KEY INFORMATION SET (KIS) TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT (TLA) DATA

From 2012, all HE institutions are required by HEFCE to publish a Key Information Set (KIS) for every undergraduate programme. This initiative was required by the Government as part of the shift in funding arrangements, with the intention of allowing prospective students to compare programmes in different institutions. The key areas of student satisfaction, employment and salary data are collected centrally by HESA and HEFCE. The University needs to provide details of accommodation costs, fees, students' union information and course information. **This document is concerned with our obligation to collect and submit data on the teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) patterns for each of our undergraduate programmes.** Despite the large effort that is involved, we have no alternative but to provide the data and to ensure that our submission is as accurate and informative as possible.

These Guidance Notes are presented in FAQ format, based on our interpretation of the information provided by HESA and the results of workshop discussion sessions held with Programme Leaders. Background papers, the presentation used in those workshops and links to detailed technical advice are available in the KIS section of the Teaching and Learning Intranet Community.

Contents (press CTRL-Home to return to this list)

1. How will the Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) data be presented?

The key TLA indicators that we need to provide are quite simple, but obtaining the data to calculate them is not. Firstly, we need to report the proportions of time spent by students in each stage of each programme in scheduled activities ('contact hours'), guided independent learning, and placements. Secondly, we need to report the proportion of each stage that is assessed by written examinations, coursework, or practical assessment.

The KIS is accessible via a 'widget' on the extranet page for each course page, so that it is highly visible to prospective students. Links to the KIS data for each programme will also be provided on the UCAS site and other websites.. Note that we have the opportunity to add an explanatory narrative or link to other information that can be accessed by students from the 'headline' statistics.

2. How are the proportions of contact time and assessment format determined for each programme?

It is important to remember that the key TLA figures are a 'snapshot' of what an average student in a particular stage of a programme can expect to experience. Many programmes have a choice of optional or elective modules; however, **the KIS return will be based only on the core modules and the most popular optional modules in each stage**. A Unit-E report will identify the actual module choices of students in the current academic year, for each stage of each programme. The top 120 credits worth of modules in each stage will be surveyed for the KIS return. It was originally thought that we would need to survey all modules, but by pre-filtering we have reduced the number of modules surveyed from over 3000 to around 1400. Despite this reduction, the KIS requires collection and checking of a very large dataset and many members of academic staff will need to be involved. Some modules will feature in the KIS for two or more programmes. Some programmes also include core zero-credit modules (e.g. placement preparation or scheduled stage activities that are shared among different programmes) and data for these will also be collected.

Although actual student choices in 2013-14 are used to determine which modules are surveyed, **the KIS return will be based on the TLA activities for programmes that will be on offer for 2015/16 onwards.** Special arrangements are made for estimating activities in the future stages of new programmes.

3. What is the mechanism for collecting the data?

The web form used during the 2013/14 KIS collection will be re-activated and populated with the most current data. This will be available from **2nd April 2014** when Module Leaders will be able to update, amend or add module related information. Relevant Programme Leaders and key staff (as requested by the Head of School) will also have read only access to the forms and should check them to ensure consistency of approach, advising adjustment of returns in collaboration with Module Leaders where necessary. Activities that take place at programme level will be collected separately from Programme Leaders (see #14, below)**. All forms must be completed and checked by Schools, not later than 31st May 2014.** [Further details of the checking process will be notified when the forms are issued].

The KIS returns will then be processed by Corporate Information Services and summary data in the form required by HESA will be sent to Heads of School for checking and approval. Any necessary adjustments can be made at this stage. **All KIS returns must be finalised by 30th June**, so they can be transmitted to HESA and validated in July-August, prior to publication on our website.

4. Why can't I see a web form for my module(s)?

As noted in #2, we only need to survey core modules and the most populated optional modules in a particular stage of a programme. Some modules may have large numbers of students, but not reach the threshold for a specific programme.

5. How will the data be collected in Partner Colleges?

For 2014/15, KIS data for franchised provision (our Partner Colleges) will again be returned by the teaching institution; however, as the registering institution we will still have the responsibility of ensuring this has been completed.

6. Why can't the data be obtained from existing sources?

Unfortunately, we cannot use timetabling data directly because there are many contact hours that are not centrally timetabled or accurately recorded; these include project supervision meetings, some aspects of field work, one-to-one contact (e.g. personal tutorials and dissertation supervision) and some types of virtual activities (see #7.) Secondly, we need a breakdown of the proportions of each programme that are assessed by examination, coursework or practical. The current Definitive Module Records and Unit-E records are not sufficiently accurate to provide these data, especially as the nature of assessments can vary in different years and some 'coursework' elements such as in-module tests are actually examinations using HESA/QAA definitions. The only way that we can collect the data is via the relevant Module and Programme Leaders. Issues connected with classification of scheduled activities and assessment modes are discussed further in #7 and #22.

7. What counts as 'Scheduled Learning and Teaching' in a module?

All centrally timetabled hours, together with locally scheduled activities, should be entered onto the data entry form, classified into the categories defined by HESA. We must calculate the percentage of the student's time for the stage of a programme that is spent in scheduled learning and teaching activities. Clearly, this will include all timetabled sessions that students are expected to attend in the relevant modules. This should be readily available, since at the time the KIS data is required, Module Leaders will have recently completed their planning requests for the 2014-15 timetables, and/or completed the information for the 2013/14 KIS submission. **The significant**

change for 2013/14 was that Work Based learning no longer sits within scheduled hours, but has been moved to sit within Placements and there are no new changes for KIS 2014. The activities recognised by HESA are defined on their website and these definitions will be provided by a mouse hover box on the web form.

Types of scheduled activities

Lecture
Seminar
Tutorial
Project supervision
Demonstration
Practical classes and workshops
Supervised time in studio/workshop
Fieldwork
External visits

There may be many other scheduled learning activities that are not shown on the central timetables. All programmes will have activities that are locally scheduled as they involve one-to-one or small group meetings with students, held in staff offices or locally managed meeting rooms. Other examples include directly supervised work in studios or workshops, or demonstration of techniques or equipment usage by technicians (e.g. for a science or technology project). Due to their nature**,** it is not possible to timetable such activities using Syllabus Plus. **Although the exact timing of such meetings is usually not known in advance, it is essential that they can be shown to be 'scheduled'.** It is suggested that Module Leaders identify this by a section in the module guidance document published on TuLiP. An example might be –
"In addition to activities that appear on your published timetable, the following activities in this module will be scheduled and notified to you via e-mail or announcement on the TuLiP module site:

- *3 x 1.0 hour small group meetings with your personal tutor*
- *3 x 0.5 hour individual meetings with your personal tutor*
- *2 hours techniques workshop with technical staff before starting your project"*

There was some debate in the KIS discussion sessions about the problems of recording of 'office hours' or 'drop-in surgeries' as scheduled time, since not all students would be able to take advantage of office hours available for very large modules. However, in accordance with the HESA guidelines, **if there are designated times when staff are available for consultation about one particular module at a pre-specified time, this should be entered under the 'tutorial' category.**

8. Can 'virtual' activities be recorded as contact time?

The QAA guidance notes that "Contact time may also take a virtual rather than face-to-face form, through the use of email, email discussion groups, virtual learning environments (VLEs) and other technology-aided means." This area provoked a variety of opinions during the discussion workshops. **We recommend that virtual activities should only be recorded as 'scheduled contact' if they are clearly scheduled for a group of students at a specific time**. Examples might include online discussions such as an interactive webinar or a Twitter discussion with a group that takes place at a set time. We concluded that provision of learning materials via TuLiP or general e-mail correspondence with students should be regarded as support rather than contact time. In any case, although the total time that staff take in corresponding with numerous students may be considerable, the 'contact' that each individual student receives on a particular module through this route is likely to be very small and would be very difficult to quantify in an audit trail. **Remember that we are measuring student contact time that, not staff time.**

9. What is 'guided independent study'?

In higher education, students are expected to be responsible for their own learning, with appropriate support being provided by staff. Scheduled learning and teaching activities occur alongside time in which **students are expected to study independently, *guided* by information** in the programme handbook, module guidance documents (including learning outcomes), reading lists, TuLiP announcements, library workbooks, learning development study guides etc. For the KIS return, 'guided independent study' is recorded as the number of hours remaining after accounting for the scheduled activities (and placements, if they occur within a module.) The data entry form will calculate this automatically, based on the credit rating of the module (see #14). For example, if the scheduled activities for a 20-credit module total 45 hours, the data form will enter (200-45) = 155 hours as independent study.

Guided independent study includes preparation for scheduled sessions, follow-up work, wider reading or practice, completion of assessment tasks, revision, etc. The relative amounts of time that students are expected to spend engaged in scheduled activities and guided independent study will vary considerably in different modules and programmes. Distance learning will generally be recorded as guided independent study. Although these activities do not need to be recorded separately on the KIS return, module teams may consider including advice on recommended allocation of study time in the module guidance document.

10. How are placements and work-based learning recorded?

The term placement covers learning that takes place through an organised work opportunity, rather than in the University or Partner College. Some supervision or monitoring is likely be involved, and may be carried out either by a member of staff or a mentor within the host organisation. Students might undertake placements individually or in groups, depending on the nature of the workplace and the learning involved. Teaching placements in medical, nursing and education courses should be treated as placements. Where the total number of hours on placement exceeds 10 hours per credit, the total number of hours should be capped at this level. **Any additional hours should then be added to the programme level summary.**

To be recorded in the KIS return, placements must be taken by at least 50% of students. This is most likely to apply when there is a compulsory placement for a particular stage, and this will be evident from the Unit-E reports. **The proportion of a stage taken as placement is recorded separately**.

Work-based learning is defined as a structured academic programme controlled by the University or Partner College, and delivered in the workplace by academic staff of the institution, staff of the employer, or both. HESA notes that "it must be subject to the same level of academic supervision and rigour as any other form of assessed learning. It includes: the imparting of relevant knowledge and skills to students; opportunities for students to discuss knowledge and skills with their tutors; and assessment of students' acquisition of knowledge and skills by the institution's academic staff, and perhaps jointly with an employer. Work-based Learning should be regarded as substituting for learning that under other circumstances would normally take place within the institution." Therefore, **work-based learning should now be returned under the 'placements' heading**.

11. How many study hours should there be in modules and programmes?

HESA expect the KIS returns to be based on the notional learning hours of 10 hours per academic credit (e.g. 100 hours for a 10 credit module, 200 hours for a 20 credit module and 1200 hours per stage). This Includes scheduled activities, personal study (for example, preparation for scheduled sessions, reading, preparation for assignment tasks, revision etc.), and group activities not involving staff contact.

It is very important that we provide clear advice to students about how much time they are expected to spend studying outside scheduled learning and teaching sessions. The workshop discussions revealed that there is some variation of practice in this respect. Most programmes have teaching and learning in the Autumn and Spring Terms, with the Summer Term usually devoted to revision and examination; this produces an expected workload of about 36 hours per week during term time. However, some programmes have more intensive periods of teaching, e.g. modules that are taught and assessed within a single term. The development of the student: staff partnership agreements provide an ideal opportunity to make expectations clear to students prior to enrolment, during induction, and throughout the course. This should be emphasised in programme handbooks, liaison and tutorial meetings.

12. Should there be a set proportion of contact hours?

There is no 'right answer' to this question! Programmes will vary enormously in the proportion of scheduled contact versus independent study. The QAA has produced two guidance reports on contact hours (Guidance for Institutions and Guidance for Students). This news release from QAA provides a very succinct summary of the difficulties with the key ; including the key statement that "The idea that more contact time equals better value for money is not necessarily true". This quote from a Russell Group news release would apply to us all: "The notion of 'scheduled learning' or 'study hours' does not fully capture these additional opportunities to seek guidance from tutors, the fact that different disciplines evolve different ways of learning that are appropriate to the subject, nor the quality and diversity of the student experience."

Some programmes with external accreditation or professional body requirements may already have guidelines for contact time in place. We will not know how we compare with other universities offering similar programmes until publication of the KIS in September.

We have no way of predicting how prospective students will assess the contact hours data (or any other KIS elements) when comparing courses at different institutions. Some students might favour high contact hours as 'value for money'; others might prefer programmes with more independent learning; whilst many prospective students will need to balance their scheduled contact time with work or family commitments. No-one knows how they will weigh up these factors. Comments on the balance between contact hours and independent learning should be made in the supporting text for each programme (e.g. highlighting progressive development of independent learning as a student moves through the different stages of the course.)

Our discussion workshops reached a key conclusion: **scheduled activities should not be artificially overstated or increased from the current pattern; however, we must make every effort to consider and record all contact that can be legitimately classed as contact time.**

13. Is there any way of knowing what other universities are doing?

As this is the third year of KIS it is possible to view other universities results. Please access the UNISTATS website for further information Many other universities provide considerably more information about the content and delivery of individual modules on their internet pages than we currently provide. Teaching & Learning Committee have approved changes to the module record forms that are being phased in during the coming academic year. Definitive information (aims, learning outcomes and requirements for passing the module) will be accompanied by fuller descriptions of the module content and details of TLA, that can be updated annually and clearly visible to both current and prospective students. A database system for linking the module information to extranet programme pages is under development. There is a preview period available between 12th and 22nd August 2014 – access details will be circulated when available.

14. How should programme activities that fall outside of modules be recorded?

There are many examples of scheduled learning activities that are organised across stages of a programme rather than associated with a specific module. Examples include induction sessions; stage or programme meetings with all students; personal tutor meetings that are not linked to modules; group feedback meetings; guest lectures or presentations; learning development or library skills sessions; careers fairs, employer presentations, FLUX or other employability sessions; external visits; and pre-placement preparation. **These should be recorded as contact hours, under the appropriate category, provided that they are scheduled and that all students could be expected to attend them as part of the learning for the programme.**

Some of these activities may be timetabled centrally because they have been linked to a core module or to a zero-credit module shared by several programmes; in this case, they may be returned as part of the module data. Other activities may not appear in the student's Syllabus Plus timetable, For example, a programme might have a programme of external talks or exhibitions and expect students to attend a certain number of these. Or, a programme might organise a careers exhibition day and tell students that they are expected to attend for two hours at a time that suits them. Such activities should be noted as additional scheduled 'contact' expectations in the Programme Handbook.

For the KIS return, **Programme Leaders will be asked to record the programme-level activities separately on a simple spreadsheet** and these will be factored into the calculations for the proportions of scheduled and independent learning.

15. Why is it important for data entry to be accurate?

Although they are 'snapshots' for a typical student's experience on a programme, it is **essential that the KIS statements are derived from sound and verifiable data.** It is likely that our calculations would be audited by QAA (for example, if students they meet during a visit raise concerns about the accuracy of information.) Commercial organizations running comparison websites might well use

Freedom of Information requests to require us to show how figures have been calculated, and students might justifiably complain if published expectations are not met. Therefore, **it is essential that centrally timetabled hours match the real situation and that locally organised or virtual contact time is a reasonable estimate appropriate to the culture of your discipline or School, and is effectively communicated to students.**

16. What documentary evidence should be used to support the KIS data?

All modules should produce a module guidance note, updated annually and posted on TuLiP. **It is recommended that all Module Leaders produce module guidance notes that record module learning activities and assessments, using the standard terminology defined by QAA/HESA.**

Further development of this approach would see enhanced module information (including the key KIS TLA elements for all modules) posted on our extranet. This is already done by competitor institutions and is likely be increasingly important for recruitment, see #12. Programme Handbooks should contain a summary of these data, with further explanation of programme-level activities. Further guidance on this from T&L Committee will be necessary after publication of QAA Quality Code on Information about HE provision.

17. How does provision of KIS data relate to preparation of the timetable with Syllabus Plus?

The University's system for completing module requests for teaching sessions via online Module Delivery Sheets is designed to improve planning and ensure that students receive an accurate timetable before the start of term. Module Leaders should have prepared a draft of their module guidance document for the coming year and based their timetabling requests on this. This should ensure congruence between the timetable and KIS Data. Students' online timetables contain a note emphasising that not all sessions appear on the central timetable and that other activities (especially individual or small group meetings) may be scheduled locally by module or programme teams. Students will be told that it is essential to check TuLiP sites and e-mail communications.

18. How does the KIS return relate to staff workload?

It doesn't – remember that we are measuring student contact time that, <u>not</u> staff time! Effective course design employing technology-assisted approaches and virtual contact is encouraged as a way of stimulating independent learning. A large part of the role of an academic staff member will be concerned with development of learning materials, informal guidance, assessment and feedback, which can never be measured by contact hours. **It is essential to recognize that scheduled contact hours are <u>not</u> a reflection of staff workload.**

19. What happens if students study abroad?

If at least 50% of students on a programme undertake study overseas for all or part of a year, this will be recorded in the 'placement category'. This is most likely to apply when there is compulsory study abroad for a particular stage, and this will be evident from the Unit-E reports. Where only part of the year is studied abroad it will be weighted accordingly in determining the learning and teaching methods for the year. On the KIS website, this will appear as 'Placement/study abroad'.

20. How are the different forms of assessment classified?

Assessments must be classified as written examinations, coursework or practical. A brief description is given below; see the QAA Guidance for more details.

Examinations: It is important to be clear about the definition of 'written examinations' used by HESA. These are "… a question or set of questions relating to a particular area of study. Written exams usually occur at the end of a period of learning and assess whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes. They may be 'seen', where the student is aware in advance of the question(s) they are expected to answer, or 'unseen', where the questions are only revealed 'on the day'. In an 'open-book' exam, a student is allowed to use a selection of reference materials during the assessment. The questions asked as part of a written exam may be essay, short answer, problem or multiple-choice. Written exams usually (but not always) take place under timed conditions." **Thus, the KIS return for 'Written Examinations' must include both exams that are formally scheduled by Examinations Office and 'in class tests' that are taken under exam conditions.** This creates a major difficulty for many modules, because 'in class tests' are classified in our Academic Regulations as 'coursework' (a legacy of the semester system). This gives the potential of a major mismatch between information published externally via the KIS and the Definitive Module Records and other external and internal documents. **This issue is currently being addressed by the assessment Working Group of T&L Committee and requires urgent resolution.**

Coursework: Types of coursework defined by HESA include:

Written assignment, including essay

Report – a description, summary or other account of an experience or activity

Dissertation – an extended piece of written work, often the write-up of a final-year project

Portfolio – a collection of work that relates to a given topic or theme, which has been produced over a period of time

Project output (other than dissertation) – examples include the staging of a play or other performance, a piece of artwork, a new product or a poster.

Set exercise (not under exam conditions – questions or tasks designed to assess the application of knowledge, analytical, problem-solving or evaluative skills. Where the set exercise is performed under exam conditions and does not involve the use of practical skills it should be treated as a written exam otherwise it should be a practical exam. This would include on-line assessments done in the students' own time.

Practical: is defined as

Oral assessment and presentation – examples include conversations, discussions, debates, presentations and individual contributions to seminars. This category would also include a viva voce exam.

Practical skills assessment – focuses on whether, and/or how well, a student performs a specific practical skill or technique (or competency). Examples include clinical skills, laboratory techniques, identification of or commentary on artwork, surveying skills, language translation or listening comprehension, and so on.

21. Where can I find more information about the KIS?

There is more information in the intranet KIS Community. These are the links to HESA, HEFCE, QAA and other guidance are provided there. These FAQ and further information will be updated regularly. HESA produces its own list of FAQs, but most of these concern detailed technical aspects and the main points of relevance to academic staff have been extracted here.

22. Who do I contact if I have queries?

We have set up a generic e-mail address KISData@plymouth.ac.uk, which will be checked regularly by the team. If you think it would be useful to discuss any aspect, please contact a relevant member of the Corporate Information team:

Fiona Venn

David Harrott

Peter Anderson,