



**Consultation paper**

Proposals for changing the methodology for the Open University allocation, from a wholly English institution to English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh institutions depending on the location of campus.

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## **Executive Summary**

1. The Statistics and Research Branch, a Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) branch within the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), is responsible for the publication of National and Official Statistics regarding higher education in Northern Ireland.
2. There are currently three National Statistics publications that the Department is responsible for regarding Enrolments, Qualifications and Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education. These are governed by the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.
3. While adhering to the Code, and in particular the Principles relating to meeting user needs (Principle 1) and the use of administrative sources for statistical purposes (Protocol 3) both the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and DEL have identified changes that could be made to make data more transparent and representative. HESA have made these changes and DEL also plan on making the same changes in line with HESA.
4. Within the Code, the Protocol on User Engagement (Protocol 1) requires all changes to a National Statistic to be subjected to a public consultation.
5. In compliance with this Protocol, DEL are initiating an official consultation process relating to a change in the Open University allocation from the old methodology where the OU was considered a wholly English institution, to the new methodology where the OU is split into English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh institutions depending on which campus the student is identified as having attended.
6. This proposal suggests that we change methodologies to split the allocation of OU into country of campus, in line with the HESA allocation.
7. DEL proposes that these new arrangements be introduced for the Enrolments and Qualifications 2014/15 publications in February 2016.
8. **You are invited to provide feedback on this proposal no later than 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015.**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Statistics and Research Branch, a Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) branch within the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), is responsible for the publication of National and Official Statistics regarding higher education in Northern Ireland.

1.2 There are currently three National Statistics publications that the Department is responsible for regarding Enrolments, Qualifications and Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education. These are governed by the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

1.3 National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from political interference.

1.4 NISRA requires all data series produced as National Statistics to comply with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. In particular the Code's Protocol on User Engagement requires DEL to undertake a user consultation outlining the proposed changes to methodology; the rationale for such proposals and the consequences of any change upon the existing data series.

1.5 The UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics can be found at the web link below:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/report-2.pdf>

1.6 The proposal suggests that we change the methodology for the Open University allocation, from a wholly English institution to English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh institutions depending on the location of campus.

## **2. Current methodology for the allocation of enrolment, qualification and destination activity at the Open University**

2.1 The current methodology for the allocation of Open University students was used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) until the 2013/14 academic year, and therefore was the approach adopted by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

2.2 Currently, in DEL publications, all Open University (OU) student enrolments and qualifications are counted as being within England, where the OU has its administrative centre.

2.3 This has been a long standing approach, as the allocation of an institution to a geographical region is done by reference to the administrative centre of that institution. As the Open University has its administrative centre in England it was counted as a wholly English institution even though it teaches throughout the UK.

### **3. Proposed change in the methodology**

3.1 From 2013/14, HESA have changed the allocation of Open University (OU) students to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, depending on location of the student's campus. This means that enrolments and qualifications registered at one of the OU's national centres in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will now contribute to the totals of those countries, where statistics are shown by country of provider.

3.2 In line with the change introduced by HESA for 2013/14 data, the Department proposes to change to the new HESA methodology, where enrolments and qualifications at any of the OU's national centres will be attributed to the country in which the campus is located, such as NI, rather than England.

3.3 Table 1 compares the current and proposed methodologies for OU allocation, which shows the impact of the change on the number of students counted as enrolled at NI Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):

**Table 1: Enrolments at Northern Ireland HEIs by mode of study and institution – 2013/14 (Current methodology and proposed methodology)**

Mode	Institution	Current Methodology	Proposed Methodology
Full-time	QUB	17,020	17,020
	UU	18,650	18,650
	Stranmillis	970	970
	St Mary's	865	865
	OU	-	0
	Total	37,505	37,505
Part-time	QUB	6,300	6,300
	UU	7,555	7,555
	Stranmillis	555	555
	St Mary's	345	345
	OU	-	4,135
	Total	14,755	18,890
Total	QUB	23,320	23,320
	UU	26,200	26,200
	Stranmillis	1,525	1,525
	St Mary's	1,210	1,210
	OU	-	4,135
	Total	52,260	56,395

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

\*Impact of the change is highlighted in light blue.

#### **4. Rationale for the change in methodology**

4.1 The proposed change will more accurately reflect activity for the OU in our statistics, with enrolment and qualification figures reflecting the region in which an OU campus is located.

4.2 The proposed new change will have both advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages:

- Students at the OU in Northern Ireland can now be counted as part of NI HEI enrolment and qualification statistics when previously they would have been counted as part of those in England.
- The proposed new change in methodology will enable continuity of data between DEL and HESA, where all figures published by both will be comparable.
- This will make quality assurance measures (discussed in Principle 4 of the Code) easier, as we will be able to check our figures directly against those produce by HESA.

Disadvantages:

- The change in the methodology will result in a break in the time series data on enrolments and qualifications provided by DEL, so data will not be comparable with previous years.

#### **5. Impact of the change in methodology**

5.1 The change in methodology will bring us into line with the approach used by HESA and ensure the continuity of methodology and statistical outputs between DEL and HESA. It will also provide a more accurate count of the students at NI HEIs.

5.2 Confidence in our statistics could be compromised if DEL were reporting figures that were different to those provided by HESA. This could cause confusion for some of our customers and may raise uncertainty about the reliability of the figures we produce.

5.3 The change in methodology will not impact on the statistics DEL produce for NI domiciled enrolments, qualifications or destinations of leavers at UK institutions; however it would have an impact on the figures relating to enrolments, qualifications or destinations of students at NI HEIs (See Table 1). It will result in an increase in the count of part time students at NI HEIs, which will also increase the overall student total.

5.4 To overcome the initial discontinuity in data for NI HEIs we plan to provide historical time series tables and charts using the new OU allocation methodology in our 2014/15 bulletins starting in February 2016. We will also provide some tables using the old OU allocation methodology to facilitate comparisons.