



# SFC Guidance

## National Student Survey and Unistats: updated timetables and changes for 2018

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Summary: This guidance sets out information on revised arrangements and timetable for publication of the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS).

FAO: Principals of Scotland's universities

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## National Student Survey and Unistats: updated timetables and changes for 2018

1. This guidance sets out information on:
  - Revised arrangements and timetable for publication of the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS), arising from the Office for Students' expected designation as a producer of official statistics by July 2018.
  - The processes and timetable for the Unistats data collection for 2018.
  - Upcoming changes to the Unistats website and dataset, including the way the new Longitudinal Education Outcomes data is treated.
2. This circular has previously been produced by HEFCE for all UK institutions. This year the Office for Students originally published this circular for English institutions, and SFC has adapted the content for Scottish institutions. The circular for English institutions can be found at [https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1450/ofs\\_201824.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1450/ofs_201824.pdf) and contains further details on activity in England.

### Key points to note

3. The Office for Students (OfS) is applying the Code of Practice for Statistics to its data publication in anticipation of its designation as a producer of official statistics by July 2018. This has implications for the pre-publication access that will be granted to the NSS outcomes and Unistats data, as these will be treated as official statistics. OfS will now publish the NSS public dataset at the same time as providers are able to access their own data on Wednesday 27 July 2018. There will also be no provider preview as part of the annual Unistats data collection and publication process, and data available in system reports will be limited to that essential for quality processes associated with the Unistats return.
4. In June 2018, earnings data from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset for English providers will be added to Unistats. LEO data for Scottish providers will not be included in this.
5. From September 2018, data on Unistats will use the Common Aggregation Hierarchy developed for the Higher Education Classification of Subjects in place of the current subject hierarchy.
6. As part of the Quality Enhancement Framework, institutions in Scotland are expected to participate in the provision of information to Unistats, and in the publication of the Unistats data collection.

7. OfS requires all UK institutions to have signed off their Unistats data by **noon on Friday 17 August 2018** for publication on the Unistats website on Thursday 30 August.

### Changes to the publication of 2018 NSS data

8. The timetable for publication of NSS 2018 was announced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in March 2018, in 'National Student Survey 2018: Publication of data' (HEFCE Circular letter 04/2018, [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2018/CL\\_042018/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2018/CL_042018/)). As it expects to be designated as a producer of official statistics prior to publication of NSS 2018, the OfS will need to make changes to the schedule to align the approach with the Code of Practice for Statistics. OfS will therefore no longer be able to offer providers prior access to the data. This will apply to all providers in the UK, as the OfS produces and publishes the data.
9. The OfS will now publish the 2018 NSS public dataset at the same time as providers are able to access their own data, at 09:30 on **Friday 27 July 2018**, not 8 August as advised in HEFCE Circular letter 04/2018. Aside from the publication schedule, other arrangements announced by HEFCE in the circular letter are unaffected.
10. OfS acknowledges that this revision to the publication timetable will impact on providers and require changes to be implemented, and have tried to minimise this disruption by ensuring providers do not have to wait longer than planned for access to the 2018 NSS results.

**Table 1: Revised timetable for the 2018 NSS publication**

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

## Changes and updates to the Unistats website and dataset

### *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework outcomes*

11. The Unistats website will be updated in June 2018 to include Year three outcomes from the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework. No Scottish HEIs chose to participate in the TEF in 2018, and the entries in Unistats will explain and contextualise this appropriately.

### *Longitudinal Education Outcomes data for Scottish providers*

12. The Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset is a new dataset, which links information about employment and earnings from HM Revenue and Customs tax records to individual student records for the first time. It is a substantial administrative dataset, which provides much greater coverage than the previously available survey data on graduate earnings.
13. The LEO data was published across the UK, and Scottish Government published LEO data for Scotland in June 2017, and plans to publish updated data in June 2018 on the same basis.
14. The Department for Education asked the OfS to publish LEO data on the Unistats website as soon as possible for English providers, to support the aims of the new regulatory system in England.
15. Scottish LEO data will not be published on Unistats in 2018. The presentation of the LEO data on Unistats will explain that the absence of Scottish data does not reflect on the quality of courses, but reflects a different policy and legal position on the use of this data in Scotland.

### *Changes to subjects used for Unistats for the 2018 dataset*

16. A three-level subject hierarchy for display and aggregation of data is currently used on Unistats which is based on Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) codes. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), has been developed to replace JACS (see <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/hecos>), and a Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) to which both JACS and HECoS codes can be mapped has also been developed. HECoS will be adopted by UCAS from May 2018 for 2019 entrants, so, to provide consistency for prospective students, we will begin to use the CAH to present data on Unistats from August 2018. This means that we will begin to use the new coding from the 2018 data collection.
17. The impact of this change on the data return is limited to new courses. Where courses are linked to historic course records in the Unistats data, we will map the JACS codes for the linked courses to the CAH. For further education colleges

we will map Learn Direct Classification System (LDCS) codes for linked courses to JACS codes, as currently, and then map those JACS codes to the CAH. For new courses, higher education institutions and alternative providers will need to return HECoS codes where they currently return JACS codes, but further education colleges may continue to return LDCS codes.

## **Unistats 2018 data collection: process and timetable**

### ***Changes to data available through Unistats collection system reports and provider preview***

18. In previous years, it has been possible for providers to see the figures that would be published on Unistats for the DLHE survey and the NSS through the reports that providers can generate from the data collection system to assist them in quality checking their returns. As OfS will apply the Code of Practice for Statistics to Unistats data, it will be removing the NSS and DLHE response data from these reports. The reports will continue to show the number of students represented by the data associated with each course and, where relevant, the level at which the data has been aggregated. These reports should only be used for quality assurance purposes and the data within them should only be shared with individuals who need it for this purpose.
19. OfS will no longer be able to offer a provider preview period through the Unistats website and are encouraging all providers to engage with the reports available through the collection system to carry out checks on their data. As there will be no further opportunity to check the data this year, OfS are going to set the sign-off deadline later in August than in recent years, to allow additional time for engagement with the system reports.
20. This year's Unistats timetable is set out below. Please note that this differs from the timetable previously published on the Higher Education Statistics Agency website.

## *Unistats timetable*

Table 2: Timetable for the 2018 Unistats collection

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

### **Data quality assurance**

21. Providers are responsible for the quality of their Unistats data. The dataset for publication should initially be signed off by the accountable officer, but formal responsibility for signing off any subsequent updates may be delegated to another member of the senior management team.

### **Replacement of Unistats**

22. Following consultation on the outcomes of the Review of Unistats in 2015, the funding bodies are working together on options for a replacement for the Unistats website. This new resource would draw on the findings from the review about decision-making behaviour and the information needs of different groups of prospective students. We will progress this work in stages – ensuring

that it is developed in a way that meets the needs of prospective students across all countries of the UK – and will provide the sector with periodic updates, the first of which will be in early summer 2018.

### Further information

23. For Scotland specific issues relating to policy, please contact Alison Cook, email: [acook@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:acook@sfc.ac.uk) and for Scotland specific issues relating to data, please contact Cathy Mitchell, email: [cmitchell@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:cmitchell@sfc.ac.uk).
24. For queries about Unistats, please contact Rose Spicer at OfS (0117 931 7148, [unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:unistats@officeforstudents.org.uk)). For queries about the NSS, please contact Rob Denny at OfS, tel: 0117 931 7078, email: [nss@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:nss@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Yours sincerely



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Interim Chief Executive

## Abbreviations

<b>CAH</b>	Common Aggregation Hierarchy
<b>DLHE</b>	Destination for Leavers in Higher Education
<b>HEFCE</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for England
<b>HECoS</b>	Higher Education Classification of Subjects
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Statistics Agency
<b>JACS</b>	Joint Academic Coding System
<b>LCDS</b>	Learn Direct Classification System
<b>LEO</b>	Longitudinal Earnings Outcome
<b>NSS</b>	National Student Survey
<b>OfS</b>	Office for Students
<b>PAYE</b>	Pay as You Earn