience, is a complex issue that requires further analysis.

Our research highlights that achieving a better understanding of non-accredited college courses, and the success rates at the various institutions that offer them and how they differ, would also be helpful.

Users referred to information shared between partners through the Skills Development Scotland 16+ Data Hub (as described in earlier in the Scotland Workforce Skills section), with some suggesting that this could be a valuable resource for researchers exploring the destinations of young people and potential interventions to support them in making choices. However, the nature of the dataset (individual records held for the purposes of operational delivery) means that only those organisations named in legislation are permitted to access these individual records.

What developments are in progress?

The Scottish Funding Council have plans to enhance the public value of the Infact Database by providing additional user guidance on how to produce simple tables in Infact for those users who prefer written guidance to online tutorials.

The Scottish Funding Council however make it clear in the articulation report, that data issues mean there are omissions from the counts. As an example, the highest qualification on entry may be recorded as an HND, but the reason for the articulation level granted was actually determined by the individual's work experience. The Scottish Funding Council are actively working to resolve these issues.

Recommendations

RF1. The Scottish Funding Council should review whether including a glossary of terminology and information about other sources of data within the Infact database would be beneficial to users.

RF2. Skills Development Scotland should work with Scottish Government to consider if suitably anonymised data drawn from the 16+ Data Hub, beyond the data available via the Annual Participation Measure, could be made available for research purposes.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

Scottish Funding Council's College Performance Indicators and National Tool, which allows the institutions to benchmark themselves in terms of student retention and achievement and thus promote colleges, were highlighted by users as particularly useful sources of information.

What are the main issues?

We have concerns relating to the value of the statistics available about withdrawal rates from further education courses, as the data currently collected about withdrawal rates by the Scottish Funding Council are limited. We heard that more detailed data is collected locally at an individual college level, but this is not standardised across the sector and that, when the data are collated centrally by the Scottish Funding Council, there are only four classifications. Users told us that these do not provide sufficient detail to maximise usage of the withdrawal data. For example illness does not delineate between mental or physical illness, and there is no option to report that financial pressure was the reason to withdraw. In addition, if a transfer reason is not recorded, some students may be assigned to an 'unsuccessful' destination in the college performance indicators.

What developments are in progress?

The Scottish Funding Council does collect data on withdrawals, however the reasons for withdrawals are often multifaceted and complex so is under review.

Recommendations

RF3. The Scottish Funding Council should review how they collect data about withdrawals from college courses, including seeking feedback from users about what information would be most useful.

Wales

Key messages

- The further education sector in Wales is being reviewed, along with all post-compulsory learning, with a view to reforming it following the 2016 [Hazelkorn Report](#).
- There has been innovative work from Welsh Government in developing the Consistent Performance Measures, allowing comparisons between outcomes of students in colleges and sixth forms.

Statistical and policy landscape in Wales

The main sources of further education statistics and data in Wales are as follows.

- The Consistent Performance Measures for Post-16 Learning, Welsh Government - are experimental statistics and provide a consistent measure for learner outcomes across sixth forms and colleges in Wales.
- The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Welsh Government - provides data on learners in post-16 education and training. This excludes those

studying at school sixth-forms, but includes further education institutions, work-based learning providers and community learning.

Students in Wales are able to continue into post-16 education through a range of options including through a sixth-form or a further education college. In Wales, as in England, studying post-16 education in a school sixth form falls into the category of secondary school education rather than further education. An individual's decision whether to attend a college or stay on at school can be influenced by the provision available within the different areas of Wales, as some areas do not have sixth forms but do have a further education college. The [Careers Wales website](#) provides information to students on continuing with post-16 education.

Some further education institutions in Wales offer students the option to study some higher education courses as part of widening access to higher education. Students can study for a higher national certificate (HNC), higher national diploma (HND), certificates of higher education and sometimes a foundation degree. Options for higher education study vary across different further education institutions.

Welsh Government are reviewing this sector following the [Hazelkorn Report \(2016\)](#). The report recommended the introduction of a new arm's length body, the [Commission for Tertiary Education and Research \(CTER\)](#) who would likely be responsible for oversight, strategic direction and leadership of the post-compulsory education and training sector in Wales.

Are Wales further education and college statistics providing public value?

There is good work ongoing within the further education sector to improve the public value of statistics in Wales. We found that continued improvements to the **accessibility** of some of the statistics could further improve the public value.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

The experimental [consistent performance measures for post-16 learning](#) have been introduced by Welsh Government to measure learner outcomes consistently across sixth forms and colleges. Before the new measures, learner outcomes for those in a sixth form or those studying in a college were published as two separate outputs, the [examination results statistics](#) and the [learner outcome measures for further education](#).

The three performance measures are: achievement, value added and destinations. The measures are intended to be used together to give a rounded picture of sixth forms' and colleges' outcomes, with no one measure being more important than the others. Data on [achievement](#) and [destinations](#) are published as sets of experimental statistics.

Users we spoke to welcomed the new metrics and were positive about Welsh Government's commitment to produce a single output. Without the consistent measures, users told us it would be difficult to compare further education and A levels.

What are the main issues?

Public value would be enhanced with earlier publication of the consistent performance measures and, whilst the measures are beneficial, the definition of sustained employment used within the release may not fully reflect what users would understand as sustained employment.

Our research identified that users would like more data on the destinations of students after completing further education

What developments are in progress?

Welsh Government currently publish experimental statistics on destinations as part of the three consistent performance measures. These statistics are being developed and Welsh Government hope to produce more detailed analysis, for example on characteristics, earnings and sector of employment.

Recommendations

RF4. Welsh Government should continue to seek user feedback around its definition of ‘sustained employment’ within the consistent performance measures and improve the guidance around its definition.

RF5. Welsh Government should continue to develop the destinations release to provide more detailed analysis for users.

Northern Ireland

Key messages

- The Department for the Economy are developing a new further education data collection system with the aim of providing more information about outcomes and destinations within the sector.
- It is possible that not all user needs are currently met through the main outputs currently published, as the Department for the Economy publish some data as responses to a series of ad hoc requests rather than structured regular data releases.

Statistical and policy landscape in Northern Ireland

The key statistics and data for Northern Ireland are published by the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and are:

- Further Education Activity in Northern Ireland statistical bulletin
- Training for Success statistics
- ApprenticeshipsNI statistics .

In Northern Ireland, students have several options once they have finished their compulsory education at age 16, depending on their interests and prior attainment. Students can opt to study for A levels in a school sixth form, for a wide range of qualifications at a further education college, become an apprentice or they can take part in a Training for Success programme.

In Northern Ireland there are six further education colleges and one agricultural college. These are the main providers of further education and training in Northern Ireland. Data and statistics are used for college performance assessments in Northern Ireland.

Are Northern Ireland Further education and college statistics providing public value?

We found that detailed information was available, but that making this more **accessibility** would benefit users of the data.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

The stakeholders we spoke to had good relationships with the statistics teams, which meant that, where data was available, they were able to access it.

What are the main issues?

The Department for the Economy run a survey of further education leavers, which is carried out online. This survey has a low response rate which affects the quality of the statistical results. With a view to increasing the response rate, issues around incomplete electronic contact details and publicity of the survey are being addressed by the Department in collaboration with the further education colleges.

What developments are in progress?

The Department for the Economy are developing a new further education data collection system. The aim is to move away from measuring enrolments to producing more information about individuals including educational outcomes and destinations.

Recommendations

RF6. The Department of the Economy should ensure that users are fully informed and aware of the implementation timescales of the new further education data collection system

England

The section summarises the key messages and finding from our April 2019 report, [Exploring the Public value of post-16 education and skills in England](#), and updates on progress since the report was published

Key messages

- There is a significant interest in England on how course choice affects the differential outcomes of individuals for example, on retention rates, employment success and income.
- Our April 2019 report recommended that the Department for Education should look to developing improved documentation and metadata for Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and undertake continued engagement with users.
- Since then, the Department for Education have continued to make improvements including developing the ILR to make it more user friendly for internal users and

developing their [Explore Education Statistics](#) platform which was launched in March 2020.

Statistical and policy landscape in England

The main sources of further education statistics and data in England are as follows.

- The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) which contains record level data about the courses being taken in further education.
- The Department for Education further education aggregate outputs.
- The Labour Force Survey which provides information on the qualifications people have received and how this relates to their working life.
- The National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS), which contains local authority level data about young people's engagement in education and training.
- Ofsted aggregate data on inspection outcomes of further education inspections.

Are England further education and college statistics providing public value?

Since our report was published in April 2019, improvements have been ongoing to increase the public value of statistics in England. We found however, that further improvements to the **coherence** and **accessibility** of the statistics could provide additional public value.

Statistics and data need to be accessible to all users

What is working well?

The Department for Education publish data on further education as official and National Statistics. As part of a program of improvement work, they have streamlined their publications, improved signposting to statistical outputs and developed data exploration tools and visualisations to enable users to explore detailed aggregate data, including at a local authority level.

What are the main issues?

The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) is primarily used as a mechanism for allocating funding to providers. To support this process data about courses taken by learners, and information about the learners themselves, are collected and stored separately. When we spoke to users for our April 2019 report, they told us they find the ILR data difficult to conceptualise, access and then analyse, as the format of the data and limited supporting documentation make it difficult for all but very experienced users to undertake analysis. In addition, we heard of a lack of clarity from users on how to access the data and of delays in receiving data.

What developments are in progress?

In 2018, the Department for Education published the results of a [Data Dissemination Discovery](#) project which explored the ways users would like to access data. This information was used to inform the development of a new statistics tool, the [Explore Education Statistics](#) platform. The new platform was launched in March 2020.

Following a review of person level data shares, the Department for Education is standardising the way that data are shared with researchers and is making data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the linked NPD (which incorporates the ILR and HESA data) available through the Office for National Statistics' Secure Research Service. Whilst this has faced some delays in implementation, it is likely this new process will resolve user concerns with access however, it will not in itself make the data easier to use.

Since the publication of our April 2019 report, the Department for Education have continued to make improvements to their statistics provision. For example, they have developed the ILR to make it more user friendly for internal users.

Recommendations

RF7. The Department for Education should test their improved datasets with external users and make these available, with documentation, to approved researchers.

RF8. The Department for Education should engage with users of the new Explore Education Statistics platform to ensure it is meeting user needs.

Statistics need to be coherent to help provide the bigger picture

What is working well?

Data on the further education workforce is currently provided by the Education and Training Foundation via the Staff Individualised Record system. This system is voluntary for providers and response rates are variable. In 2018 the Department for Education ran a call for evidence to seek views on what workforce data are currently collected, what might be needed and how the sector thinks this could be achieved. A [consultation on the next steps](#) undertaken in March 2019 supported the case for change, concluding that the sector needs to improve the quality and quantity of workforce data so that policy-making at a local, regional and national level can be based on accurate and high-quality data.

To help address the information gaps in the short term the Department for Education have commissioned a number of surveys. In late 2018 they published the results of the [College Staff Survey](#) which covered teachers and leaders at general further education and specialist colleges. They have also commissioned a further staff survey to cover other further education providers to enhance understanding of the wider sector.

What are the main issues?

Data about students studying for higher education courses at further education colleges are not consistently held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), making it very difficult to compare outcomes of students studying in different settings. Work is currently being undertaken to improve the data flows to HESA to increase accuracy in tracking these students. This is discussed in more detail in the section on Universities and higher education statistics.

Historically, funding practices for further education has led to different and incoherent data sources for data for 16 to 18-year olds namely, the National Pupil Database (NPD) which holds information on pupils studying in school sixth forms and Individual Learner Record (ILR) which covers students studying in further education. As an example, the ILR does not hold the same level of detail about pupil ethnicity as the NPD and the two datasets hold different measures about students with learning

difficulties, with the NPD flagging those with special education needs whilst the ILR holds self-identified records of those with a learning difficulty, disability or health problem.

What developments are in progress?

The Department for Education told us about plans to consolidate their end-to-end data process which aims to rationalise the flows of data within their systems and provide better and more coherent data for its own analysts. One strand of this is working to develop improved ILR datasets to make it easier to use for internal analysts. Such improvements should go some way to making ILR based data easier for the less experienced analysts to use.

Summary of recommendations

Further Education and college sector recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RF1. The Scottish Funding Council should review whether including a glossary of terminology and information about other sources of data within the Infact database would be beneficial to users.	✓			
RF2. Skills Development Scotland should work with Scottish Government to consider if suitably anonymised data drawn from the 16+ Data Hub, beyond the data available via the Annual Participation Measure, could be made available for research purposes.	✓			
RF3. The Scottish Funding Council should review how they collect data about withdrawals from college courses, including seeking feedback from users about what information would be most useful.	✓			
RF4. Welsh Government should continue to seek user feedback around its definition of 'sustained employment' within the consistent performance measures and improve the guidance around its definition.			✓	
RF5. Welsh Government should continue to develop the destinations release to provide more detailed analysis for users.			✓	
RF6. The Department of the Economy should ensure that users are fully informed and aware of the implementation timescales of the new further education data collection system				✓
RF7. The Department for Education should test their improved datasets with external users and make these available, with documentation, to approved researchers.		✓		
RF8. The Department for Education should engage with users of the new Explore Education Statistics platform to ensure it is meeting user needs.		✓		

Apprenticeships Statistics

An apprenticeship is a combination of study (for example at further education college, university or private training provider) and employer based practical work experience. Apprenticeships are offered at a variety of qualification levels. Across the UK there has been a growing policy focus on apprenticeships.

As with further education, data collected on apprenticeships are not directly comparable between the devolved administration due to the differences in policies and practices. In light of the differences in policy, statistical collection and publication in the devolved administrations, we have reviewed each separately

United Kingdom

Key Messages

- Good comparable data on apprenticeships is limited and the statistics are dependent on the type of apprenticeship the country offers. These can be quite different across countries.
- Due to the diverse arrangements across the UK it is difficult to compare the outcomes for apprenticeships across the nations.
- Policies on widening access have meant that apprenticeships, colleges, and universities often encompass the same group of people. Comparability of statistics however across the sectors is limited.

Scotland

Key messages

- Scotland has good disaggregated statistical information on Modern Apprenticeships produced by Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Government, although graduate and foundation apprenticeships are newer and there is limited information on them so far.

Statistical and policy landscape in Scotland

There are three types of apprenticeships in Scotland.

- **Modern Apprenticeships** are work based learning opportunities for individuals aged 16 or above where the individual is employed and either, undertakes a combination of formal learning and work-based assessment or is assessed in the workplace by colleges or independent training providers. These are the most well know type of apprenticeship, with colleges and independent training providers playing the major role in the delivery of them.
- **Foundation Apprenticeships** were rolled out to all local authorities in 2016, with the aim of addressing the issues with youth unemployment. They give pupils in their last two years of senior school the option to choose this

qualification and acquire industry recognised work-based skills and capabilities through learning at schools/colleges/training providers and through workplace placements.

- **Graduate Apprenticeships** are the most recently introduced apprenticeship. These offer the opportunity to study at degree or master's level and are delivered in partnerships between employers and universities. Apprentices are in employment for the duration of their studies.

The Modern Apprenticeship programme in Scotland is managed and funded through Skills Development Scotland who administer the public funding contribution on behalf of Scottish Government and provide quarterly official statistics. Users were positive about the level of granularity in the statistics and on recent improvements to Skills Development Scotland quarterly and annual Modern Apprenticeship reports. In addition, Scottish Government has produced a Modern Apprenticeship LEO release which covers the median earnings of those successfully completing Modern Apprenticeships. In addition, Skills Development Scotland also produce information reports on Foundation Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships, which are not official statistics.

Are Scottish apprenticeship statistics providing public value?

Apprenticeships are an expanding policy area in Scotland. Improvements to the **available information** on all types of apprenticeships would increase the public value to users.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

We heard lots of positive feedback on the Modern Apprenticeships statistical output by Skills Development Scotland. Users commented that it was much more granular than it used to be, with breakdowns of age, gender and local authority. There is also higher-level information on starts, leavers and occupational grouping.

What are the main issues?

With the increased focus on apprenticeships in Scotland, researchers told us they want to know if these apprenticeships are a successful route into careers and whether individuals progress or leave apprenticeships. They also want to find out more on whether there is a gender balance on the take up of STEM careers through this route, as well as the diversity constituents. There is also an interest in employers' opinions of apprentices.

There is currently only limited information available on Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships and users would like to be able to gain similar statistics to those available for Modern Apprenticeships.

One user also expressed the desire to understand the cost per apprenticeship to get an understanding of the return on investment. Similarly, another user noted that there is limited information about independent apprenticeship providers and that it would be helpful to know about their characteristics to help investigate the differing success rates of apprentices.

What developments are in progress?

Skills Development Scotland informed us that, as part of the Education and Skills Impact Framework developed collaboratively and underway across Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Government and the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Boards Analytical Unit, estimates of economic and social returns to apprenticeships will be produced. This will include a cost-benefit analysis and return on investment.

Recommendations

RA1. Skills Development Scotland should explore developing official statistics on foundation and graduate apprenticeships, when deemed appropriate.

RA2. We recommend that Skills Development Scotland consider the feasibility of publishing additional information about apprenticeship providers and the consequent success rates of apprentices.

Wales

Key messages

- As apprenticeships become more popular in Wales, outcomes and destinations are becoming of interest to users.
- Welsh Government have developed a new interactive Apprenticeships Dashboard for its Learning Programme Starts data that is published on a quarterly basis.

Statistical and policy landscape in Wales

In Wales, there are four types of apprenticeships available:

- Foundation apprenticeships, at level 2
- Apprenticeships, at level 3
- Higher apprenticeships, covering levels 4-7
- Degree apprenticeships, covering levels 6-7.

Students can start an apprenticeship at the level best suited to their stage of learning. As part of their [Apprenticeship Policy](#), Welsh Government have committed to a minimum of 100,000 apprenticeship places by the end of the current Assembly term in 2021. Welsh Government also proposes to integrate apprenticeships into the wider education system.

Apprenticeships provision within Wales will be impacted by the reform of the post compulsory education sector. The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research will also be responsible for delivery of apprenticeships across Wales as a result of the [Hazelkorn Report \(2016\)](#).

Are Wales apprenticeship statistics providing public value?

Demand for statistics within Wales on apprenticeships is on the rise, as apprenticeships become more popular. Statistics meet some user needs, however our research identified improvement that could be introduced.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

Our research highlighted that the main source of data about apprenticeships in Wales comes from Welsh Government's [Apprenticeship Learning Programmes Started](#) publication, which draws on data from the Wales Lifelong Learning Record statistics.

Users welcomed a new quarterly apprenticeships dashboard which accompanies this data, as it provides data in a more accessible format than previously available. Accessibility of Welsh Government's Apprenticeships Learning Programmes Started data has been improved to increase its public value. In 2019, Welsh Government developed an [interactive dashboard](#) which users can access for the latest quarters of data but that also visualises data back to 2012/13. The dashboard is published on a quarterly basis with provisional figures followed by final data being published in February.

Users of the data welcomed the dashboard, as previously just the key points were published alongside the data on gov.wales.

What are the main issues?

In some instances, the presentation of the apprenticeships data and statistics by Welsh Government is reducing the value of the data to users. For example, there was concern over the numbers undertaking apprenticeships and the risk of double counting if registered with more than one provider in a year. There are however datasets available on Stats Wales using unique learner numbers to avoid multiple counting and this is highlighted within the metadata that accompany the tables on Stats Wales. The notes for these datasets do not currently provide this explanation.

Stakeholders want to know about the destinations of those who complete an apprenticeship. There is some information available within the annual destinations release published by Welsh Government. Further information that users were interested in included the job types by apprenticeship type or whether a student goes on to attend higher education following completion of an apprenticeship.

Recommendations

RA3. Welsh Government should look to improve the metadata in the Apprenticeships Started publication to explain it is possible for students to be counted multiple times, with a link to the data published using unique learner numbers.

RA4. Welsh Government should carry out user research to consider what further information they can provide on the destinations of those who complete apprenticeships.

Northern Ireland

Key messages

- It is currently difficult to get a complete picture of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. This is due to differences in the data sources of the two main publications.

Statistical and policy landscape in NI

Apprenticeships are available at Level 2, Level 3 and as Higher Level Apprenticeships, which cover Level 4 to Level 8. [Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships June 2014](#), published by the Department for Employment and Learning, refreshed apprenticeship policy and led to the introduction of Higher Level Apprenticeships. These were piloted, before moving to steady state delivery in 2017/18.

Are Northern Ireland apprenticeship statistics providing public value?

We found that whilst data and statistics were available, differences in data sources and timings meant that there was a lack of **coherence** across the available published data.

Statistics need to be coherent to help provide the bigger picture

What is working well?

The main source of data about apprenticeships in Northern Ireland comes from the Apprenticeships NI statistics published by the Department for the Economy. Whilst we were unable to identify many users of these statistics outside of the Department, development of the data collections and publications ensured the outputs meet policy needs.

What are the main issues?

Our research highlighted that, whilst there is currently limited ongoing research into higher apprenticeships, data to support this is likely to be of interest in the future. It is currently difficult to get a complete picture of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland, as due to a lack of coherence in the different data sources, the Higher Level Apprenticeships statistical bulletins are structured differently to Apprenticeships NI statistical bulletins.

What developments are in progress?

We understand that the Department for the Economy are launching a consultation seeking user views on apprenticeships statistics.

Recommendation

RA5. The Department for the Economy should publish their plans for aligning the two apprenticeships datasets once the user consultation is completed.

England

This section summarises the key messages and finding from our April 2019 report, [Exploring the Public value of post-16 education and skills in England](#), and updates on progress since the report was published.

Key messages

- We understand that the Department for Education is in discussion with the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education to develop new apprenticeship standards.
- The issue around Individualised Learner Record dataset noted in the further education section also applies to those wishing to better understand apprenticeship data.
- The recently launched data platform, Explore Education Statistics, should provide help for analysts to download the underlying information to enable analysis of the apprenticeship's choices available to aid pupils post-16 choices.

Statistical and policy landscape in England

There are two different types of apprenticeships in England; frameworks and standards. Apprenticeship frameworks are being phased out and, [from August 2020](#), all new apprenticeship starts are expected to be on standards.

The Institute for Apprenticeships is sponsored by the Department for Education to ensure the standards of apprenticeships are of high quality and to provide advice to government on funding. In England, the Digital Apprenticeships Service is a portal for employers to manage apprenticeship levy payments and to access funds.

Are England apprenticeships statistics providing public value?

There are a wide range of apprenticeships statistics produced by the Department for Education. Recent work to link datasets, as well as improvements in accessibility, have improved their public value.

Statistics need to fully meet the information needs of users

What is working well?

The Department for Education publish data about apprenticeships as official and National Statistics. These include the Apprenticeships and Traineeships England bulletin which provides all age apprenticeship and traineeship learning in England, as well as monthly apprenticeship statistics. We found that there was further disaggregated data available providing users with the ability to create pivot tables for age, level, demographic, framework/standard, and geographical breakdowns, however this does require a certain level of MS Excel knowledge.

The Department for Education published experimental statistics in March 2020, which provide information on apprenticeships starts by industry characteristics. These statistics are produced by linking data from Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and Apprenticeship Service Accounts matched to the Office for National Statistics Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) data.

National Achievement Rate Tables (NARTs) are summary indicators of performance in apprenticeships and education and training. Individual providers use the data to benchmark their targets and overall performance. Data are available in open data format with information provided to support users to interpret the data.

What are the main issues?

In our April 2019 report, we found that official statistics currently published about apprenticeships can make it difficult to tell the full apprenticeship story, as information about new standards is not available. We understand that the Department for Education is in discussion with the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education to develop these standards.

Also in our 2019 report, we highlighted limitations in the information available for pupils to make informed choices about post-16 education which included apprenticeships. The launch of the Explore Education Statistics data platform in March 2020 should improve access this information and aid students post-16 choices.

What developments are in progress?

As outlined in the further education section, the Department for Education launched its new data platform, Explore Education Statistics (EES) in March 2020. It is the Department for Education's aim to have two releases on the EES, a further education and skills release and an apprenticeships and traineeships release, bringing all apprenticeship data together in one place and updated on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. Although the apprenticeships data are not yet live on the new platform, we understand that work is underway. This will mean significant improvements on accessibility of the information.

Recommendation

RA6. The Department for Education should continue to explore data linkage options to align apprenticeship starts with industry in order to facilitate the demand for smaller business apprenticeships.

Summary of recommendations

Apprenticeship recommendations	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
RA1. Skills Development Scotland should explore developing official statistics on foundation and graduate apprenticeships, when deemed appropriate.	✓			
RA2. We recommend that Skills Development Scotland consider the feasibility of publishing additional information about apprenticeship providers and the consequent success rates of apprentices.	✓			
RA3. Welsh Government should look to improve the metadata in the Apprenticeships Started publication to explain it is possible for students to be counted multiple times, with a link to the data published using unique learner numbers.			✓	
RA4. Welsh Government should carry out user research to consider what further information they can provide on the destinations of those who complete apprenticeships.			✓	
RA5. The Department for the Economy should publish their plans for aligning the two apprenticeships datasets once the user consultation is completed.				✓
RA6. The Department for Education should continue to explore data linkage options to align apprenticeship starts with industry in order to facilitate the demand for smaller business apprenticeships.		✓		

Next Steps

Exploring the statistical landscape of post 16 education and skills in this multi-sector, multi-country way has allowed us to not only to identify the current challenges and potential improvements to statistics in each sector, but also to look across the UK to highlight areas of good practice and shared learning opportunities. We commend that statistics producers are seeking new and innovative ways of improving their outputs to enhance public value.

We have identified specific areas within the four key sectors of workforce skills, universities and higher education, colleges and further education and apprenticeships where improvements will increase the public value of the available statistics and highlighted where additional information would better meet user needs.

This report was published in July 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. We appreciate that these are unprecedented times and that statistics producers may be focused on critical and immediate priorities. We will report on our recommendations and outline the progress made towards the end of 2020/21 and encourage producers to work with us and to implement these wherever possible.