Higher Education Staff Data Collection Review: Issues Paper
May 2012

Introduction
The Higher Education Staff Data Collection is part of the Higher Education Statistics Collection maintained by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (the Department). It currently collects data on the numbers and characteristics of staff employed by higher education providers listed on Tables A and B of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA) and Avondale College.

Since the Collection was established in 1989, there have been major changes in the higher education sector which impact on the type and usefulness of the data gathered. However, while minor changes have been made to the collection, it has not been formally reviewed since it was established. There has also been significant growth in the numbers of private providers offering higher education qualifications, most of which do not currently report their staff data to the Department.

The Department will therefore be reviewing the Staff Data Collection in 2012. This paper outlines some of the key issues for the Higher Education Staff Data Collection Review (the Review). It aims to provide a starting point for consultation with the higher education sector on possible changes to the Staff Data Collection. Written submissions are invited from higher education providers and other key stakeholders. Further information on the consultation process and the making of submissions to the Review can be found at page 9.

Purpose and scope of the Staff Data Collection Review
The purpose of the Review is to determine the extent to which the collection provides relevant and accurate information to meet the needs of key stakeholders, including responsible Ministers, government agencies, higher education institutions, research organisations, student bodies and the general public, and to consider how the collection might be refined to better meet these needs. The Review will also examine recent related issues raised by the sector, including the data used to calculate the student to staff ratio.

In consultation with key stakeholders, the Review will consider how the Staff Data Collection is being used, and what changes may be required to improve the accuracy and usefulness of the collection for current data needs. This includes the needs of government, including for funding, policy development and public reporting, and the staff data requirements of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which has responsibility for regulation and quality assurance of all higher education providers, including private providers. TEQSA is also consulting with the sector on its data requirements in 2012. In proposing changes to the data collection, the Review will give appropriate consideration to the implementation and ongoing costs that will be incurred.

The Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report (Bradley Review) highlighted a number of issues facing the academic workforce in Australia, in particular the challenge of attracting and retaining high quality academics in a global environment. This Review does not aim to directly address the workforce issues raised in the Bradley Review, however it is envisaged that some changes to the Staff Data Collection would provide better information to assist higher education providers and government in considering these workforce issues.

Overview of the Staff Data Collection

Under Section 19-70 of HESA, higher education providers are required to provide to the Minister for Tertiary Education, information for the Higher Education Staff Data Collection, which includes data on both academic and non-academic staff. This data is available publicly and is published on the Department’s website.\(^2\)

The Staff Data Collection consists of three files that are submitted by providers annually. These are:

- Full-time and fractional full-time staff file
- Estimated casual staff file
- Actual casual staff file.

**Full-time and fractional full-time staff**

Data for *full-time and fractional full-time staff* comprise the actual numbers of staff and the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) for staff who were engaged in the provision of higher education courses in higher education institutions as at 31 March each reference year. As such, the number of persons counted and their FTE is a ‘snapshot’ taken at that date. The data are provided at a ‘unit record’ level (essentially for each staff appointment) and include:

- Gender
- Age
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander indicator
- Country of birth code
- Main language spoken at home
- Highest qualification
- Place of highest qualification
- Appointment term
- Work sector
- Academic or Non-academic organisational unit (Organisational unit code)
- Work contract – current duties (Full-time or Fractional full-time)
- Current duties term
- Function – current duties (teaching, research, teaching & research, other)
- Current duties classification (academic/non-academic, level and increment)
- Equivalent full-time annual salary - current duties (non-academic staff only)
- Full-time equivalence – current duties.

**Estimated casual staff**

The *estimated casual staff* file is due at the same time as the data for the full-time and fractional full-time staff. It comprises the estimated total FTE staffing level for casual staff in the calendar year (not as at 31 March as for the full-time and fractional full-time staff file). In other words, a single FTE figure is provided for the reference year, without any detail of gender, function, classification, organisational unit, or other data items, which means that the data is only useful for determining the crude growth or decline in staff FTE.

**Actual casual staff**

The *actual casual staff* file is due at the same time as the full-time and fractional full-time staff file and comprises actual staff resources expended by casual staff in the previous calendar year reported as FTEs. The data are provided in aggregate rather than unit record (i.e. a single record may relate to many staff members) and include:

- Gender

- Work contract
- Function
- Current duties classification
- Academic or Non-academic organisational unit.

The actual casual staff file does not include details on:
- Number of staff members
- Age
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander indicator
- Highest qualification.

A list of data elements in the current staff data collection is provided at Appendix A.

Key Issues

A range of key issues and proposed changes to the current Staff Data Collection are outlined below. These have been compiled from recent feedback from the sector and gaps in the current Staff Data Collection as identified by the Department. The issues and suggested discussion points provided below are intended as discussion starters only and stakeholders are encouraged to use the submission process to raise any other issues that have not been covered in this paper.

Improving the relevance of the Staff Data Collection

The Staff Data Collection is used by government and the sector for a range of purposes, including:
- as a basis for the allocation of resources to universities
- for academic workforce planning
- for analysis of academic workforce demographics
- to calculate student to staff ratios
- to provide information to prospective students through the MyUniversity website.

The Department is interested in hearing about other ways that the current data is being used by individuals and organisations. Feedback from the sector will help to determine which parts of the collection are most relevant or need to be changed to meet the needs of the sector.

Key Questions:

1. What do you or your organisation use the Staff Data Collection for?
2. Does the current collection meet your needs or the needs of your organisation?
3. What staff data is collected that is no longer useful? What staff data is not collected but would be useful?

Increasing the level of detail

The level of detail in the higher education data collections varies enormously, especially between data in the student collection compared to the staff collection. In most cases, there is not enough detail in the staff collection to enable presentation of important subgroup data. For example, it is currently not possible to identify the campus location of each staff member, the proportion of academic staff with teaching qualifications or the field of education of their highest qualification.

Collecting more detailed data on staff qualifications would provide useful information on the background of higher education staff and assist TEQSA with its regulatory role.
Proposed change:
The Department proposes to collect the main campus location of each academic staff member. For staff working across campuses, this would be the campus where they spend the most time undertaking teaching and/or research. This information would also assist in identifying the number of academic staff located offshore.

The Department also proposes to collect additional information on academic staff qualifications. This includes information on staff teaching qualifications (for staff with a teaching function) and the field of education of their highest qualification. In some cases converting international qualifications to equivalent Australian qualification levels and indentifying staff working across campuses may be a challenge. The Department is interested in the sector’s views on how these issues could be addressed. Please also let us know about any other staff information that is currently not collected but would be useful for the sector.

Key Questions:
4. Are there any issues for providers if the Staff Data Collection is expanded to include information on the main campus location of each academic staff and to include offshore staff?
5. Are there any issues for providers to report additional information on staff qualifications?

Extending the Staff Data Collection to include all private higher education providers

Currently, only providers listed on Table A and B of HESA and Avondale College report staff data to the Department. Other private higher education providers have not been required to report their staff data in the past. However, TEQSA will require access to staff data for all higher education providers, for its regulatory role.

TEQSA has power, under the TEQSA Act 2011, to require information from all providers on matters relevant to quality in higher education, to delegate selected functions to Commonwealth employees, and to share information with Commonwealth Departments. In order to collect staff data on all registered providers, the Department may rely on TEQSA’s delegated information collection powers.

Adding data from private higher education providers to the Staff Data Collection will not only secure the additional information required by TEQSA, but will also create a more complete staffing profile for the Australian higher education sector as a whole and enable a better understanding of staffing issues across all institutions.

Proposed change:
The Department proposes to extend the Staff Data Collection to collect data from all providers authorised to offer higher education courses in Australia. This data will be shared with TEQSA as required.

The Department is aware that some existing data elements may be specific to universities and may be difficult for other providers to report. For example, the current work classification levels for academic staff (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, etc) and Higher Education Worker (levels 1-10) may not be appropriate for private providers. The Department therefore recognises that there may be a need to refine existing data elements with a view to developing consistent reporting arrangements across the higher education sector.

Key Questions:
6. What are the issues in extending staff data reporting requirements to all private higher education providers?
7. How can the university-specific data elements be revised to reflect the structures and practices in private higher education providers?
8. Is it possible for private higher education providers to report their staff under the current work level classifications? If not, what are possible alternatives?

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See also data element no. 408 in the Higher Education Staff Data Collection Element Dictionary.
Adequacy of the current staff function classifications

Staff function is currently reported in four categories:

- teaching only
- research only
- teaching and research
- other.

Over time there has been considerable growth in the numbers of staff reported in the ‘teaching and research’ category, however it is not clear what proportion of their work is spent on each activity. For example, one staff member may be doing 95 per cent teaching and five per cent research, while another is doing the exact opposite, yet both their activities would be reported in the same way.

The imprecision of this classification has implications for how the Department reports the total effort dedicated to teaching and research across institutions. For the purpose of calculating student to staff ratios, the formula used assumes that the ‘teaching and research’ staff have equivalent FTE weight to ‘teaching only’ staff, which effectively overstates the staff time committed to teaching. Similarly, for the purpose of calculating per capita research outputs, the FTE for staff with a function of ‘teaching and research’ is often added to the FTE of academic staff with a function of ‘research only’, effectively overstating the FTE available for research.

Proposed change:

The Department proposes to refine the reporting measures for staff function to better capture the teaching, research and other activities undertaken by staff. This could potentially be achieved by revising the functions classification to include teaching, research and other and for providers to apportion FTE weight to each activity undertaken by staff. For example, a full-time staff member who spends an average of 25 per cent of their annual work time undertaking research and 75 per cent undertaking teaching duties would be reported as 0.25 FTE research and 0.75 FTE teaching. While a full-time staff member who is teaching only would be reported as 1.0 FTE teaching.

Key Questions:

9. Are there any issues for providers to apportion and report FTE weight to each activity undertaken by staff working in one organisational unit?

10. What additional staff functions classifications would be most useful (in addition to teaching and research)?

Inclusion of contract and third party staff

The Staff Data Collection currently only collects information on staff directly employed by the higher education provider and excludes staff engaged in teaching through contract and third party arrangements. The exclusion of staff employed by third parties or through contract arrangements is likely to lead to under-reporting of the staff resources available for higher education activities. The use of staff employed by other organisations to deliver teaching, research and research training, such as, teaching provided in some medical courses by staff employed by hospitals, can inappropriately inflate the student to staff ratio for some providers. The trend to outsource a range of support functions, such as information systems, building, security and cleaning has also seen the staff FTE reported against non-academic organisational units by some universities decline without a corresponding decline in the staff available for these key functions.

The inclusion of data on teaching staff that are contractors and employed by third parties in the Staff Data Collection would provide a more accurate account of the total staff resources used in delivering each higher education provider’s services. However, the Department recognises there are issues surrounding collection of data on staff that are not directly employed by the provider. In addition to staff engaged though contractual arrangements with third parties, many higher education providers use the services of honorary and unpaid staff, such as emeritus professors, to undertake teaching and research. While these staff make valuable contributions to their institutions, there may be particular challenges in quantifying the effective resources provided by unpaid staff.
Proposed change:
The Department proposes to extend the Staff Data Collection to include contract and third party staff. It will be important to be able to distinguish between staff directly employed by the provider and staff employed through third party or contract arrangements. One suggested method of collecting this information would be to include a contractor/third party indicator on each staff file.

Key Questions:

11. Are there any issues for providers to report information (in line with reporting requirements for academic staff employed directly by the provider) on contract staff and staff employed by third party arrangements?
12. Should Honorary and unpaid staff be included in the Staff Data Collection?
13. If so, how should their teaching and research efforts be measured and recorded?

Improving the consistency of data across collections

The staff data currently collected is not consistent across all levels and types of staff with the main difference being the ‘point in time’ reporting of full-time and fractional full-time staff, versus the ‘annual total’ reporting of casual staff. Currently, HESA Table A and Table B providers are required to report staff data by 30 June each year, however, the reporting period for the full-time and fractional full-time staff file is taken as a ‘point in time’ and comprises actual numbers of staff and FTE for staff engaged in the provision of higher education courses in higher education institutions at 31 March each reference year. This is different to the casual staff files which comprise the total casual staffing level (reported as FTE) taken over one calendar year. In the Student Data Collection, the student load is reported as Equivalent Full Time Study Load (EFTSL) over all of the student census dates spread across a calendar year.

In addition, more detailed reporting is currently required for full-time and fractional full-time staff than for staff employed on a casual basis. Although casual staff provide a substantial portion of the teaching and research undertaken in the higher education sector, information currently collected for casual staff are limited and there is no ‘unit record’ file for casual staff in the Staff Data Collection. As such, there is no indicator of the number of persons that work in the sector under contract or casual arrangements, nor information on the qualification and age profiles of these staff members.

While staff with full-time or fractional full-time appointments normally have a clearly stated full-time equivalence in their employment contract, casual staff are usually engaged on an hourly basis and paid on the submission of time sheets. Currently, there are three different formulas provided in the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS Help) to convert the casual hours worked to a full-time equivalence. The Review seeks to consider the accuracy of the current methods for converting casual hours and to explore alternative methods that take into account providers operating under the trimester system.

Proposed changes:
The Department proposes to change the Staff Data Collection to full-year reporting for all staff and to extend the level of staff information collected for the casual staff file to be in line with the full-time and fractional full-time staff file. This would provide more consistent and accurate data on the staff profiles and staffing resources committed to various functions (e.g. teaching, research, other) and would remove the requirement for the estimated casual staff file. This change would require all staff (including casual staff) to have a unit record.

The Department acknowledges that there will be particular challenges in collecting more detailed profiles of all casual staff due to the sometimes more transient nature of the employment relationship. In addition, any changes

\[4 \text{ More details about the calculation of FTE can be found at } \]
made to data collected need to take into account the potential impact on time series.

The Department is also interested in reviewing the method used for converting casual hours to FTE. One alternative method could be to calculate the full-time equivalence for casual and contract staff based on an ‘actual earnings/annual salary’ method. That is, in lieu of reporting the hours worked, providers would be asked to assign an estimate (or actual) annual salary to all staff positions. The actual annual earnings for that position would then be divided by the annual salary to derive the FTE.

For example, if a casual lecturer level A earned $50,500 (as shown on the Australian Tax Office Group Certificate) and the annual salary for the position is estimated to be $72,000, the FTE for this staff member would equate to 0.7 FTE ($50,500 / $72,000).

The Department is aware of some issues surrounding the use of salary to calculate the FTE, such as the higher hourly rate paid to contract staff and accounting for non-monetary employment benefits.

**Key Questions:**

14. *Should the data collection for both full-time and fractional full-time staff, and casual staff be consistent? If so, is there a preference for a ‘point in time’ or an annual total?*

15. *Are there any issues for providers to implement the proposed change to the casual staff file by 2014?*

16. *Is the current method of converting casual hours to full-time equivalence accurate? If not, how can it be improved?*

17. *Is the proposed method of calculating FTE using actual earnings /annual salary feasible?*

**Issues with the student to staff ratio (SSR)**

The SSR is calculated by dividing the equivalent full time student load (EFTSL) by the full time equivalence (FTE) of academic staff with a teaching or teaching and research function (including casual staff). Any changes to the staff data collection as a result of this Review, are likely to impact on the academic staff FTE, and so will affect SSRs.

Some universities have raised concerns regarding the methodology used to calculate the SSR. In particular, universities operating trimesters have argued that the SSR is invalid as their full-time students are counted as 1.5 EFTSL (compared to 1 EFTSL at other universities) and the data therefore overstates their SSR. The concern seems to be at least partly related to an interpretation of the SSR as an average class size. The SSR does not measure average class size but is a measure of average teaching workload (in EFTSL) per FTE staff.

Based on concerns raised by the sector, the Department has undertaken preliminary analysis of the SSR and has found that there are a number of misconceptions about the calculation of the SSR. Further explanation of what is included in the calculation of the SSR is at Appendix B.

While the SSR provides a measure of average teaching workload, the SSR does highlight issues with the Staff Data Collection. Some of the changes to the Staff Data Collection proposed in this paper, if implemented, could provide a better picture of the total resources that institutions devote to teaching. These proposed changes include identifying the actual FTE teaching effort of all staff, including those employed in third party and under contract arrangements.

**Proposed changes:**

As part of the Review process, the Department plans to clarify some definitions in HEIMS and provide clearer guidance to providers to help improve the reporting of teaching effort. The proposed changes to the Staff Data Collection discussed throughout this paper will likely impact on the calculation of the SSR.

**Key questions:**

18. *How does your institution or organisation use the SSR? Is there a better measure than the SSR that meets the needs of your organisation?*
19. What should and should not be included in the calculation of SSR?

20. What other changes could be made to the Staff Data Collection for the purposes of the SSR?

**Conclusion**

This paper has considered a range of issues on the Staff Data Collection that have been raised with the Department in recent years. The Department thank the Higher Education Data Reference Group and other stakeholders for their advice to date.

Stakeholders are invited to raise further issues in relation to the Staff Data Collection through the submission process outlined below, including views on the timing and cost of implementing proposed changes.

**Key Questions:**

21. What are the issues facing your institution in implementing the proposed changes from 2013 (for 2012 data) or 2014 (for 2013 data)?

22. What do you estimate would be the approximate cost for your institution of implementing the proposed changes?
Submission and Consultation Processes

The Department invites submissions from providers and key stakeholders in the higher education sector on the issues outlined in this paper and on any other key issues identified by the sector.

Submissions will help to inform the Department’s advice to the Minister regarding proposed changes to the Higher Education Staff Data Collection. The Government will consult with key stakeholders and peak bodies on any proposed changes. This Review is expected to be completed around September 2012. The timeline for implementation of any changes will be considered in light of feedback in the submissions.

Making a Submission

Submissions to this paper are requested by close of business Monday 2 July 2012.

Submissions and other enquiries can be emailed to:
HIGHERED@deewr.gov.au or posted to:
Policy Section
Higher Education Division
Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
GPO Box 9839
Canberra ACT 2601

The Department requests electronic submissions in Word or RTF format.

Your submission should clearly identify:
- the name of the organisation or individual making the submission
  (if an organisation, please provide details of a contact person)
- address
- email
- telephone

Confidentiality

The Department will not accept submissions that are provided on a wholly confidential basis. If you consider that information in your submission should be treated as confidential, please provide this information as a separate attachment and clearly indicate this in your submission.
Appendix A: Higher Education Staff Data Collection – Elements by File

The Higher Education Staff Data Collection 2012 Element Dictionary and the HEIMS HELP Glossary provides details and definitions of the data elements.

Actual Casual Staff (CA)
- 315 - Gender code
- 412 - Function code
- 415 - Reporting Year and Period Code
- 446 - Variation reason code
- 509 - Current duties classification type and level group code
- 510 - Organisational unit code
- 511 - Work sector code
- 514 - Actual full-time equivalence – prior year

Estimated Casual (EC)
- 415 - Reporting Year and Period Code
- 515 - Estimated Casual Full-time Equivalent (FTE) - Reference Year

Staff Full-Time and Fractional Full-Time (FT)
- 314 - Date of birth
- 315 - Gender code
- 316 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander code
- 348 - Language spoken at home code
- 412 - Function code
- 415 - Reporting Year and Period Code
- 446 - Variation reason code
- 501 - Highest qualification
- 502 - Place of highest qualification
- 504 - Country of birth
- 505 - Appointment Term Code
- 506 - Work contract code
- 513 - Full-time equivalence – reference date
- 401 - Person identification code
- 507 - Current duties term code
- 408 - Current duties classification type, level and increment code
- 423 - Equivalent full-time annual salary – current duties

Appendix B: Explanation of the student to staff ratio (SSR)

The student to staff ratio indicates the average teaching workload per full time equivalent teaching staff. It does not indicate average class size. The student to staff ratio is an institutional average and the actual number of students per teacher will vary depending on the subject and level of study.

The student to staff ratio is the equivalent full-time number of students (numerator) divided by the equivalent full-time number of staff (denominator), where the numerator and denominator are described as below:

**Numerator: students**
The number of students is based on the equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) value. The EFTSL indicates the notional proportion of the workload which would be applicable to a standard annual program for a student undertaking a full year of study of a particular course. This excludes offshore and work experience in industry student load.

**Denominator: staff**
The number of academic staff is based on full-time equivalence at the reference date, and includes full-time, fractional full-time and actual casual staff. This excludes TAFE work sector, non-academic organisational units, offshore staff and non-teaching staff.

The data currently included and excluded in the calculation of SSR is outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student data</th>
<th>Staff data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EFTSL (equivalent full time student load)</td>
<td>FTE (full time equivalent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore EFTSL</td>
<td>Onshore staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and international student load</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students taught through third parties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical experience components of courses</td>
<td>University teaching and supervision of practical components of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework and research student load</td>
<td>Academic staff with teaching only plus research and teaching functions (research supervision counts as teaching)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casual and permanent staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excluded</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offshore EFTSL</td>
<td>Offshore staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience in industry student load</td>
<td>External staff supervising work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff teaching in third parties (e.g. TAFEs or private providers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research only function (research supervision counts as teaching)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student load in TAFE units (for dual sector universities)</td>
<td>TAFE staff (for dual sector universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External staff (e.g. guest lecturers or staff under third party arrangements, such as hospitals or other universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-academic staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>