

Consultation on how to take account of Associate Students in the Higher Education Students and Qualifiers publication: Results Summary

1. The Scottish Funding Council began a consultation with stakeholders and users of the 'Higher Education Students and Qualifiers' publication in August 2015. The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the best way to handle Associate Students in future issues of the publication.
2. At present, students enrolled on Associate Student programs are being recorded at the both partner institutions; they attend college for the first one or two years of their degree and then complete their degree at the partner HEI who act as the awarding body. As the Associate students are being counted in both sectors, this means that when both sectors are taken together, the overall number of HE student enrolments exceeds the actual number of HE students. It is expected that the number of Associate Students will continue to increase in the coming academic years as SFC has funded additional places to be provided under this arrangement for the academic years to 2015-16.
3. The consultation put forward three possible options to deal with the issue. These were:

Option 1: Continue to count the Associate Students in both sectors

Option 2: Count the students in the HEI sector only.

Option 3: Count the students in the college sector for years 1 and/or 2 of their study and count them in the university sector for later years of study.

The full consultation document can be seen at:

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistics/Associated_Students_HESQ.pdf

4. The major content of the responses to the consultation covered the following aspects:

Recording and Reporting Issues

The predominant view from respondents was that Option 1 would be best in order to achieve the best level of consistency both in reporting and in measuring outcomes. It would also be the most straightforward to administer and was therefore likely to be the lowest overall risk choice for data quality. The recording of students in one sector only was more likely to result in possible anomalies in certain areas of recording e.g. in relation to outcomes and qualification aim.

There was a strong view that Option 2 may not be practical due to the lack of ownership and responsibility for the college sector by the university sector and that the reliance on effective communication between the sectors could make it more difficult to acquire good information. It was considered that Option 3 was likely to pose a greater risk of confusion between providers on who was to report for each student for each year and that this could also cause anomalies to occur.

Recognition for college contribution

The view was expressed that the Option 2 choice did not give adequate recognition to the contribution colleges are making to student attainment and that it did not correspond with the balance of responsibility for students while they were attending college.

Maintaining consistency of data with HESA for the university sector

As Associate Students are being recorded by HESA, it was considered that Option 1 would best allow full consistency with HESA figures for the university sector; while Option 2 would also allow this consistency. Option 3 would not as students would only be reported under an award at college.

5. SFC also raised this matter at meetings of our statistical advisory groups, the Statistical Advisory Group for Further Education (SAGE)¹ and the Institutional Group on Statistics (IGS)². The SAGE group expressed a preference to continue to count the Associate Students in both sectors, whereas no specific preference was expressed by the IGS group.
6. Taking account of the responses, the overall balance of opinion was that the approach identified in Option 1 should be followed. SFC also considers that this is the best option. **This means that the students will continue to be counted in both sectors as before. SFC will develop an additional table for future publications with information on 'Associate Students', assuming the data available is sufficiently comprehensive.** HESA have also been informed of this decision.
7. We would like to thank the following organisations for responding to this consultation:
 - Dundee and Angus College
 - West Lothian College
 - University of Strathclyde
 - Glasgow Caledonian University
 - Queen Margaret University
 - Colleges Scotland
8. If you would like further clarification on any of these points please contact John Taylor, Policy/Analysis Officer at the Scottish Funding Council using the below contact details.

¹ Statistical Advisory Group for Further Education (SAGE):

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/aboutus/council_board_committees/Committees/Advisorygroups/SAGE/sage_committee.aspx

² Institutional Group on Statistics (IGS):

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/aboutus/council_board_committees/Committees/Advisorygroups/IGS/IGS_committee.aspx

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