

July 2012/15

Statement of policy

This report is for information

This publication brings together the latest information about the Key Information Set, including HEFCE policy decisions and next steps.

Key Information Sets and Unistats

Overview and next steps

The Key Information Set and the new Unistats web-site

Policy development

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Quality assurance, Quality enhancement, Learning and teaching, Web-site management, Student data, KIS data
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Executive summary

1. This publication brings together the latest information about the Key Information Set (KIS), including HEFCE policy decisions and next steps.

Key points

2. This publication updates the information on KIS and the new Unistats site that was provided in 'Provision of Information about higher education: outcomes of consultation and next steps' (HEFCE 2011/18). The principles outlined in that publication have framed the work to develop the KIS and the new Unistats website. The developments in other areas covered in 2011/18 will be reported separately.

3. A Key Information Set is a set of standardised information about undergraduate courses, which enables them to be easily compared. It has been designed with the needs of prospective students in mind.

4. In September 2012 the KIS will be published on the new Unistats web-site, and will also be accessed via a small advertisement or 'widget' on the course web pages of universities and colleges.

5. Developments to the KIS have been made in collaboration with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland, Universities UK, GuildHE and the Association of Colleges (AoC). The KIS will be available across the UK and is overseen by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG), chaired by Professor Janet Beer, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University.

Action required

6. No action is required in response to this document.

Context

7. In November 2010 HEFCE, Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE published 'Public information about higher education: Consultation on changes to information published by institutions' (HEFCE 2010/31)¹. The consultation sought views on how to enhance the information that is available about higher education (HE) study at universities and colleges. The proposals in it formed part of a wider review of the quality assurance system for HE. This work was led by HEFCE, UUK and GuildHE. The National Union of Students (NUS), Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and Association of Colleges (AoC) were also involved in the development of the proposals

8. The consultation outcomes were published in June 2011 as 'Provision of information about higher education: Outcomes of consultation and next steps' (HEFCE 2011/18). This publication set out how the accessibility and usefulness of information about HE could be improved, and set out requirements for what information higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) should publish about their HE courses.

9. The consultation had proposed a standardised method of publishing key items of information about each undergraduate course, which it referred to as a Key Information Set (KIS). It was envisaged that the KIS would sit on the course pages of HEIs' and FECs' web-sites.

10. Shortly after the release of the Government HE White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System', also in June 2011, we published our strategy statement, 'Opportunity, choice and excellence' (July 2011/22), which sets out the principles, priorities and practices that will guide HEFCE as we work with Government, representative bodies, HEIs, FECs and other partners to implement the reforms outlined in the White Paper. We subsequently published a circular letter in September 2011, 'Key Information Set: publication of technical guidance and further information' (HEFCE Circular letter 23/2011).

11. A further circular letter published in February (HEFCE Circular letter 04/2012) gave the following updates about the KIS:

- an update on development of the new web-site that will host the KIS data from September 2012
- further details of the KIS 'widget' and how to incorporate this on course web pages
- the timetable for universities and colleges to upload their KIS data to the HEFCE extranet, for them to be published on the new web-site
- a reminder of where the KIS technical guidance is published
- a reminder of how KIS developments link to quality assurance.

¹ HEFCE publications are available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs.

Technical guidance

12. We have worked with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to develop technical guidance so that institutions can consistently collate data for publication in the KIS. The full guidance and related documentation, published by HESA in July 2012, should be used by UK institutions when collecting and uploading their data for September 2012. It can be accessed at: www.hesa.ac.uk/C12061.

The KIS

13. The KIS will be viewable on the new Unistats web-site. The principle behind the KIS is to present information about courses in a consistent form, to make it easy for prospective students and their advisers to compare them. The information they present is listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Information for publication in the KIS

Information	Source	Level	For the September 2012 KIS, information will relate to:
Study			
Results from the National Student Survey (NSS) : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are good at explaining things • Staff have made the subject interesting • Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course • I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies • Feedback on my work has been prompt • Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand • The library resources are good enough for my needs • I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to 	HEFCE to draw from the NSS	Course level or aggregated (see paragraph 41 below)	2012 NSS results
Proportion of time spent in various learning and teaching activities – by year/stage of study, with a link to further detail	Institution to provide to HEFCE	Course level	The experience a typical student may have

Information	Source	Level	For the September 2012 KIS, information will relate to:
Proportion of summative assessment by method – by year/stage of study			
Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies that recognise this course, details of the type of recognition with a link to further detail			Accreditation in place/planned for academic year 2013-14
Costs and financial support			
Institution-owned/sponsored accommodation: average annual costs – upper and lower quartiles, and number of units (to which students can reasonably expect to have access) Private rental accommodation: average annual costs – upper and lower quartiles	Institution to provide to HEFCE	Institutional level	Academic year 2012-13
Financial support available from the institution: whether it offers a fee waiver; means-tested support; non means-tested support; National Scholarship Programme; and a link to more detailed information	Institution to provide to HEFCE, for courses that do not recruit through UCAS. For courses recruiting through UCAS data will be sourced from UCAS	Course level	Financial support etc/average fees planned for academic year 2013-14
Average fees (excluding fee waivers) per year by country of UK domicile			
Employment and salary information			
The destinations of graduates six months after completing their course – comprising working, studying, working and studying, unemployed, not available for work	HEFCE to draw six-month figures from the Destinations of Leavers from HE (DLHE) survey and 40-month figures from the Longitudinal DLHE survey	Course level or aggregated	2010-11 DLHE and 2010 Longitudinal DLHE results
Of those in employment, the proportion in managerial/professional jobs six months after graduation.			

Information	Source	Level	For the September 2012 KIS, information will relate to:
Salary data for those in full-time employment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upper quartile, median and lower quartile six months after graduation from the course at the institution displaying the KIS • regionally adjusted upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the subject across all institutions six months after graduation • regionally adjusted upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the subject across all institutions at 40 months after graduation 			
Students' union			
Satisfaction with the students' union	HEFCE to draw from the NSS (a question was added to the 2012 NSS about the students' union)	Institutional level	2012 NSS results

How did we decide what to include in the KIS?

14. The requirements for inclusion of information in the KIS, as outlined in HEFCE 2011/18, were based on the following research, consultation and pilot study:

- the views of 2,000 prospective and current students (collected during research in 2010 by Oakleigh Consulting and Staffordshire University)
- responses to the consultation HEFCE 2010/31
- four expert working groups considered specific parts of the KIS
- a pilot study with eight institutions
- user testing in late 2011 and early 2012 across England, Scotland and Wales with more than 200 prospective HE students.

More information can be found at:

www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/kis/kisresearchanddevelopment/

How KIS data are collated

15. Much of the information in the KIS is already available in a national and comparable form. The following items of information do not currently exist in a comparable form and will be supplied by HEIs and FECs:

- accreditation of the course, where applicable, for example by a professional body
- tuition fees
- average annual cost of accommodation that is sponsored or owned by the institution
- likely annual cost of private rental accommodation in the area
- percentage of the course spent in various learning and teaching activities
- how the course is assessed, for example, proportion of course work involved.

16. Data on tuition fees will be presented as an average of the maximum fee for each year of the course over the duration of the course. This figure will be explained, with the variations charged to students from other parts of the UK clearly shown.

17. The information on student satisfaction, employment and salary data, will be provided by the National Student Survey, and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey respectively.

18. On the new Unistats site users will be able to compare all the KIS data for courses offered by different universities and colleges.

19. On any page with data there is a link to “create a PDF report”. This report will contain all KIS data about a course or about a comparison of courses. Apart from the data, the report will include contact details of the institutions (as seen in the institution’s page), any notes (from the “your Unistats” section) and a couple of useful questions at the end of the document.

20. HEFCE is collating the information required to create the KIS in the first year, 2012. It is agreed that the Higher Education Statistics Agency will take over this role for HEIs and alternative providers of HE in subsequent years.

Development of the new official Unistats web-site

21. The Unistats web-site has been available since 2007, providing the opportunity to search and compare subject-based course information at different institutions. A new site will be launched from September 2012 that will have a different look and feel, and will present data in a substantially different and more user-friendly way. However, data from the NSS and DLHE will still form a major part of the site as a whole as well as the KIS. The new site will contain data at course level including entry qualifications, continuation rates and class of degree. There will no longer be data on postgraduate courses.

22. Originally, we indicated that the full KIS data should sit on the course pages of HEIs and FECs. This policy has been revised; now all KIS data will be available via the new Unistats web-site, and accessible via links from a widget on institutions’ course pages and as well as via links from UCAS Coursefinder.

23. The decision to hold all KIS data on a single web-site was made following user research and to reflect sector feedback that putting all 17 items on each course page would require significant redesign and was not practical. As a result it was agreed that each course page would include a KIS widget or KIS advertisement that would allow institutions to broadly maintain the integrity of their own course pages while ensuring that students see some comparable statistics for that course, and are directed to the remainder on Unistats via the widget.

24. By putting the KIS on a separate site we intend that there should be:

- a good user experience
- a consistent look and feel
- minimal duplication of effort for those providing data
- the potential for robust comparisons
- more data available to the public than before
- a central source of comparable statistics on HE courses.

25. The decision to continue to use the name Unistats for the site which is to hold the KIS data was made by the HE Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG), following user testing.

26. The new Unistats website will be launched in the week commencing 24 September 2012 and will replace the previous site at <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/> (the new site will also be accessible at this location). The site can also be accessed directly via the KIS widgets which will be embedded in the course web pages of universities and colleges. A search on most search engines will also lead users to the site. There will be links to the site from each course page within the UCAS Course Finder site (<http://coursefinder.ucas.com/CourseFinderWeb/search.htm>)

Accessing the full dataset on the site

27. Following the launch of the site in September, anyone who wishes to use the full dataset for their own applications will be able to access the data in one of two ways:

- a. Via an Application Programming Interface (API) allowing third party users to embed the data in their own sites or apps in real time (this means a direct connection to the Unistats site which will automatically update when Unistats updates).
- b. As an Extensible Markup Language (XML) download which will be updated on the same rolling schedule as the main site (this means that a new XML download will be made available every time the Unistats site updates, but there will be no direct connection with the Unistats site).

28. HEFCE will provide an update on the use of data, including full technical details of both dissemination methods, once our plans are finalised. Those wishing to use the full dataset will be able to access this via the Unistats site after the site goes live.

Institutions' web pages and the KIS widget

29. The KIS widget will present a small part of the full KIS data for a course. It will appear on HEI and FEC web-sites, on the relevant course web page. Guidance for institutions on how to embed the widget has now been published on the HESA web-site at:

www.hesa.ac.uk/includes/C12061_resources/Unistats_widget_user_guide.pdf

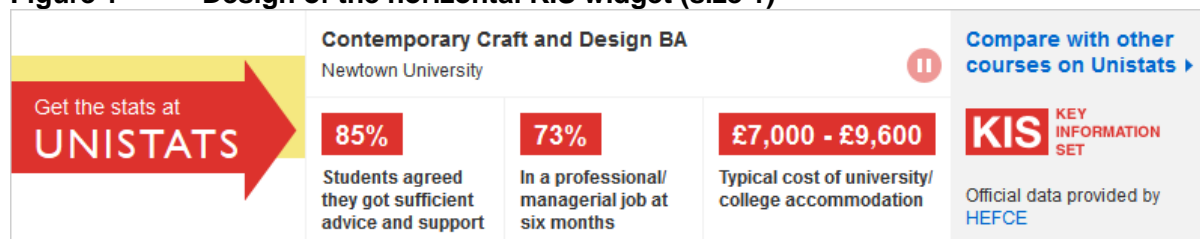
30. The KIS widget provides up to 10 pieces of information from the KIS dataset on a rotating basis and will display at least three of these items at a time. Users can pause the information at any time. Some courses will only have a partial KIS and won't be able to display some of the data, so the rolling items display what data there is from that list of 10 items.

The ten items are:

- are staff good at explaining things?
- have staff made the subject more interesting?
- overall satisfaction
- percentage at work or study after six months
- professional accreditation
- satisfaction with the support and guidance students received
- percentage in professional and managerial roles after six months
- accommodation costs
- percentage of scheduled learning and teaching activities
- percentage of coursework.

31. An example of the KIS widget is given below. Both a horizontal and a vertical version of the widget will be available in two sizes.

Figure 1 Design of the horizontal KIS widget (size 1)



32. Institutions will be able to begin including widgets on their web-sites from September 2012 when the new Unistats site is launched. We expect all institutions to have completed embedding widgets on all relevant course pages by 31 October.

33. To include the KIS widget on a course page an institution takes a small amount of generic script provided by HEFCE and tailors it to include the course identifier (as submitted through the KIS collection), then adds it to the page. The widget design and dimensions must not be changed by institutions.

34. The widget will update automatically every time the page is viewed, to provide the most up to date information. Having embedded the widgets, institutions will not normally need to update them even when data are updated on the central database.

Responsibility for publishing the KIS

35. A KIS will be produced for most undergraduate courses planned for 2013-14 for which students will be registered at HEIs or alternative providers of HE who subscribe to the QAA. FECs with their own student numbers (directly-funded) should produce a KIS for each course taken by these students (see below paragraph 38 for information about indirectly funded provision).

36. A KIS will not be produced for:

- a. Short courses (one year full-time equivalent or less).
- b. Courses delivered wholly overseas.
- c. 'Closed' courses. Closed courses are defined as those which are not open to all suitably qualified applicants, for example courses provided solely for the employees of particular companies.
- d. Postgraduate courses.

37. The KIS does not include postgraduate courses. Work is under way to establish the information needs of postgraduate taught students and the feasibility of a survey.

38. We expect a KIS for each course to be associated with the institution which recruits students to a course, regardless of whether the institution is funded directly by HEFCE or not. The principle is that students should be able to find information at the point of application. Take the example of an HE course at College Y that is funded by HEFCE via University X (referred to as 'indirectly funded'). The college recruits the students onto the course and the students are registered at University X. Here the widget will be shown on the course page on College Y's web-site. In this case University X will supply the data for College Y to HEFCE. If a course offered by College Y is directly funded by HEFCE, then College Y will be responsible for supplying the data and placing the widget on its course web page. Where College Y has its own and University X's students on the same course two widgets will be required. Therefore registering institutions should make their partners aware of their responsibilities in relation to the KIS (see paragraphs 81-83 of HEFCE 2011/18).

39. A KIS should be produced for full- and part-time courses at undergraduate level, including foundation degrees. Where a course is available both full- and part-time, one KIS should be provided that covers both. Where courses are available on a part-time basis only, or where separate programmes of study are offered for part-time cohorts, we would expect a KIS to be provided that includes part-time data only.

40. The final set of checked KIS data which institutions are supplying must be uploaded to the HEFCE extranet by 22 August 2012 and must be formally signed off by the head of the institution.

Updating the institution's data

41. Between 22 August and the new Unistats site launch date it will not be possible to make changes to an institution's data. However, after the launch it will once again be possible to make changes. We anticipate that the site will be updated weekly and we will issue guidance confirming this later in the year. There will be no charge for updating the data.

Publication thresholds and aggregation of data

42. Where NSS and DLHE data for a particular course fail to meet the publication thresholds², data will be aggregated in the following order until data that meet the thresholds are achieved:

- course level, most recent two years
- Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) subject level 3, most recent year
- JACS subject level 3, most recent two years
- JACS subject level 2, most recent year
- JACS subject level 2, most recent two years
- JACS subject level 1, most recent year
- JACS subject level 1, most recent two years.

43. The same publication thresholds are also applied to data shown on the widget. Publication thresholds will apply to the NSS, the DLHE survey, and student data sourced from the HESA student record and The Data Service's Individualised Learner Record (ILR). Where the data for a widget item do not meet these thresholds, even at JACS subject level 1 for the most recent two years, the items will not feature on the widget.

44. We do not expect the KIS to replace other information sources, or to be presented in isolation. The KIS is not intended to be definitive or to imply any contractual obligation on the part of the institution, but rather to be indicative, with some items, such as student satisfaction measures, based on retrospective data and some items, such as fees, being prospective. There will be links to more detailed information on an institution's web-site, and the user will be encouraged to contact the institution for further information.

45. The new Unistats web-site will explain how to use the KIS, listing sources of the information provided, guidance on how to interpret the information, and disclaimers. These guidelines will be subject to user testing, agreed with UUK and GuildHE, and discussed with the NUS before being published.

² The publication thresholds for the NSS are that 50 per cent of the eligible students must have responded and that these must represent at least 23 students. The publication thresholds for the DLHE differ in that the number of students covered by the indicator must be at least 22.5 FPE (a 50 per cent threshold is not applied). However, for salary information, at least 50 per cent of the relevant students (those who are employed full-time) must have given a salary. Thus, for salary data to be published, at least 22.5 students who are employed full-time must have given a salary, and these must represent at least 50 per cent of the students employed full-time. Finally, for data sourced from the HESA student record and The Data Service's ILR, a threshold of 22.5 students is applied.

Employment and salary data and professional accreditation

46. KIS and Unistats for 2012 will report the proportion of employed graduates in professional or managerial positions, defined as those in Standard Occupational Codes (SOC) 2000 major groups 1, 2 and 3: managers and senior officials, professional occupations, and associate professional and technical occupations. We will review this when the new version of the classification system (SOC 2010) is introduced in 2013.

47. Data users will still be able to request graduate employment data from HESA, which will continue to classify these according to the data user's preferred grouping of SOC codes, or any other job classification, such as the graduate and non-graduate job classification developed by the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick.

48. Following consultation in February 2010, the salary data to be presented in the KIS was agreed by HEPISG; nine pieces of data derived from the Destination of Leavers from HE survey will appear:

- upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the course at the institution of interest
- upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the subject across all institutions
- upper quartile, median and lower quartile for the subject across all institutions at 40 months (this figure derived from the Longitudinal DLHE survey).

49. These data are already available on the current Unistats web-site at subject level.

50. More information on professional accreditation and the KIS is available on the HESA web-site at www.hesa.ac.uk/C12061/PSRB_FAQ.html.

Alternative providers of higher education

51. Following the original consultation responses in June 2011, we took the view that there should be, as far as possible, a level playing field when it comes to providing accessible information about HE, and therefore it should be possible for alternative providers who need or wish to do so to provide KIS and other comparable information about HE for students.

52. Publicly funded HEIs and FECs, and all alternative providers who subscribe to the QAA, should make KIS widgets accessible via their web-site. The exceptions to this are listed in paragraph 36. They should also make available the wider information set³. QAA has now confirmed this in the updated version of the QAA handbook for institutional review, which was published in March 2012 and comes into force from the academic year 2012-13⁴.

53. We recognise that there are alternative providers of HE that subscribe to the QAA who do not currently participate in the NSS or the DLHE survey. As agreed with QAA through HESA, the production of some KIS data for September 2012 is possible. These data will be on: learning, teaching and assessment; professional body accreditation in place/planned for academic year

³ See www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/thewiderinformationset/

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/IR_Handbook_March12.pdf

2013/14; financial support and average fees planned for academic year 2013/14; and accommodation. We will work with alternative providers to ensure KISs submitted in 2012 in a standardised format, and will appear on both Unistats and alternative providers' web-sites.

54. Alternative providers will not be able to submit KISs with their own satisfaction or employment data if NSS or DHLE data are not available. Such data would not be comparable with those produced from the NSS or DLHE, and could therefore be confusing and subject to misinterpretation by prospective students.

55. Alternative providers that subscribe to the QAA are expected to move as quickly as possible towards taking part in the NSS and DHLE (which will involve their subscribing to HESA), with a view to publishing full KISs that will be comparable with those of other providers. These providers will have been contacted by QAA and HESA to discuss and agree timescales for providing a full KIS. They will also be able to provide data to ensure they are represented fully on the Unistats website.

56. HEFCE will confirm in late summer how much these alternative providers will be charged to take part in the NSS; this will be calculated on a cost-recovery basis, as is done for those who voluntarily take part in the NSS at the moment. Alternative providers who do not subscribe to QAA may also provide KISs and data for the Unistats web site. They should discuss the approach to achieving this with HESA in the first instance and would need to participate in the DLHE and NSS to provide a full KIS.

Internal and external quality assurance and the KIS

57. Institutions will be responsible for assuring the quality of their KIS data. Due to the volume of data and the frequency with which it can change, they will not undergo the same verification that is commonplace with other HESA data. Instead, HEFCE or HESA will supply institutions with summary reports of the data, and institutions will have the opportunity to preview the data that will appear on the KIS before sign-off. In all cases the final data set must be formally signed off by the head of the institution to assure its accuracy. A similar sign-off will be required for any subsequent updates.

58. The QAA's Institutional Review method, introduced from the start of 2011-12, reviews the academic quality and standards in higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. Following consultation⁵, it was agreed that, from academic year 2012-13, a new judgement will be introduced on the information that institutions publish. Until that point the information that HEIs publish would continue to be subject to a comment in Institutional Review but not a judgement. The new method for the review of HE in FECs will operate on similar lines to Institutional Review.

59. Following consultation and discussion it was agreed that, from academic year 2012-13:

- a. The Institutional Review will include the following judgement: 'The quality of the information produced by the institution about its learning opportunities is

⁵ HEFCE 2009/47

commended/meets national expectations/requires improvement to meet national expectations/does not meet national expectations’.

b. The revised QAA Institutional Review handbook, published in March 2012, clarifies how each of the judgement grades will be determined⁶.

c. A judgement on information on the same basis will be included in the new arrangements for the review of HE in FECs from 2012-13. These will replace the existing process of Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review which ceases this year. The handbook for the review of HE in FECs will be published in July 2012.

d. The Expectation that UK higher education providers are required to meet concerning information about higher education provision is set out in Part C of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education⁷. It also sets out Indicators of sound practice, with accompanying explanations, which suggest ways in which HE providers might demonstrate that they are meeting the Expectation.

e. The focus of the new judgement will therefore be whether HE providers meet the Expectation set out in Part C as to whether they ‘produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy’. Significantly, Part C is not primarily concerned with the mechanisms used to produce information, nor the media chosen to communicate it. It also recognises that providers need to take responsibility for meeting legislative and other regulatory requirements, including those set by the funding councils. It recognises that differences in mission, size, organisational structure, range of provision and the nature of the student body will determine a provider's intended audiences and the preferred means of communicating information. The information considered by QAA reviewers will therefore be much broader than the KIS (although this will be an important factor as detailed in the Institutional Review Handbook*), or even the wider information set mentioned in paragraph 52. Furthermore, reviewers are not expected to make a judgment on the statistical accuracy of the detailed information in the KIS (much of which is subject to other data audit methods). Consideration of the KIS and WIS will therefore be in the context of whether the institution’s information is produced in line with this Quality Code Expectation.

Next steps

60. As specified in HEFCE circular letter 04/2012 universities and colleges must upload all requested data onto the HEFCE extranet by 22 August 2012. A site preview will be made available to universities and colleges, as well as some private companies wishing to use the dataset under embargo in the week commencing 17 September 2012. The new Unistats web-site will go live in the week commencing 24 September 2012. Widgets must be made available on institutions’ web-sites by 31 October 2012.

Evaluation and review

61. An evaluation will commence in autumn 2012. It will seek to determine the practical success of Unistats and the KIS in their early stages. It will cover:

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/IR_Handbook_March12.pdf

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-C.aspx

- the user experience of the KIS widget, the KIS and the new Unistats web-site
- whether the process from HE providers' perspectives can be improved on
- an audit of the data provided by institutions.

List of abbreviations

DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
FEC	Further education college
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEPISG	Higher Education Public Information Steering Group
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System
KIS	Key Information Set(s)
NSS	National Student Survey
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SOC	Standard Occupational Codes
UUK	Universities UK
XML	Extensible Markup Language