



Department
for Education

Higher Education Statistics Agency: de-designation

Government consultation response

October 2022

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Introduction

Background

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is the designated data body (DDB) under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). The DDB compiles and publishes appropriate information relating to registered higher education providers and the higher education courses they provide. It makes the information available in an appropriate form and manner to the OfS, UK Research and Innovation and the Secretary of State. HESA has announced that it is exploring a merger with Jisc¹, and that if the merger goes ahead, HESA staff and assets would transfer to Jisc and HESA would, in time, cease to exist.

It is not possible under HERA to transfer designation between bodies. As a result, if the merger goes ahead, HESA would need to be removed as the DDB. To ensure that there are no interruptions to data services, concurrent removal of HESA's designation and designation of a new body would be essential.

Under paragraph 5(4) of Schedule 6 to HERA, the Secretary of State is required to consult before removing the designation of a DDB, even in a situation where the body consents to such de-designation (and may cease to exist in the future). The consultation which took place between 14 June and 10 July 2022 therefore sought views on the de-designation of HESA in the event that it merges with Jisc. A separate consultation was carried out by the OfS² on the suitability of Jisc as the new DDB.

The Secretary of State may remove the designation of the DDB if:

- (a) the Secretary of State is satisfied that removing the designation would be appropriate, or
- (b) the DDB consents to the removal of the designation.

HESA therefore requested that the Secretary of State undertake a consultation on de-designation in the event that the merger goes ahead as planned. While HESA has not provided a formal notification of its consent to the removal of its DDB designation, it has indicated that such consent would be forthcoming in the event that:

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/17-02-2022/hesa-and-jisc-explore-merger> More information on Jisc and its activities can be found at <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

² [Consultation on the suitability of Jisc as the designated data body - Office for Students](#)

- (a) the consultation supports the removal of HESA as DDB;
- (b) the separate OfS consultation recommends the appointment of Jisc as DDB; and
- (c) HESA is content that all processes and actions necessary to secure the transfer of its operations to Jisc have been undertaken.

Based on the context above, we made one proposal in our consultation: that, if HESA merges with Jisc as intended, the designation of HESA as the DDB under HERA should be removed. This document outlines the government's response to the consultation and our plans for the de-designation of HESA.

Who was this for

The consultation was shared with a range of stakeholders including;

- Registered higher education providers
- Persons representing, or promoting the interests of, students on higher education courses provided by registered higher education providers
- Persons representing, or promoting the interests of, employers of graduates
- The OfS

Consultation period

The public consultation ran from 13 June to 10 July 2022. We published our proposal online, alongside a survey for respondents to complete. Responses could be submitted via the government's online consultation portal, or by email or post.

Summary of responses received and the government's response

The consultation generated a total of five responses: four responses through Citizen Space, our online consultation platform, and one response submitted by email.

Of the five responses received, three were from registered higher education providers, one was from an individual, and one was from an organisation representing registered higher education providers.

All responses that answered the question or provided comments on the proposal were considered.

Main findings from the consultation

There was broad support for our proposal – the majority of respondents (80%) agreed that if HESA merges with Jisc as intended, the designation of HESA as the dedicated data body (DDB) under HERA should be removed.

Question analysis & government response

Question 1

Do you agree that the designation of HESA as the Designated Data Body for higher education in England should be removed, on this basis set out in the consultation?

80% of respondents agreed that if HESA merges with Jisc as intended, the designation of HESA as the DDB under HERA, should be removed.

	Total	Percent
Yes	4	80%
No	1	20%

Those who agreed and provided comments emphasised their trust in HESA as the DDB. However, they reasoned that, if the merger is to go ahead with Jisc, they see no other organisations capable of taking on this task with the same level of confidence and support from the sector. They are confident Jisc is the right organisation going forward to undertake the DDB role, due to their track record for delivering high quality products and services to the sector.

They also flagged the importance of HE data functions remaining independent from the OfS and government, and that data continue to be available to individual higher education providers following any merger.

The one individual respondent who disagreed queried the advantages of this proposal, raising concerns about the costs associated with this.

Whilst we note this concern, it is the government's view that there needs to be an effective DDB in place, one which has the confidence of, and support from, the regulator and the HE sector. The costs of the merger (which in any event are expected to be minimal) do not override the need for continuity in the performance of the relevant data functions, and therefore the need for this de-designation to take place.

Next steps

Following consideration of the responses to the consultation proposal, the Secretary of State has decided that he will remove the designation of HESA as DDB under the HERA if HESA merges with Jisc as intended.

Please note that HESA has not yet given its formal consent to the removal of its designation. If no such consent is received and HESA does not merge with Jisc, we would not expect to progress with the de-designation of HESA.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded to the consultation

- Guild HE
- Open University



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