

Annex I: Completion and non-completion

This annex explains how to determine the completion status of a year of instance in HESES14.

1. Completion is defined in terms of modular programmes of study. It applies to all institutions, including those that may not consider their programmes to be modular. For the purposes of HESES14, a 'module' is taken to mean a discrete component within a programme of study, sometimes referred to as a 'unit', 'course' or 'option'. Where a student is studying a number of modules that can all count towards the same qualification, this should be treated as a single instance.
2. Where a student has a clear intention of completing a specified activity within the year of instance, completion is measured against this intention. Therefore institutions should collect information on students' study intentions for the year so that completion status can be assessed appropriately. A student who fails to complete any module counted in the year of instance is to be returned as a non-completion for all activity in that year. Thus, if a student starts the year intending to follow a certain pattern of activity but does not complete all of it, then that student would be a non-completion. However, the following considerations apply.
 - a. If a student formally switches mode from full-time to part-time as defined in paragraph 9 of [Annex M](#), their completion status should be determined with reference to their revised study intentions.
 - b. If the pattern of activity within the year is not specified, then, provided the student completes all activity countable in the year, they would be considered as completing.
 - c. An exception is allowed for full-time students where the module is in addition to the standard requirements for full-time study. In this case, a student who completes the number of modules normally required in the year for full-time study may be treated as a completion for the year of instance, even if they fail to complete other modules in the year that are in addition to the standard requirement.
3. Within overall study intentions, students may substitute modules without affecting their completion status. For these to be counted as substitute modules, the following must be true.
 - a. The total number of credit points in the substituted module(s) would need to be greater than or equal to that in the original module(s)
and
 - b. Either the fees charged will need to remain the same (this will commonly be the case for full-time students), or the entire fee for the original module(s) would need to be refunded and a separate fee charged for the substitute module(s).

4. To be counted as a completion (and thus be included in Column 4 of Tables 1, 2 or 3), a student must complete all the modules they intended to complete in the year of instance, within 13 calendar months of the start of the year of instance: that is to say within 13 calendar months of the anniversary of their commencement date that defines the start of the year of instance. To complete a module, the student must do one of the following.

- a. Undergo the final assessment of the module (this refers to the activity of the student in sitting an exam or submitting coursework rather than the activity of an assessment board in assessing the achievement of the student).
- b. Pass the module, where this can be achieved without undergoing the final assessment (because they already have enough marks in that module to be awarded credit for it). In some cases, institutional regulations allow credit to be given because of the level attained in other modules: this would not be treated as completion for funding purposes, even though the institution may allow the student to progress.

Example 1

5. A standard year of instance commences on 29 September 2014. Final assessment for a particular module counted within the year of instance takes place in June 2015, with an opportunity to resit or resubmit in September 2015. The student does not take the assessment in June 2015, but does so for the first time at the resit or resubmission opportunity in September 2015. The module is treated as completed, because the assessment was taken within 13 calendar months of 29 September 2014, the start of the year of instance.

Example 2

6. A standard year of instance commences on 29 September 2014. Final assessment for a particular module counted during the year of instance takes place only in June each year. The student does not take the assessment in June 2015 and has not otherwise passed the module, but does take the assessment at the next opportunity in June 2016. The module is treated as not completed, because the assessment was not taken within 13 calendar months of 29 September 2014, the start of the year of instance. This would be the case whether or not the student had been given permission to defer their assessment for a year.

Example 3

7. A student studies for eight modules during a year of instance. They undergo the final assessments in seven modules, but do not undergo the final assessment in one, on the basis that they know that they have already passed the module, based on the marks already achieved in that module. In this case, the student is treated as a completion, because they underwent the final assessments in seven modules and passed the remaining module, where it was possible to pass without undergoing the final assessment.

Example 4

8. A student studies for eight modules during a year of instance. They undergo the final assessments for all modules, but in one module their performance is insufficient to meet the academic standards required to pass that module. In this case, the student would be treated as a completion, because they underwent the final assessments in all modules.

Example 5

9. A student studies for eight modules during a year of instance. They undergo the final assessments for seven modules, but not the eighth, with the consequence that they do not have enough marks in that module to be awarded credit for it. Whether or not the institution's academic regulations relating to progression allow credit to be awarded for the one incomplete module on the basis of the student's overall performance across all modules studied in the year, the student is treated as a non-completion for funding purposes for all activity in the year, because they did not undergo the final assessment in a module. The fact that credit was awarded for the module under the institution's academic regulations on the basis of the student's overall performance across the year of instance is not sufficient to meet the completion definition.

Example 6

10. A full-time student has a clear intention of studying for eight modules during a year of instance. Their intention initially was to include one particular module (A), but although they started the module they decide to switch to a different module (B) of equal value. The completion status for the year of instance then depends on completion of module B (rather than module A), together with the other seven modules taken by the student.

Example 7

11. A full-time student starts in September intending to study eight modules during a year of instance. At the end of the first semester they interrupt the course having completed four modules, and return 12 months later to complete the remaining four modules. The student is a full-time non-completion for the first year of instance, because they did not complete four of the modules that they intended to take within the year of instance. They will be a completion for the second year of instance – though normally this will be part-time because they will not meet the attendance requirements to be full-time.

12. For the purposes of determining completion, the final assessment is the one that has its first occurrence on the latest normal due date: that is, the timing of resits and coursework extensions should be disregarded. Whether an assessment is considered to be the final assessment does not depend on the weight associated with it. For example, if a module is assessed by an exam which accounts for 90 per cent of the marks and the remainder via coursework, with the coursework due after the exam (and not solely by virtue of an extension having been granted), completion should be determined by submission of the coursework rather than attendance at the exam. Where the last two assessments for the module fall due on the same day, undergoing either constitutes completion. Where the final assessments for a module comprise an assessment at a fixed date for all students (such as an exam) and another assessment at a variable date (such as a performance or presentation) which may be timetabled for individual students either before or after the fixed assessment, then the fixed assessment should be treated as the final assessment when determining completion. A viva voce examination should not be treated as the final assessment unless all students are required to undertake it.

13. In some cases a year of instance which counts towards a qualification taken over several years may not contain any formal assessment, for example where assessment will take place at the end of a later year. In this case, where there is no such assessment opportunity within 13 calendar months of the start of the year of instance, continued attendance throughout the year of instance constitutes completion. Institutions should therefore ensure that adequate evidence of attendance exists, such as class registers.

14. When a student undertakes a module that can lead to a qualification or institutional credit, but does not undergo assessment for that module, in general that student will be treated as a non-completion for all their activity in the year. This applies where assessment is optional (for example on open programmes, including continuing education provision). However, an exception is allowed where the student has entered into a binding and irreversible commitment before the commencement of the module that they will not undergo assessment for it. In this case, the module will not be reported at all in HESES, and the completion status of the student will not be affected by their completion or non-completion of the unassessed module.

15. Where the pattern of activity within the year is not specified, students will occasionally register for a module then withdraw before it starts. Provided the fee for this module is refunded in full, the module should not be reported at all in HESES, and may be disregarded in determining completion and full-time equivalence. Full-time students

will not fall into this category, as it will not be possible to refund the fee while retaining the full-time fee status of the student.

16. In some cases a student may undertake a module more than once within a year of instance. In determining completion status, institutions must ensure that the module is counted only once. Where the module has been completed on one or more occasions and has also been taken but not completed, the completion should be counted for determining completion status and full-time equivalence, and the non-completion of the module ignored. Exceptionally a student may take a module in two years of instance and complete the module for the second year of instance within 13 months of the start of the first year of instance. In this case the institution may count the module in either but not both of the years.

17. Where a student's study intentions change partway through the year of instance because they are awarded accredited prior experiential learning equivalent to one or more modules, their completion status should be judged against these revised study intentions. In some cases the reduced study intentions might mean that the student no longer meets the full-time attendance requirements. Provided the student meets the requirements to be treated as a mode switcher (see paragraph 9, [Annex M](#)) they should be treated as a part-time student with completion judged against their revised study intentions.

Example 8

18. A part-time student on a standard year of instance begins a module in October, but withdraws from it after undertaking some activity and before completing the final assessment. The following February (within the same year of instance) the student retakes the module and completes it. The first attempt at the module from October would not be reported at all in HESES, and should be disregarded in determining the completion status for the year of instance.

Example 9

19. A full-time student on a standard year of instance has a clear intention of completing eight modules within the year. One particular module that they start in the first semester is not completed, but the student retakes it in the second semester in place of another one, and completes it. Overall, in the first semester, the student completed three modules and began a fourth, which was not completed, and would not be reported in HESES and which is disregarded for the purposes of determining completion status; in the second semester, the student completed four modules, one of which was a second attempt at the module that was not completed in the first semester. In this case, the year of instance would be a non-completion, because the student completed only seven modules, rather than their overall study intention of eight.

20. In completing the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) record, it should be noted that some students may still have opportunities after 31 July to undergo the final assessment within 13 months of the start of their year of instance. Wherever possible, the

institution should seek to update its HESA record to reflect the latest known completion status of the student. In doing so, institutions will need to have due regard to HESA's data collection timescales and the need to ensure high-quality returns. We will seek further information from institutions that have high numbers of students with undetermined completion status. Students should be recorded with undetermined completion status only where an opportunity still exists for the student to undergo the final assessment within 13 months. They should not be treated as undetermined completion status simply because the 13 months have not fully elapsed.

Estimates of non-completions and historical data

21. Institutions should ensure that estimates of non-completion are supported by historical data. Any historical data used in this way should not be skewed by exceptional circumstances such as industrial action affecting exams. Where such exceptional circumstances occur, institutions should ensure that the completion status of students on the HESA record accurately reflects their actual completion status.

Good practice

Estimation of non-completions

22. There has been a common misconception that withdrawals notified from an academic department are the sole source of data for that department's non-completion estimate. Estimates of the number of non-completions for a particular year of a course should normally be based on the equivalent non-completion rates for the previous academic year. There should be a clear rationale for any alternative methods used or adjustments made. Where the non-completion rate used in the return differs significantly from past data, there should be a clear rationale for the change.

23. The completion status of a student should be determined in accordance with the funding rules for assessment of a student's completion status, not by the institution's individual academic regulations and rules on student progression.

24. In using the previous year's non-completion rate for a course as the basis of the current year's estimate, it is important to make sure that the non-completion rate for the previous year is accurately known. Continuation of study to the following year should not be taken as evidence of, or a proxy for, completion in the previous year. In addition, if a student has not formally withdrawn from the institution by the year end, this does not in itself qualify as a completion.

25. Institutions may find it useful to demonstrate the validity of their non-completion estimates by analysing the non-completion rates for different courses over, say, three to five years. This would help to identify trends, and years where the result is atypical compared with the trend.

26. A review of the outturn compared with the estimate should be made at the year end, and reasons sought for any discrepancies. This knowledge can then be used to inform the estimate for the following year.

27. Non-completion status should be established in a timely fashion, and the student record system updated to reflect the student's change in status. Systems should be in place throughout the year to identify students who are missing from or struggling with

courses, and steps taken to try to retain them at the institution. Reconciliations should be made with the student record system, to ensure that it is up to date and accurately reflects what is being reported elsewhere.

28. Use of a central database, rather than separate records held locally at departmental, school or faculty level, will help to ensure that the main student record is up to date and useful as a management tool.

29. Sufficient data should be recorded at the module level on the main student record system to allow accurate assessment of a student's completion status. This should include, but not necessarily be limited to, identifying the final assessment and the student's submission to it, and the overall outcome for the module. Coding should distinguish between non-submission to an assessment and a very low mark for poor academic performance or misconduct. This level of detail should be readily available to ensure accurate reporting of a student's completion status.

30. In the HESA data, the module outcome field (MODOUT) should be reported in accordance with these completion rules. The FUNDCOMP status of a student should in turn reflect the overall position of the student for the year of instance.

31. Exception reports should be used to establish whether unlikely combinations of MODOUT and FUNDCOMP status are being reported (for example, a student who has any module recorded as non-completed, but has a FUNDCOMP of 1), so that corrections can be made before data are submitted.

Assessment of headcount and completion status for part-time students

32. Assessment of completion status for part-time students should normally take account of all modules undertaken by an individual student within the year. Sometimes both headcount and completion status of part-time students, particularly those on continuing education courses, are based incorrectly on an individual module extract, which does not take into account that a student may be taking more than one module during the year. This will inflate the headcount and potentially the number of completions, as the completion status is judged on a single module.