

Mr Paul Clark
HESA
95 Promenade
Cheltenham
GL50 1HZ

09 December 2015

Dear Mr Clark

HESA Data Futures Programme consultation

The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to HESA's consultation on the Data Futures Programme. The Society is the national academy of science in the UK. It is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists. It draws on the expertise of the Fellowship to provide independent and authoritative advice. As the UK's national academy of science, the Society is concerned with the health of the UK's education, research and innovation system as a whole.

Access to high quality data is essential in research and public policy development. The demand for higher education data is widespread, from tracking the supply, mobility and diversity of students and researchers, to monitoring the financial sustainability of institutions and departments. The Royal Society therefore welcomes the proposals to transform HESA data collection arrangements, improving the quality, timeliness and accessibility of information, while reducing the burden on providers.

Changes within the sector are likely to mean that the demand for data increases. The Government's proposals to implement a Teaching Excellence Framework and improve social mobility, as outlined in the recent higher education Green Paper, rely heavily on the availability of robust datasets. These datasets enable government and others to monitor the effects of policy changes, such as the changes to funding and financial support at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It would, therefore, be of great benefit to stakeholders throughout the sector if the Data Futures Programme was extended beyond student data at the earliest opportunity, to include HESA finance and staff data collections.

The value of higher education data will also increase as links with other datasets are improved. The Society particularly welcomes HESA's proposals to increase the accessibility and standardisation of data, and the commitment to work with other data collectors. To maximise comparability and opportunities for data linking, the Data Futures Programme should work with a wide range of data collectors relevant to higher education. This would improve our understanding of how diversity and the supply of scientific skills evolve from school, through further and higher education, and into the workplace.




President Sir Venki Ramakrishnan
Executive Director Dr Julie Maxton

Founded in 1660, the Royal Society is the independent scientific academy of the UK, dedicated to promoting excellence in science.

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Effective research and policy development relies upon the availability of high quality data, and there is an increasing demand for data within higher education and related sectors. Regardless of any future changes to the higher education architecture, the Data Futures Programme proposals would significantly strengthen the provision and value of HESA data collections, and should be welcomed.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Halliday', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alex Halliday

Physical Secretary and Vice-President of the Royal Society

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