

GRADUATE OUTCOMES COHORT A REVIEW

C17071 2017/18

APRIL 2019

HESA



Graduate Outcomes

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SECTION 1 - THE GRADUATE OUTCOMES PROGRAMME

Thank you for your interest in the Graduate Outcomes survey and welcome to our first end of cohort review. This covers cohort A of the C17071 2017/18 collection. This update provides an overview of our journey through the first cohort of the new Graduate Outcomes survey which launched on Monday 3 December 2018.

As part of our communications strategy, we aim to provide a review at the end of each cohort to summarise some of the key findings, our learnings and any recommended changes for the next cohort. We are also sharing some additional statistics about the survey on page 6. We hope this will be useful for providers as well as any other interested parties.

Graduate Outcomes is the largest UK annual social survey and marks some significant changes from the previous Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE), notably:

- Graduates are surveyed 15 months post-graduation, instead of six months
- The survey is now delivered by HESA, not from within individual HE providers, thereby seeking to ensure a more consistent approach
- The centralisation of this survey brings all the challenges of mobilising a new national survey capability, and
- The questions, while they are similar to previous leavers surveys, focus to a greater extent on the student perspective and voice.

The completion of cohort A survey fieldwork was a significant milestone for Graduate Outcomes and the culmination of nearly three years of review, consultation and implementation. This is the first year and first cohort of the new survey, and both HESA and the sector are learning about what this means for the methodology, including response rates and data quality.

Over the next six months, we will be working to ensure planning, refinement and improvement for the opening of cohort D is undertaken. We will continue to work with the Graduate Outcomes Steering Group to identify and implement improvements to the survey. We know there is significant interest in response rates, as well as the information we're able to provide to HE providers in the form of outputs and dashboard insight.

In addition, data quality is of the utmost importance in ensuring we survey graduates correctly and improve the outputs for data users. There is also interest in the services we can provide to ensure the supply of high-quality graduate contact data, to support and engage HE providers and to ensure an effective graduate engagement approach as a basis for our survey itself. Some updates on these areas are shared within this report.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved with Graduate Outcomes. We appreciate your support, comments and suggestions. Centralisation brings with it new ways of working and we know that for some this has been challenging. HESA is absolutely committed to ensuring Graduate Outcomes delivers successfully and we are working to ensure its success.

If you have any queries or suggestions, please email liaison@hesa.ac.uk or call +44 (0) 1242 211 144.

Rob Phillpotts
Managing Director, Statutory Services

SECTION 2 - OUR COHORT A FINDINGS

The final response rates from cohort A were shared with record contacts on Monday 11 March, following closure of the survey on 10 March. The findings are outlined on page 6 with some additional engagement statistics. We will continue to present response rates by target group, supported by an overall cohort rate as recommended by the Steering group.

Cohort A response rate targets were derived from an analysis of achieved response rates on DLHE and longitudinal DLHE. Assuming a non-linear attrition over time, the targets represent a realistic measure of performance. Graduate Outcomes is very different from DLHE, so we do not have a benchmark on response rates. This makes it a baseline year for Graduate Outcomes, which will eventually help us test our starting assumptions and rebase the expectations in future years, where possible and necessary.

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSE RATES

Despite the above, our view is that response rates for the UK domiciled graduate group for cohort A are not where we expected or hoped they would be. We are making changes to the engagement strategy (see section 4) and reviewing targets for cohort B, all aimed at closing the gap between the target and the actual response rate.

From the infographic (see page 6) we can see that the split between online and telephone responses was very even. We will review this trend over the coming cohorts as we implement changes in favour of boosting online uptake. We will use the pattern from the best day and best time of day, by mode, to inform the strategy whilst balancing other conflicting factors (such as the need to batch up the release of large quantities of emails).

You will also be aware that, on 15 February, we advised HE providers that we had taken the decision to extend the cohort A fieldwork period to Sunday 10 March. This allowed an additional 10 days to obtain survey responses following the short period that the survey was offline in January. This returned an additional 5,156 responses.

UK DOMICILED SAMPLE

We have reviewed various characteristics of the UK domiciled sample, with a focus on delivery of email invitations, the validity of phone numbers and call attempts and have noted the following:

Email deliveries

Successful delivery of email invitations relies on the validity of email addresses, followed by the absence of global or local filters which may block successful receipt of messages. HE providers are responsible for providing accurate and current personal contact details for graduates. HESA can partly measure the delivery success of emails using the built-in reporting mechanisms provided within the Conformat system. This provides a delivery status code for each email sent from the system to tell us if they've either been delivered properly or hit an issue.

In most cases, it is possible to determine whether or not a message was successfully sent to the recipient. Of the total sample of UK domiciled graduates, 85% were successfully sent an initial invitation via email, followed by a number of reminders. We will continue to monitor this as we have experienced issues with spam filters going into cohort B.

Telephone interviewing

Some of the quality issues we have identified during our analysis of telephone numbers are summarised here:

- For 3,283 UK domiciled graduates, their phone numbers were unobtainable, making it impossible for interviewers to make any direct contact
- For a further 514 graduates, while the number was contactable, it was the wrong number for the graduate. In such instances, we can only contact the graduate where they have a valid email address
- On average, for UK domiciled graduates where we have successfully achieved a completed survey (interview), we have called them 3.6 times
- For UK domiciled graduates for whom we have not obtained a completed survey, this number is much higher at 11¹ calls (on average). This analysis points towards a strong possibility that towards the latter stages of data collection, we were dealing with a 'tired' UK domiciled sample which was not likely to show significant levels of engagement
- As a next step we will undertake more detailed analysis on the characteristics of this 'hard to reach' sample and identify ways of improving our engagement with them.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The engagement strategy for all graduates is at the heart of the Confirmat system and incorporates a detailed plan which includes a range of methods (emails, SMS messages, phone calls), timings and scenarios. This has been crafted using best practice data collection and research methods. We have also worked with experts from the ONS, Confirmat (and liaised with the Steering Group) to create a robust strategy that carefully balances the need to gain responses using a blend of methods across all the contact details we hold for each graduate.

Despite the technical challenges we experienced over the Christmas period (reported in the [mid-cohort review](#)), followed by issues with inaccurate contact details being supplied to HESA, the following engagement activities returned extremely positive results:

December	First email invitations
	First SMS invitations to UK numbers
	First SMS invitations to international numbers
	First email reminders
January	Ramping up of telephony in light of technical issues with SMS and emails
February	Reminder emails to non-starters
	Reminder emails to non-completers
	SMS reminders
March	'Last chance' email reminders
	Last SMS reminder

We have provided an outline [engagement plan](#) which shares a simplistic view of the contact we will make per cohort. You will see the changes we're making to the strategy itself on page 7-8.


SECTION 3 – RESPONSE RATES AND ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS

[View full printable version »](#)


Cohort A

Opened on **Monday 3 December 2018** and closed on **Sunday 10 March 2019**.


First cohort of the all new Graduate Outcomes survey!




Main changes from DLHE:



Now **15 months** from the end of the course



New '**graduate voice**' measures



Centralised approach via HESA and suppliers

Response rates



Providers in cohort A **242**

Mode of completion:



Phone 56.6%



Online 43.4%

(Desktop and mobile)

36%

Overall cohort A response rate



55,416 total completed responses

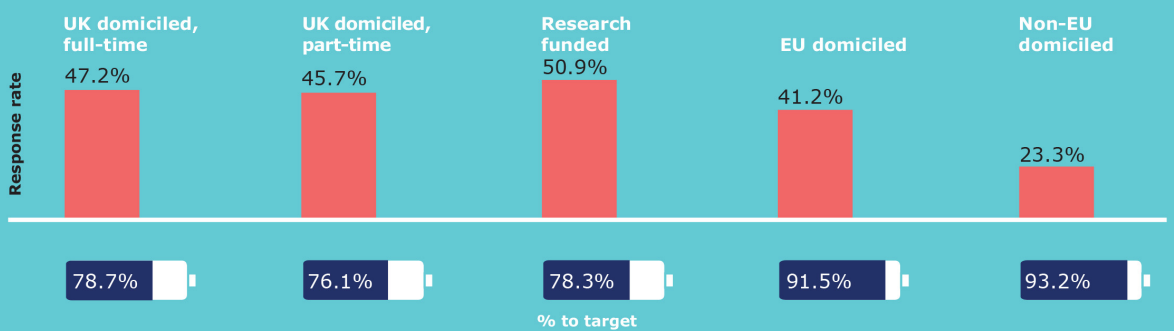
Response rate target: **43%**
This is due to the high proportion of non-UK students.



Partial responses 6,587

This is where a graduate **did not complete** the minimum questions required for a full response. It also includes those who click the link in the email but progress no further than the first page. Actively encouraging completions forms a key part of the engagement strategy.

Main target groups



Engagement statistics



5 rounds of email invitations sent



5 rounds of SMS messages sent

7

Average number of phone calls needed for a completed survey response

Where the response is started and completed by phone only

Best time of day for completions



Average time taken to complete



Phone **15** minutes, **22** seconds



Online **10** minutes, **38** seconds



English website: **39,683**



Welsh website: **433**

Unique page views of the Graduate Outcomes websites
graduateoutcomes.ac.uk
(to 10 March 2019)

SECTION 4 - MODIFICATIONS FOR COHORT B

Bearing in mind the response rates achieved and our findings, we are keen to make changes to the survey between cohorts. However, we also have to take a measured and holistic approach to the collection as a whole. This is to ensure that we are not introducing a statistical bias or reacting too quickly.

We have learned a lot already and we're keen to share this insight so that providers can understand the approaches we are taking and why. Cohort B launched concurrently to cohort A on Monday 4 March 2019. We have outlined below some of the key changes that we have implemented.

NEW QUALITY RULES AND GUIDANCE

We need providers to improve the accuracy of their contact details data to ensure we can make direct contact by email and phone with every graduate. We appreciate that this might be a manual process in some cases, but it's vitally important for the integrity of the survey and to ensure we comply with data protection legislation.

To support you, we released a new version of the [Graduate Outcomes coding manual \(v1.14\)](#) on 21 February. This included additional and amended [quality rules](#) that will help providers to identify duplicated data, shared data, and non-permitted data. In addition, we shared a new page of [guidance](#) to clarify what is and isn't classified as acceptable personal contact details for a graduate. We are also considering what further services we can offer to help HE providers manage and quality assure their data in future. More information on this will be provided in due course.

Where HE provider data submissions trigger errors but can verify the data is genuine as confirmed by the graduate, a switch could be applied by contacting Liaison or the OfS for English FECs.

SURVEY MODIFICATIONS

Changes to the survey may introduce a statistical bias, so the level of change we look to make at this stage in the collection is limited.

However, we have made a change to the first 'welcome' screen. The aim is to decrease the number of graduates who fall out of the survey at this point – of the graduates who fall out of the survey, 76% happen at the welcome screen. To address this, we merged the first two pages (screens) of the survey and reduced the amount of descriptive text without sacrificing key messaging or fair processing information. This now means that when graduates click the link to the survey, they will go straight into question one. We hope to see a reduction in the drop off rates at this point as a result.

REVISED ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

As outlined in section 2, our findings identified some points for consideration for the engagement strategy for cohort B. We have looked at the frequency (the number of reminders), the contact data feed from HE providers via the portal, and also the way the system is built to facilitate these reminders. We have applied all of this analysis against the actual engagement experienced over the 14 week period and have made a number of revisions to it. We will use cohort B to review the impact of these changes.

Spread the email delivery days and times

To improve the chances of engagement with our email invitations, we need to learn from previous experiences. For the same reason we wouldn't continue to call a graduate unsuccessfully at the same time of day, every day, we need to reflect this for email reminders. To action this across the cohort, using all the supplied contact details, we are introducing further variation in the distribution of emails by day and time of day and will monitor the impact over the cohort. We aim to collect a sufficient amount of data over the first few cohorts to get a good understanding of what works in terms of engagement, ready for implementation during cohort D.

Call queue management

Managing the call queue to ensure all graduates have an equal chance of being called is an intricate planning process. This is particularly the case given that we may have several telephone numbers for each graduate.

Prioritisation is key, whilst maintaining the principle of randomisation (and acknowledging that there are multiple ways to randomise). For cohort A, we gave equal priority to all telephone numbers supplied for a graduate and a higher priority to UK domiciled graduates. We are now finalising an alternative method for cohort B and will report back at the midpoint review. Randomisation is designed to give all graduates at each provider an equal chance of being called during the fieldwork period.

Interviewer training and development

Supporting and training our telephone interviewers is a constant process, building on their existing robust training and development plan. We are continuing to work with IFF to ensure that all best practice is being followed and each interviewer is provided with the relevant guidance to ensure each successful contact converts to a completed survey response.

SECTION 5 - ACTIONS FOR PROVIDERS

While HESA can take appropriate actions to apply learnings from each cohort, the key to a successful sector-wide survey is continual collaboration with providers. We aim to provide clear and helpful guidance so we can continue to work together. We have therefore shared some suggestions for consideration by HE providers as ways you can support the delivery of a successful survey, ensuring that the sector gets the outcomes it needs:

SHARE YOUR QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

Data quality remains the key focus for providers and the [new and updated information](#) we have shared will help to ensure that HE providers have appropriate data quality assurance mechanisms in place to accurately compile graduates' personal contact data before submission to HESA. We know that HE providers are approaching this in different ways and we are keen to share sector best practice.

Undertaking successful engagement activity with graduates (e.g. email campaigns and events) to ensure they are prompted to update their contact details is of parallel importance. Where HE providers successfully engaged with graduates to provide new or updated contact details, we would like to share their successful methodologies with the sector. We are in the process of collecting written case studies to be shared on the HESA website for all HE providers to learn from.

If your provider has robust quality assurance processes and / or successful graduate contact strategies that could be adopted by providers, please [get in touch](#). We will supply you with a template to create a case study which will be shared on the HESA website.

FOCUS ON DATA PROTECTION

We have provided comprehensive information on the HESA website and would like to remind providers to read these materials. We also recommend that you take advice from your Data Protection Officer (if applicable) if you have any questions or concerns.

Visit the [Graduate Outcomes data protection guidance on the HESA website](#).

UPLOAD A PROVIDER LOGO

There is still time to add your provider logo to the provider portal which means your graduates will see it on the email invitation and on the online survey. We believe that personalisation is likely to encourage graduates to respond to the survey and consequently improve provider response rates.

Find out how to [upload your provider logo](#) in the provider portal.

PROMOTING GRADUATE OUTCOMES

We collectively still have much to do to ensure that we have embedded Graduate Outcomes from a brand awareness perspective. Building awareness with students starts on day one of university / college to ensure that by the time graduates have begun their journeys post higher education, they know its importance once an email invitation lands in their inboxes.

HESA has created a suite of [communications resources](#) to help providers to promote the Graduate Outcomes brand, whilst allowing them to tailor it to their own needs and formats (original artwork files have been supplied).

HESA would like to hear from providers about what has / hasn't worked in their own engagement with students and graduates so we can share best practice across the sector. If you have some insights or communications plans to share with HESA, please [get in touch](#) as we are in the process of creating provider case studies.

We will be running a series of communications over the coming months focusing on the promotion of Graduate Outcomes - please look out for these and [contribute your ideas](#) in the form of a case study for the HESA website.

SECTION 6 - NEXT STEPS

We are currently running cohort B with the changes we have described above. We will share the first overall response rate with providers for cohort B during the week commencing 15 April. ~In addition to this, we are working on a number of other workstreams:

PROVIDER PORTAL DEVELOPMENT

The provider portal enables transfer of data between HESA and providers and we have received positive feedback about it. In terms of functionality, it is at a very early stage and we have a development roadmap in place that takes into consideration feedback from providers. We have lots of ideas as to how we can use it to communicate survey progress and to support providers to undertake their responsibilities.

We welcome providers' ideas to ensure the portal remains fit for purpose and supports your engagement with Graduate Outcomes. We will shortly release additional functionality which will provide detail on a provider's individual response rates, SIC/SOC coding and the data feed.

DATA DISSEMINATION

As you are aware, our data dissemination strategy work for Graduate Outcomes was placed on hold in late January. This work has recommenced and HESA is currently conducting a series of data quality checks on the survey data for cohort A. This is designed to quality check based on a number of important factors. For example, use of the proper survey logic, and usability of the free text for the setting of derived fields.

The data feed will be downloadable from the provider portal and will be shared at a provider level, with only your provider data made available. English FECs will receive their data supply from the Office for Students. We will share more detail on what this will include and the processes involved as soon as we are able.

INCENTIVES

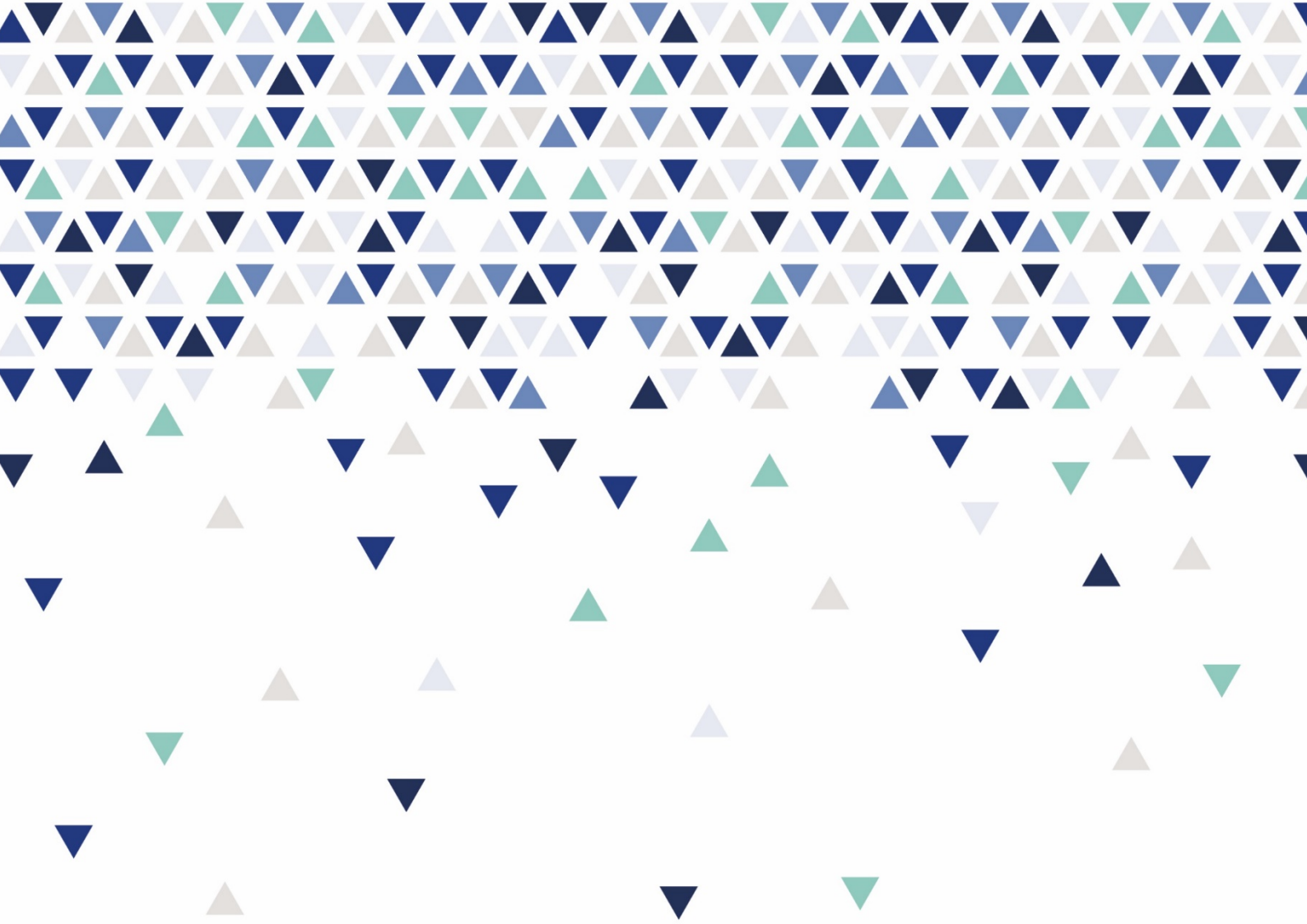
Alongside a number of other response rate strategies, we are currently looking into the possibility of offering incentives in future cohorts, considering ethical and practical considerations. We wanted to provide an update on this area during cohort A, however, due to other operational issues, this work has been delayed.

In the meantime, we ask that providers do not create their own incentive schemes. Incentives could bias the results in favour of population groups. For a centrally run survey, incentives should be rolled out across the entire population and managed centrally so that all respondents are treated equally. We will continue to work with our Steering Group and update the sector as this work progresses.

TECHNICAL WORK TO REDUCE SPAM FILTERING ON EMAIL INVITATIONS

At the start of cohort B, we encountered an issue with our email invitations being blocked by spam filters. A spam filter detects unsolicited and unwanted email and prevents those messages from getting into a user's inbox. Like other types of filtering programs, a spam filter looks for certain criteria on which it bases judgments. To complicate matters more, different email providers (e.g. Outlook, Yahoo, Gmail etc) all use different judgements.

Whilst we have taken steps to avoid triggering these filters, we are implementing a number of additional changes to the email formatting, coding and distribution frequency with the aim to avoid triggering spam filters. We will provide more information about this in the cohort B midpoint review.



ⁱ This was previously reported as 7 calls. This was amended to 11 calls on 16 April 2019.

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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