

Redevelopment and audit of HE data collection – IRU Response

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) supports the Australian Government’s proposed efforts to improve the efficiency and quality of the Higher Education Data Collection. We recommend careful consideration of the costs and timeframe required for implementing these changes, some of which lack detail. Some of the reporting requirements overlap with the admissions transparency requirements, which should determine the data collected.

1. Single touch reporting

Single touch reporting makes sense in principle, reducing time lags associated with reporting. However, it is unclear how this system will interact with student records and how data will be verified. The data corrections and verifications processes must be designed to avoid placing new burdens on universities.

Any move to single touch reporting will also require universities to have sufficient time for implementation.

2. Identifying students

The proposed Unique Student Identifier (USI), replacing the CHESSN and integrated with the existing VET student identifier, will further improve data quality. IRU universities enrol a high proportion of mature age students and others from non-traditional educational pathways, across a range of short and long term educational programs. Longitudinal student data will facilitate improved understanding of education pathways and life-long learning.

3. Reducing duplication

The discontinuation of Department of Human Services reporting is sensible but requires the proposed single touch reporting system to be implemented effectively.

4. Relevance

The removal of most of the 30 elements identified from the collection will improve the quality of the data collection.

The parental attainment variables (elements 573 and 574) should be retained. They are no longer required for calculating Socio Economic Status (SES), but they remain simple and reliable measures for identifying “first in family” students. This remains an important measure for higher education participation and equity.

The case to use the Collection for Work Integrated Learning identifiers is weak. The nature of the data required for greater understanding of how WIL operates is too complex to be covered in this way. Work Integrated Learning encompasses a wide range of activities of different durations and purposes across different academic fields of education. WIL data collection should follow discussion about what information is relevant and the most viable way to collect it, including exploring alternative methods of data collection, such as representative survey sampling.

5. Low quality data

5.1 Overseas student fees

The current approach produces unreliable and poor quality data. However, the proposed approach may lead to invalid results, particularly in courses where students study a combination of units with different cost bands. As written, the proposal appears to envisage entering the cost of the whole degree program rather than the annual charge. Any new measure should be fit for the purpose of measuring one year of study for an overseas student.

5.2 Misreporting “no information” location codes

It is not viable to remove “no information” location codes. Many students do not know their long term address at time of enrolment such that “no information” is a valid response. Removing the “no information” option would lead to higher item response, but poorer quality data.

5.3 Course and campus names

A clearly articulated, agreed standard for reporting of course and campus names would improve data. This would require national coordination. The assumption that every student belongs primarily to one campus is also incorrect for many students.

5.4 Credit transfer arrangements

The IRU supports the review for fitness-for-purpose, consistency and interpretability of credit transfer data, including a removal of reporting requirements, assuming the integrated VET and Higher education USI provides data on students’ educational pathways to higher education.

5.5 Highest Participation prior to commencement

The IRU supports the review’s aims for ensuring consistent data reporting on prior education and notes that this data reporting overlaps with admissions transparency requirements.

5.6 Campus submission

The IRU supports the removal of the incomplete data reporting for courses and campuses, and the government’s review of this information. The current campus submission data reporting overlaps with the admissions transparency requirements. Until the purpose of this data is clarified, we recommend that course related information remains an institutional responsibility.

5.7 Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)

The admissions transparency requirements address the provision of ATAR and selection rank data, and define for which students the data is relevant. The student data collection should be driven by this process.

General feedback

The Australian higher education sector reports comprehensive and high quality data to the Government, but the benefits of this data to higher education institutions, researchers, students and stakeholders is not fully realised. The completeness and useability does not meet the standards offered by the VOCSTATS data cube currently administered by the NCVER.

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