

To heads of higher education institutions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

September 2008

Dear colleagues

The Data Efficiency Project Steering Group, which I chair, was set-up in early 2007 jointly by the project sponsors: the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).

The Steering Group was tasked with overseeing a project to research and obtain evidence on:

- a. The burdens that arise in institutions in meeting the data requirements of funding bodies and government departments through HESA returns; and
- b. On the operational barriers that need to be overcome within institutions in order to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the data submission process.

Institutions in the sector were represented on the Steering Group by Philip Harvey, Registrar at the University of Sussex and Kathy Williams, Academic Registrar at the University of Leicester as well as by myself. The project sponsors were represented by Steve Egan, Deputy Chief Executive at HEFCE; Robin Sibson, Chief Executive HESA and Martin Furner, TDA.

Following a tendering exercise consultancy support for the project was commissioned from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) who visited and conducted three workshops with representatives from 27 institutions in England, Scotland and Wales.

The resulting report "Making your data work for you – Data quality and efficiency" identifies: the main burdens and operational barriers to delivering the HESA staff and student returns; suggested improvements to the existing process and; a road map to implement the improvements identified.

The key findings from the report are that:

- a. Some examples of Good Practice exist widely across the sector, but others only rarely. There is huge scope to achieve a wider adoption of more elements of Good Practice across the sector.
- b. There are numerous ideas and considerable enthusiasm for making current practice Better, including a suggested vehicle for taking the ideas forward.
- c. Performance would be improved and the burden reduced by achieving a wider adoption of more elements of Good Practice and the implementation of some or all of the Better Practice proposals.

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Implementation by the project sponsors and other data collectors and institutions alike is critical to the delivery of significant benefits from the report. The Steering Group recommended that the following steps be taken.

- a. Set-up a group (or designate an existing group) to implement actions arising from the report from autumn 2008 onwards that would;
- b. Develop an implementation plan including:
 - i. Integration with the data assurance requirements set out in the new HEFCE FM (for English institutions)
 - ii. Commissioning a self-assessment/self-evaluation tool for institutions to assist them in this process
 - iii. Feeding the report findings into enhanced HESA training for HEIs
 - iv. Dissemination via established conferences & meetings

The sponsoring bodies are in the preliminary stages of setting-up a working group to take forward implementation of the road map proposals. The intention is that this will then come under the auspices of any successor body to HERRG in the future.

Should you wish to comment on any of the issues I raise above, please send your comments to Ian Parry, Assurance Consultant at HEFCE and Project Manager for the Data Efficiency Project, (i.parry@hefce.ac.uk; 0117 931 7091).

Yours sincerely



Professor Nigel Thrift
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