

GRADUATE OUTCOMES COHORT C REVIEW

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HESA



Graduate Outcomes

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SECTION 1 - THE GRADUATE OUTCOMES PROGRAMME

This update provides an overview of the third cohort of the new Graduate Outcomes survey which launched on Monday 3 June 2019.

I'm delighted to see that we are starting to deliver improvements in response rates for cohort C. With careful planning of our email batching, we have found that our emails are now reliably being delivered and to a high industry delivery rate standard (details below), which has in turn improved the number of completed online responses to the survey. As we've said before, whilst increasing overall survey completion is key, we wanted to focus particularly on tactics to increase online completions, as these are a lower cost to complete than calling graduates by phone.

Our new email delivery system was also used for the pre-survey notification stage of cohort D and, as part of this, we have more information on email data quality. Sharing this and other information that we establish about graduate contact details (success and failure etc), is firmly on our provider portal development roadmap, so that providers can gain access to this information about our use of provider contact data.

AWARD WINNING!

Earlier in the month, Graduate Outcomes was awarded a 2019 Confirmat AIR (Achievement in Insight and Research) Award in the Project and Innovation category. The Confirmat AIR Awards recognise top leaders in Market Research. Out of nine, we were the "judges' choice" which means that we were the best of the 9 projects recognised.



Over the implementation period and during delivery of the survey, we have continued to test, develop and push the Confirmat system. This has covered integration with other systems including HESA's provider portal and SMS and email messaging systems, changing Confirmat's contact management and telephone interviewing features to ensure that all modes are centralised and also Welsh language modifications.

This award demonstrates Confirmat's recognition that we're using their system to a high standard, and with creativity and innovation, and my thanks and congratulations go to the team at HESA for this recognition of their hard work.

LOOKING FORWARD

We are now in week 4 of cohort D and fast approaching the end of the collection year. The data dissemination strategy is progressing well and I can share that the Statistical Bulletin, Open Data release and Performance Indicators are expected from **April 2020** – read more in [section 6](#).

As always, if you have any queries, please do get in touch.

Rob Philippotts
Managing Director, Statutory Services

SECTION 2 - OUR COHORT C FINDINGS

RESPONSE RATES

As at Sunday 1 September (based on the previous day's surveying), the overall cohort C response rate is **51.9%**. The breakdown by target group can be found in the table below:

Target group	Target	Response rate
UK domiciled, full-time	60%	54.3%
UK domiciled, part-time	60%	54.4%
Research funded	65%	64.0%
EU domiciled	45%	51.3%
Non-EU domiciled	25%	41.9%

Note: All results published on the provider portal or in communications from HESA are provisional due to the nature of the live data feed and the fact we are carrying out continual quality assurance.

We are pleased to report that we have again met national targets for the EU domiciled and Non-EU domiciled target groups. In addition, compared to cohort A and B, we have also reduced the gap on all other target groups. We're delighted to observe this upward trend in response rates showing that the changes we've been making to the survey user experience; engagement strategy and the impact of provider activity are all paying off. We hope to see this continue to improve as we progress through cohort D.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

In cohort C, we implemented a few changes to our engagement strategy:

Telephone interviewing

We introduced a new call management system which has enabled more systematic calling of all graduates, using all numbers available. On average, it took 5 calls per graduate to get a completed interview. On average, over 12 calls were made to all those who did not complete the survey. Of those who did not complete and had a phone number, 23.7% had invalid numbers meaning our contact centre could not contact them.

In the last month of fieldwork, we implemented case prioritisation on the telephone interviewing system. This was aimed at developing a methodology that would help reduce non-response bias in survey outputs, using a more responsive approach to data collection.

Using survey data collected in the first half of cohort C and information on student characteristics, we identified a group of non-respondents who were least likely to respond to the survey. These were allocated to a group of interviewers for priority calling. At the end of two weeks of prioritisation, this group of graduates had been called more than the remaining sample of non-respondents and there was a marginal increase in response rates for the priority group, compared with the non-priority group.

However, we also identified a few operational challenges which meant the implementation of case prioritisation was not optimal on this occasion. Given the size of cohort C, we didn't expect case prioritisation to have a significant impact on non-response bias. However, testing it in the smallest

cohort has identified improvements we need to make in order to implement it successfully in cohort D.

Email

Following the email blacklisting issue (read more in [section 4](#)), the online mode of data collection in cohort C was more successful. Using a slow and steady approach to the dispatch of invitations and reminders, we found that most of our emails were delivered. This has meant that the proportion of responses achieved online improved significantly from 30% in cohort B to 42% in cohort C (as a proportion of total number of completed responses). As described in [section 4](#), we have onboarded a new technical supplier to help us overcome email delivery issues permanently.

We achieved a higher response rate for UK domiciled graduates, compared with the previous two cohorts. To increase response rates for this group and to encourage 'engaged' respondents to complete the survey, we sent out a bespoke reminder to UK graduates who had started the survey by answering at least the first question but dropped out before completing it. This was moderately successful, and we think we can improve this next time by implementing this strategy earlier on in the fieldwork period.

SMS messages

Generally, emails and SMS messages worked well throughout cohort C. They were particularly impactful towards the end of the cohort, when the sample was getting tired and the returns on telephone interviewing were dropping.

SECTION 3 - RESPONSE RATES AND ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS

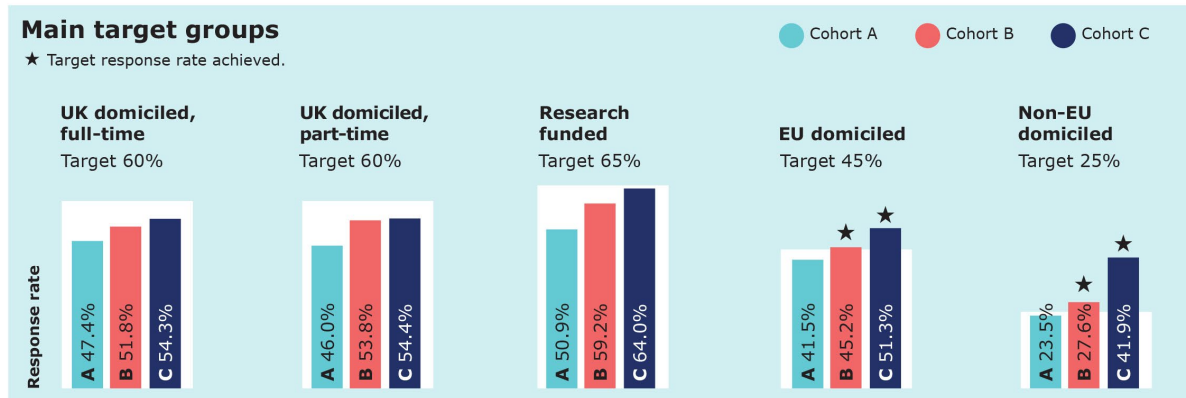
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Cohort C

Opened on **Monday 3 June 2019** and closed on **Saturday 31 August 2019**.

Response rates

All response rates and results published prior to the final release of data are provisional due to the nature of the live data feed and the fact we are carrying out continual quality assurance.



51.9%

Overall cohort C response rate



17,445 total completed responses



Partial responses 1,491

These are graduates who answered at least the first question but did not complete the survey. Actively encouraging completions forms a key part of the engagement strategy.

The top 3 questions where graduates drop out of the survey are:



- Q. What activities were you doing in the census week?
- Q. What was your job title during the census week?
- Q. What was your annual pay for your main employment in the census week?



Providers in cohort C
281

Mode of completion:



Proportion of responses achieved online increased from 30% to 42%, between cohorts B and C.

Engagement statistics



5 rounds of email invitations sent



6 rounds of SMS messages sent



Average number of phone calls needed for a completed survey response. This includes responses started online as well as by phone.

Unique page views of the Graduate Outcomes websites (to 31 August 2019)

graduateoutcomes.ac.uk

English website: **81,947**
Welsh website: **871**

@grad_outcomes followers: **815**

Best time of day for completions



Phone



Desktop



Mobile

Best day for completion



Average time taken to complete

Phone **13** minutes, **19** seconds
↑ 26 seconds quicker than cohort B

Online **11** minutes, **0** seconds
↑ 11 seconds quicker than cohort B

SECTION 4 - UPDATES FROM COHORT C

IMPLEMENTATION OF MAILJET AND PRE-NOTIFICATION STRATEGY

At the end of cohort C, we implemented a new system called MailJet to help us with the issues related to internet service providers (e.g. Gmail, Office 365) blocking our email invitations. At the same time, we had also been looking to trial new activity that aimed to improve our response rates and a pre-notification email (a warm up) was one strategy that we had been considering.

To successfully warm up our new IP addresses and keep them warm, we needed to move to an almost continual delivery of emails. We determined that this warmup activity should commence within cohort C so the IPs were ready for a spike in September where we emailed over 540,000 graduates in week one.

In mid-August, we staggered the delivery of a [pre-notification email](#) to approved cohort D graduates that shared key information about the survey and let them know they'd receive their unique survey link in early September. This is similar to the activity that we are asking providers to do as part of the [suggested graduate contact plan](#).

What did we learn?

The pre-notification email was sent to the first email address of every graduate in cohort D with an approved email address. According to MailJet, 96% of these emails were delivered. Of the emails that were delivered, 36.3% were opened and of these, respondents clicked a link in 1.5% of them. Note that pre-notification emails did not contain a link to the survey, but respondents could access the Graduate Outcomes website (for more information on its purpose, privacy and data collection methods) as well as our social media channels.

We are continuing to see a positive return on email invitations in cohort D and we will report on this in the mid-cohort D review in mid-October. We will continue to use this system in Year 2 (18/19) and we will also continue with the pre-notification strategy for future cohorts.

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

In June, questions in the Graduate Outcomes survey about subjective wellbeing sparked discussion and lots of queries from HE providers and researchers. To add to the discussion and to answer a number of questions from providers, Neha Agarwal our Head of Research and Insight, wrote a blog piece which we shared with the sector in July.

This blog answers questions around:

- Why subjective wellbeing is not covered in the raw data supply?
- Where did the SWB questions come from?
- How are the questions asked?
- Are they mandatory questions?
- What support do interviewers provide to graduates?
- What could you use this data for?

If you missed it, please read "[Asking how graduates feel](#)".

NEW UKMOB QUALITY RULE TO CHECK MOBILE NUMBER VALIDITY

As we have outlined in previous reviews, we developed a new quality rule on UKMOB that checks that mobile numbers supplied are valid. This will reduce the number of undelivered SMS messages and failed calls. Due to development issues, the validation ran internally only prior to the launch of cohort D. This found that approximately 10% of the supplied mobile numbers were invalid. These numbers have not been used within the engagement strategy for cohort D.

On 20 September, the rule ([UKMOB.08](#)) was implemented in the provider portal as a warning. This meant that impacted providers know to source alternative mobile numbers to allow HESA to make contact. This is especially important where all mobile numbers for a graduate are deemed invalid by this rule. From C18071, this rule will run as an error which means that any records that fail the quality rule (i.e. if the mobile number is not valid), providers will need to amend / remove the invalid mobile number(s) in order to approve the record and send it for surveying.

We also provided feedback to providers regarding the supply of email addresses for graduates. We have found that a number of emails that 'bounced', had typos in domain addresses (e.g. @hotmal or @gmal) or where a provider domain address (e.g. @providername.ac.uk) was supplied that no longer exists. Providers are recommended to view the [contact details guidance](#) page and the individual [data items](#) for more guidance.

SECTION 5 - MODIFICATIONS FOR COHORT D

SURVEY MODIFICATIONS

During cohort C, we identified areas of the survey that would benefit from modifications (with no material impact to survey integrity but a potential positive impact on data quality) that would further improve the usability of the survey for graduates.

The main modifications aimed to decrease the length of the survey by reducing the number of pages in the online survey that graduates would have to click through. In some cases, we were able to remove a few redundant pages that contained contextual information and merge them with questions on one page (whilst keeping the question clear and accessible). In other cases, we were able to remove a page altogether as the information had already been covered on a previous page or in the question itself.

Other changes made to the survey included the removal of 'N/A' for employment intensity questions (only full-time and part-time), tweaking of instruction text to better define the question criteria (what is required in the question) and to improve the flow of the survey.

OTHER UPDATES

With the implementation of MailJet, our engagement strategy had to change to an almost continual release of emails. We have therefore updated the [engagement plan](#) on the HESA website.

We have also updated the look and feel of our email invitations to use more of the Graduate Outcomes colour palette, making them more appealing to the recipient. We have also increased the size and prominence of the call to action (the survey link). Samples of the [email invitations](#) can be viewed on the HESA website.

SECTION 6 - LOOKING TOWARDS THE END OF THE 17/18 COLLECTION

AN UPDATE ON THE DATA DISSEMINATION STRATEGY

The Graduate Outcomes dissemination workstream is progressing, which will ultimately result in the final delivery of all four cohorts of data to multiple stakeholders in the mid / end of February 2020.

We are now beginning work on two documents that will provide more information in the lead up to the dissemination:

- a methodology statement that will detail how we create and run the survey with the objective of providing a statistically robust dataset. To be shared and updated throughout the Winter.
- a dissemination policy, outlining what and to who data can be shared for onward use. To be shared in the New Year.

These documents will be shared with our Graduate Outcomes Steering Group and once finalised, they will be added to the HESA website.

Alongside this, our analysts are working on templates for the HESA outputs. This includes; the Statistical Bulletin, Open Data release and Performance Indicators, expected one after the other from **April 2020**. Please visit the [upcoming data releases](#) page on the HESA website for more information and updates.

We are also looking to create a joint event with Jisc to take place shortly after the outputs are released. This will provide an opportunity to explore the outputs of the 17/18 collection and the insight it offers. We will provide more information about this event in early 2020.

SECTION 7 – NEXT STEPS

NEW C18071 GUIDANCE

In July, we issued new guidance for C18071 in relation to the number of contact details required per graduate (from 10 to 5) and how they are returned to us. This is all detailed in the [C18071 coding manual](#).

For C18071, we recommend that providers only supply five contact details (of each type) per graduate, instead of 10. For C19071, we will change the schema to reflect this – notice will be provided in due course. This is because we want to focus on the ‘best’ contact details rather than all or any. We’ve defined ‘best’ as being the most likely to elicit a response to the survey which can be determined by recent contact with the graduate via this contact detail.

In addition, the best details should be returned in position 1 (first column of EMAIL data) for that data item as they will be used within the engagement strategy first. Mobile numbers are more likely to result in successful contact and therefore, UKMOB (mobile) numbers are called before UKTEL (landlines), followed by INTTEL (international) numbers, where applicable. [Read more about this guidance](#).



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT GRADUATE OUTCOMES

Website: www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/outcomes
Graduate website: www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk
Twitter: https://twitter.com/grad_outcomes
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/graduate-outcomes>

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