

Graduate Outcomes Cognitive Testing of the Graduate Outcomes Survey

Prepared for HESA

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Contents

1	Executive Summary	5
2	Introduction	10
	Background	10
	Aims and Objectives	11
	Methodology	11
	Sampling	11
	QAS	13
	Fieldwork	13
	About this report	17
	Report outline	17
3	Overall views of the proposed Graduate Outcomes survey	18
	Did the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey work?	18
	The use of time frames of reference in the Graduate Outcomes Survey: consistency and recall	19
	Do graduates perceive the questions asked by the Graduate Outcomes Survey to be relevant to them?	20
	Does the proposed questionnaire capture the complete picture of graduates' outcomes 15 months after their graduation?	21
	Will people complete the Graduate Outcomes Survey?	22
	Dropout rates	23
	Survey name	26
4	Census week activities	28
	How well did the section work overall?	28
	Selecting census week activity / activities	29
	Identifying the main activity	33
	Starting up a business	34
	35	
	Portfolio careers	35
	What do graduates take the census 'week' to mean?	41
5	Graduates' 'work' in the census week	43
	Introduction	43
	Overall views of the survey	44
	General question issues impacting all groups of respondents	45
	Consistency of timeframes	45
	Part-time vs. full-time work (B3)	45
	Formal supervision (B6)	46
	Annual pay (B8)	47
	NHS organisations (B12)	48
	Employer location (B13 & B14)	49
	Necessity of the qualification (B16)	50
	Job search and take-up (B17, B18 & B19)	51
	Graduates employed in multiple jobs	53

Self-employed graduates	56
Graduates starting a business	56
Census week business activity (B24)	58
Drawing funds from the business (B25)	59
Importance of the qualification (B32A)	60
Business motivations (B32 & B33)	61
Detailed factual information about the business which was being set-up (B34 & B35)	62
Assumption this is full-time work	64
6 Employment history	65
How well did the section work overall?	65
Key discussion areas	67
Accounting for part-time employment and the understanding of 'full-time' work	67
Uncertainty around inclusion of census week employment	67
Ambiguity around the 12-month timeframe	68
Repetitiveness of section	68
Intrusiveness of questions	69
7 Study in the census week	70
How well did the section work overall?	70
Key discussion areas	71
What counts as 'studying?'	71
The perceived relative importance of study versus work in the census week	71
Mode of study	72
Qualification type	73
8 Study history	75
How well did the section work overall?	75
Key discussion areas	76
'What counts as 'studying?'	76
'Issues relating to the timeframe'	78
Mode of study	79
Qualification type	79
9 Reflection on career to date	81
How well did the section work overall?	81
Question Set 1: Fit with Future Plans (Questions F1 / F4 / F7)	83
Question Set 2: Being Meaningful and Important (Questions F2 / F5 / F8)	86
Question Set 3: Utilisation of Studies (Questions F3 / F6 / F9)	91
10 Opt-in banks	94
Relative success of opt-in banks	94
G Net Promoter Entity	94
H Subjective Wellbeing	95
I Graduate Choice	96
J Impact of Higher Education	98
How graduates approached the scale	99
The number of statements	100

Suitability of statements 1-6 for graduates who were working in the census week	101
Comprehension issues	101
O: PhD / Research Degree Experience	103
L to N: Research Students	103

Appendix A – Table of question by question specifics	106
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Appendix B – Table of Welsh language issues	123
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1 Executive Summary

As one would expect from a questionnaire so heavily based in tried and tested questions and question approaches, the survey generally worked well. Most graduates found its questions relevant, and relayed that it allowed them to relate a full and complete picture of their life.

The new survey section including a series of 'graduate voice' questions designed to capture how 'on track' graduates consider themselves to be worked well overall and graduates appreciated the opportunity to provide a more personal and emotional view of their outcome.

There were, however, a few areas which will need significant work before the survey questionnaire can be released for a full-scale survey.

1.) Clarifying the census date activity options at the core activity question

We recommend that the list of census date activities is extended and adapted to include:

- "paid work for an employer" (instead of working)
- Self-employment / freelancing / running my own business (*potentially with the latter separated into its own code*)
- Voluntary / unpaid work for an employer
- Developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio
- "engaged in a course of study, training or research" (instead of studying)
- "unemployed and looking for work" (either in addition to or instead of "unemployed")
- (*potentially*) "recently graduated and assessing my options"

We also recommend moving the options for "contracted to start work" and "due to start studying" into a separate question asked after graduates have made their choice of their main activity (and that these questions are followed up to get more detail about the type of work / study).

2.) Treatment of graduates who are self-employed and/or who are running a business

At present, graduates who are self-employed are guided through a set of questions which is essentially the same as graduates who are working for an employer. A number of these questions, and the concepts within them, do not work particularly well for the self-employed (such as salary questions) or need to be quite heavily adapted (such as the narrative questions which establish why the graduate chose to take up the job, and how they first found out about it).

We strongly recommend that a discrete set of questions be developed, mirroring the employment questions, for those who are in self-employment. We further recommend that these questions also be asked of those who are running their own business, and that these

be separated from graduates who are in the process of starting up a business (but for whom the business is not yet a going concern).

3.) Capture of graduates' intentions / activities to start a business

The current set of questions which seeks to understand what graduates who are (in the process of) setting up a business does not work particularly well and does not get consistent response. Graduates' interpretation of what starting a business involves varies quite considerably, stretching from people who are looking to develop a going concern into something bigger to those for whom the business is at a highly embryonic stage.

As above, we would recommend that the core questionnaire focus on running a business, and that the separate much shorter set of questions (that currently appears towards the end of the working section), which is asked of graduates who are looking to set-up a new business, be reduced and further developed and moved towards the end of the questionnaire.

4.) Developing a portfolio versus working in a portfolio career

There is a stark lack of clarity and consistency of interpretation in respect of the term "developing a portfolio". And we would suggest that "developing a portfolio" is a very different concept from "working in a portfolio career" – an activity which the current questionnaire doesn't really explore directly or explicitly in any way.

We recommend that "developing a portfolio" be incorporated into the list of options at the census week activity question, potentially using amended wording.

We also recommend that a separate line of enquiry is developed to allow us to identify and explore those who are "working in a portfolio career"; this might involve giving graduates who are working in more than one job the space to talk in detail about all of the jobs they are working in.

We feel that whichever way the questionnaire is developed to better cater with these concepts, further testing is undertaken with a range of graduates before the survey launch.

There are a number of other smaller issues which may prompt some further discussion:

a.) Enhancing consistency of response from graduates working in multiple jobs, and/or engaged in multiple activities on the census date

As things stand, graduates who are working in multiple jobs make different decisions about which job they should choose as their "main job". This means that two people engaged in exactly the same activities, and with the same "end game" in mind might make very different choices as to which job / activity they presented as their "main". Their choices might reflect their differing psychological make-up and / or that they are bringing a differing set of cognitive practices to the questionnaire, more than that they are living differing realities.

This may be acceptable. And it may be unavoidable that this happens sometimes. But it will also be possible to reduce the risk of this happening by helping guide graduates to decisions more carefully.

There are a couple of ways forward on this issue. Firstly, and at a very basic level, the order in which the different criteria that could inform a decision are presented could be altered to guide the decision in a specific direction. (That is, at the moment, the question text cites: (i) a time consideration, (ii) a financial consideration and (iii) a consideration based on future plans, in that order. Changing the order in which these considerations are presented could impact on where graduates land in making their choices.

Alternatively, before asking graduates to consider their main job, it may be worth asking an additional question which establishes why graduates are working in more than one role (e.g. to gain experience in another area while working in a lower skilled job to earn money) to contextualise the job they then go on to identify as their “main job”.

b.) Introduction of a keyword assessor to ensure sufficient level of detail on job roles is captured while reducing participant burden

Ensuring that a sufficient level of detail is recorded in respect of job roles to enable detailed (4-digit) SOC codes to be applied to job titles and job descriptions is a critical requirement of the survey. The questionnaire needs to be set-up to facilitate this (and the interviewers trained to expedite it). There is a balance to be had here, however: from a graduate perspective, going into great detail about what jobs which they believe are straightforward to understand can seem laborious, and can lead to frustration with the questionnaire. In the standalone quantitative survey that we designed to accompany the cognitive work, as many as one in eight graduates who started to complete the questionnaire online dropped out in the section which asked them about the job they were doing, and the bulk of these dropped out specifically at the question asking them for details of their job role.

It will be hugely beneficial to response / retention rates, to interview length, and to the time required for data processing if we can include a “keyword assessor” design in the relevant question set-ups. This is something which IFF developed for the Longitudinal DLHE to great success. How it works is that if the respondent gives / types in an “obvious” job title (which can be automatically coded to 4-digit SOC), the script recognises this and refrains from posing follow-up questions about what daily duties / activities the job involves.

c.) A clearer and more consistent approach to timeframes

The structural device of the survey is to refer graduates back to a census week which comes around 15 months after graduation, and which could be up to 3 months before the day of interview.

However, there are also questions which **could** refer to a different time period. For example, B20 asks “have you worked for your employer for 12 months or more?” and there was some confusion as to whether this should be interpreted as “for 12 months or more **going back from today**” or “for 12 months or more leading up to the census week”.

Similarly, D1 asks “Were you employed in a full-time role at any point in the last 12 months?” and E1 “Have you undertaken any further or additional study in the last 12 months?” which led to similar confusion.

It is possible for the survey to refer to different timeframes for different questions, but the wording needs to be more carefully formulated and the graduates will need to be reminded at regular intervals what timeframe they should be thinking of. Equally, if the intention is to align

the timeframes more closely, then again the wording will need to be revisited in order that it delivers greater clarity.

d.) Giving graduates who have or are engaged in a more complex combination of activities rein to relate the full scope of their life.

e.) Enhancing consistency among graduates about what counts as ‘studying’

As it stands it is not clear how formalised graduates’ study should be to be counted towards a study outcome either in the census week or in the last 12 months. The wording of questions around this needs to be reconsidered, response options updated accordingly and importantly, phrasing need to be made consistent throughout the survey to ensure that graduates are clear as to what they should and shouldn’t consider in their answer.

Finally, there are a number of more minor “tweaks” to the questionnaire which we list here for completeness:

- i.) Switching from a census day (as is the case on the outgoing DLHE survey) to a census week worked well. It will be further helpful to graduates by warming them up and “locating” the census week in their memories via a couple of different ways:
 - a. Firstly, by introducing a new question at the start of the survey at which graduates establish generally where they are in the life plan
 - b. Finding a relevant, shared cultural event to refer them back to (e.g. Christmas, the Royal Wedding, the World Cup, a political event, etc).
- ii.) Graduates who are working while studying, and for whom studying is their main activity are nevertheless first asked a lot of questions about their job. It will help keep them engaged if the question sections are reordered so that these graduates are asked first about their study activity and then about their employment outcome.
- iii.) Overall the study section of the proposed questionnaire is considerably shorter than the employment section, and some graduates wanted to share more about their study outcomes. To mirror some of the questions asked in the employment section, it might be worth including some additional attitudinal questions in the study section e.g. graduates’ motivations for undertaking study.
- iv.) Provide a definition of what is meant by full-time and part-time work, so that graduates respond to these concepts more consistently.
- v.) Linked to this, HESA may wish to review whether any part-time employment should also be captured in the ‘employment history’ section of the survey which currently only captures full-time employment.
- vi.) It would be beneficial to the way in which the survey is received if we could filter B12 (“*Was this organisation part of the NHS?*”) so that it does not appear either where it is clear that the answer should be a “yes”, or where there is no chance it could be.

- vii.) For B16 which asks graduates whether they needed their degree to get their job, it may be beneficial to split out the question into several statements so that it asks whether graduates needed the subject area, level of qualification and class of degree.
- viii.) While the graduate voice section of questions at the end of the survey was considered a welcome addition, those who were engaged in multiple activities or worked in multiple roles were unsure how to answer this section of questions. It may be worth asking graduates to focus on their main activity when answering these questions.
- ix.) Graduates are asked to consider how 'meaningful' and 'important' their 'current activity / activities' to be at F2, F5 and F8. This is essentially asking two questions and we recommend that the question focusses on just one of these aspects either 'meaningful' or 'important'.
- x.) If 'meaningful' is retained at these questions, the term may require some clarification. Graduates interpreted 'meaningful' across a number of different levels – the self, society, or somewhere in between and as such interpreted and answered the question inconsistently.

2 Introduction

Background

- 2.1 The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has collected data on the destinations of Higher Education (HE) leavers since the early 90s. Every year, HE providers are required by HESA to collect information on their graduates six months after graduating. The survey uses a snapshot date to collect information about graduates' employment status, employment and study details on that date and their preparedness for employment, study and being self-employed / freelance or starting up a business.
- 2.2 DLHE data is now being used in an increasing number of ways and by an increasingly varied audience. It features in several different HE performance metrics, including university league tables, Unistats and TEF. In England the data is also used as a condition of HEFCE funding. Therefore, given so much now rides on DLHE data, it is subject to more scrutiny than ever before.
- 2.3 In addition to this, graduate trajectories are changing: the labour market has evolved since HESA first started collecting destinations data, for example, through the rise of the gig economy and the prevalence of more fluid job roles, working patterns and definition of employment activities. This necessitates a change in how graduate outcomes are recorded and how 'successful' graduate outcomes are defined.
- 2.4 In the meantime, the DLHE survey series has not been developed to reflect these wider changes; data collection on employment and other life outcomes following higher education has not changed substantially since 2002. It is in this context that between July 2015 and June 2017 HESA conducted a major review of destinations and outcomes data, referred to as the NewDLHE review.
- 2.5 The outcome of the review was a mandate to proceed with a new data collection model – The Graduate Outcomes Survey - underpinned by the following principles¹:
 - Open centralisation meaning that the survey will be run centrally with HE providers having near real-time access to responses and a significant stake in the survey's governance
 - A census covering all full-time and part-time students completing relevant HE qualifications
 - A snapshot survey of graduates 15 months after completing their studies
 - Four surveys each year, beginning in December, March, June and September to account for the different times of the academic year at which students graduate
 - The introduction of a new set of measures that capture the graduate's 'voice' and allow their self-assessment to be accounted for in the definition of 'successful' outcomes
 - The use of linked data sources to collect information on graduates' earning and further study information

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/records/reviews/newdlhe/model/methodology>

- A target response rate of 70%
- The introduction of optional and bespoke question banks (much like the NSS) to allow HEPs to gain supplementary information about their graduates

Aims and Objectives

2.6 The Graduate Outcomes Survey will launch later this year in December and the first graduate cohort to participate will be those who left HE in the 2017/18 academic year.

2.7 Thorough testing of the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey is key to ensuring its successful launch and so in November 2017, HESA commissioned IFF Research to undertake a full cognitive testing programme of the survey including:

- The core sections of the survey with a particular focus on any new questions within this and more limited testing of the opt-in banks
 - The overall sequencing and flow of the survey
 - Graduate understanding and interpretation of the survey questions
- Graduates' views and opinions on the name of the survey

2.8 The findings from the cognitive testing will be used to inform the final design of the Graduate Outcomes survey.

Methodology

The survey was tested with graduates who had completed a HE qualification between 15 and 18 months ago. The main testing was conducted via cognitive interviewing with 95 which was supplemented with the testing of a standalone online survey by a further 1,094 graduates. A detailed explanation of the methodology along with survey instruments are provided in the accompanying technical appendix.

Sampling

2.9 A key feature of the new Graduate Outcomes survey, compared to the DLHE surveys, will be that interview will move from 6 months after graduation to 15 months after graduation.

2.10 A major consideration for this cognitive exercise was the extent to which this temporal shift disrupts respondents' understanding of the existing questions, or the way in which they answer them. This meant that our survey population was necessarily defined by the cognitive testing timetable i.e. that by the time we conducted the cognitive fieldwork in January-February 2018, graduates would have ideally completed their HE course 15 months prior.

2.11 To ensure that our sample was not skewed towards graduates in too narrow a window, we defined our final in scope population as all graduates completing an HE course between June – October 2016. This meant that we tested the Graduate Outcomes Survey with graduates who completed their HE course somewhere between 15 and 18 months earlier.

- 2.12 The sample design also accounted for different types of HE provider acknowledging that institutional characteristics may also impact the ways in which graduates experience their education and how they respond to the survey.
- 2.13 Contact details for graduates were supplied by HEPs. Below we provide a summary of the HEPs who were approached to take part in the study and the profile of those that actually participated.

Table 2.1 HEPs approached and that participated in the cognitive exercise

	Number of HEPs approached	Number of participating HEPs
Provider type		
HEI	32	16
Specialist HEI	11	5
FEC	12	2
Alternative Provider	12	4
Provider location		
England	44	20
Scotland	9	3
Wales	9	2
Northern Ireland	5	2
Tariff entry		
High	16	8
Middle	13	6
Low	11	5
N/A	27	8
Size of institution		
Small	11	6
Medium	18	7
Large	14	7
Unknown	24	7

- 2.14 Despite approaching more FECs and Alternative Providers than originally envisaged and intervention by HESA to encourage participation, engagement from FECs and Alternative Provider with the research was limited. Contacts at these institutions commonly cited resource implications as the main reason for not being able to take part.

QAS

Prior to the main fieldwork period, the proposed questionnaire was assessed using Question Appraisal System (QAS) techniques. This exercise tested the questionnaire against 8 key criteria as follows:

- Reading – checking if any of the questions would be difficult for interviewers to read uniformly to all graduates or if the questions could be problematic when read in the graduate's "inner voice".
- Instructions – reviewing all introductions, instructions or explanations from a graduate's perspective.
- Clarity – identifying problems related to communicating the intent or meaning of the question.
- Assumptions – assessing whether any of the questions create problems as a result of any assumptions made or as a result of the underlying logic of each question.
- Knowledge or memory – checking whether graduates are unlikely to know any information or have trouble remembering it.
- Sensitivity or bias – reviewing any potentially sensitive questions or wording, and to see if they are likely to create biased responses.
- Response categories – assessing the adequacy of the range of set response options that can be used to answer specific questions.
- Other problems – any other issues with the question set.

Where the exercise threw up significant issues, changes were made to the questionnaire.

Fieldwork

Cognitive testing

2.15 The main questionnaire testing was conducted via cognitive interviewing. This technique was used to test graduates':

- Understanding of the questions and corresponding response options and whether they are interpreted as intended
- Recall (of what they were doing in the census week) and the strategies they use to recall this information
- Judgement (exploring motivation, sensitivity and social desirability)
- Response (mapping the intended response with available options)

2.16 A total of 95 cognitive interviews were achieved with graduates. The cognitive testing took place over the course of 5 weeks through a series of face to face interviews and Skype interviews. Face to face interviews were held throughout the UK in central locations in London,

Manchester, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast. The table below shows the profile of the graduates completing the cognitive interviews.

Table 2.2 Profile of graduates completing a cognitive interview

Total	Number of graduates	Proportion of all graduates
	95	100%
Interview location / type		
London	21	22%
Manchester	15	16%
Glasgow	16	17%
Cardiff	12	13%
Belfast	4	4%
Skype	27	25%
Provider type		
HEI	84	88%
Specialist HEI	6	6%
FEC	4	4%
Alternative Provider	1	1%
Main activity in census week		
Working	67	71%
Studying	14	15%
Unemployed	4	4%
Doing something else	10	11%
Mode of study		
Full-time	80	84%
Part-time	10	11%
Distance learner / e-learner	5	5%
Age upon entry		
21 or over (Mature)	39	41%
Under 21	56	59%
Ethnicity		
White	72	76%
BAME	19	20%
Unknown / Information refused	4	4%
Nationality		
UK	85	89%
EU	6	6%
Non-EU	4	4%
Subject areas		

	Number of graduates	Proportion of all graduates
Total	95	100%
Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences	24	25%
STEM (excluding biological sciences)	14	15%
Social science, Business and Law	24	25%
Languages, History, Education and Combined	21	22%
Creative Arts and Design	12	13%
Welsh language speaking	6	6%
Research student	7	7%

Standalone online survey

2.17 Additional feedback on the survey was also gathered by sending out a link to the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey to graduates not completing a cognitive interview. At the end of the survey, graduates were given the opportunity to provide some top-level views on their experience of completing the survey as well as their thoughts on the name. The survey also provided some quantified data to check for unusual response patterns. A total of 1,094 graduates completed the standalone online survey whose profile is summarised in the table overleaf.

Table 2.3 Profile of graduates completing the standalone online survey

	Number of graduates	Proportion of all graduates
Total	1,094	100%
Provider type		
HEI	989	90%
Specialist HEI	83	8%
FEC	14	1%
Alternative Provider	6	1%
Main activity in census week		
Working	811	74%
Studying	162	15%
Unemployed	55	5%
Doing something else	66	6%
Mode of study		
Full-time	953	87%
Part-time	84	8%
Distance learner / e-learner	57	5%
Age upon entry		
21 or over (Mature)	458	55%
Under 21	607	42%
Ethnicity		
White	845	77%
BAME	239	22%
Unknown / Information refused	10	1%
Nationality		
UK	854	78%
EU	115	11%
Non-EU	125	11%
Subject areas		
Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences	302	28%
STEM (excluding biological sciences)	224	20%
Social science, Business and Law	215	20%
Languages, History, Education and Combined	243	22%
Creative Arts and Design	110	10%
Research student	19	2%

About this report

- 2.18 This report details the findings of the cognitive testing of the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey. In each chapter, we summarise the key issues faced by graduates when answering individual survey sections and questions and suggest recommendations to the survey ahead of its launch in December this year.
- 2.19 This report is supplemented by a standalone technical report which provides detailed information on the project design and implementation.

Report outline

Chapter 3: Considers the overall feel and flow of the questionnaire, the relevance of the question set to graduates, how complete a picture the survey captures and graduates' level of engagement with the survey

Chapter 4: Looks at how graduates established their census week activities and pays particular focus to those developing a 'portfolio' and the uniqueness of their situation

Chapter 5: Focusses on the graduates' work in the census week and how this survey section caters for groups in different types of work including paid work for an employer, self-employment and starting a business

Chapter 6: Explores how the new set of questions on graduates' employment history works which is designed to capture any full-time work undertaken in the last 12 months and fill the gap between outcomes recorded at 15 months after graduation and at the DLHE stage

Chapter 7: Looks at how the survey section on graduates' study in the census week which replicates much of the corresponding survey section in DLHE translates to the new Graduate Outcomes Survey

Chapter 8: Considers how a new set of questions designed to captures graduates' study history over the last 12 months works

Chapter 9: Focusses on the new bank of 'graduate voice' questions introduced specifically to the Graduate Outcomes Survey to capture the diversity, richness and relative success of graduate outcomes as perceived by graduates themselves

Chapter 10: Evaluates how well the proposed banks of optional questions work among different graduate groups

Appendix A: Provides a detailed breakdown of issues and recommendations on a question by question basis

3 Overall views of the proposed Graduate Outcomes survey

3.1 The nature of a cognitive study of a questionnaire is that it dives into the details of that questionnaire in great depth to explore how well each question, and each response code works. We conduct this deep dive exercise through the bulk of this report. For this first chapter we step back a little, however, and consider the overall feel and flow of the questionnaire to understand:

- How well the survey worked overall
- Whether the questions it asks are relevant to graduates
- Whether it captures a full picture of what graduates are doing 15 months after their graduation
- How likely it is that graduates will complete it

Did the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey work?

3.2 In a nutshell, yes, the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey worked and did so very well for the majority of graduates.

3.3 The majority of graduates liked the structure and order of the survey. The core survey begins with their activities in the census week, before moving to their time between graduating and the census week, and then finally asking graduates to reflect upon their career as a whole and how it relates to their future. A small number of graduates stated that they enjoyed this structure without being prompted, seeing it as aiming to outline the relevance of their study to their current life.

"It's nice to talk about how your degree has helped you and what the purpose of it was."

Studying in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined course, HEI

3.4 Graduates praised the survey for being easy to understand and follow. The wording was considered concise and simple, making the survey flow well. Many of the graduates that we tested the survey with found the wording of most questions to be easy to understand. This aided appreciation of the overall flow of the survey.

"[The survey is] really well worded and it doesn't require you to think too much."

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences course, Specialist HEI

3.5 There is evidence that this straightforward and logical flow worked well for the majority of graduates who reported relatively straightforward situations in the census week, but less well for those in more complex situations where they were engaged in multiple activities. As the table shows below, of those who completed the standalone online survey, most were engaged in one single activity in the census week, and among those who were working at that time, the majority were working in just one job or role.

Table 3.1 The relative 'simplicity' of graduate outcomes in the census week

	% of all graduates	% of graduates in work in the census week
Number of activities engaged in during the census week		
One	88%	
Two	12%	
Three	*	
Four	*	
Number of jobs working in during census week		
One	64%	91%
More than one	6%	9%
Not working during the census week	30%	

- 3.6 There were additional complexities around some of the activities that graduates were involved in, in particular entrepreneurialism and portfolio building; but these were fringe activities - three per cent of all graduates stated they were starting up a business in the census week and just over one in ten were developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio (11%). Chapters 4 and 5 look in detail at these sections of the questionnaire and at our recommendations for how they could be further developed.

The use of time frames of reference in the Graduate Outcomes Survey: consistency and recall

- 3.7 The only thing which consistently disrupted the flow of the survey was the use of differing time frames. The current draft of the questionnaire sometimes asks about the last fifteen months, sometimes the last twelve months, and at other times talks in the present tense. A handful of graduates commented that they were not clear whether they should take, for example, the last twelve months to refer to the twelve months that led up to the census week or to the date of the interview itself. This created confusion and disrupted the flow of the interview which we explore in more detail in later chapters.
- 3.8 Whichever timeframe of reference is used, the ability of graduates to recall what they were doing at points of time in the past will be key to its success.
- 3.9 A key feature of the new Graduate Outcomes survey, compared to the DLHE surveys, will be that the interview will move from six months after graduation to 15 months after graduation.
- 3.10 Each graduate cohort will be split into four sub-groups depending on what point in the academic year they completed their HE course. There will be four fieldwork periods per survey corresponding to each graduate sub-group and within each fieldwork period, graduates will be asked to detail what activities they were involved in during a census week. The four census weeks will be defined as the first week of each wave of fieldwork in December, March, June and September and each fieldwork period will run for three months. What this means is that graduates could be asked to recall what they were doing in the census week up to three months' prior.

- 3.11 For the purposes of the cognitive testing, we asked graduates what they were doing between seven and 11 weeks prior to the interview, using a census reference date of the week commencing 4th December 2017.
- 3.12 For the majority of graduates, the use of a census week that was one to two months before the interview date did not pose any problems. The survey, while looking for specific details about a particular point in time, regards events and factors in graduates' lives that are large and important enough to be memorable. For most, discussing details of their employment from a month or longer ago was not a difficult task.
- 3.13 A handful of individuals indicated that they had used personal events to focus their recollection of the census week. One graduate commented that it was easy to remember the week as they had been on holiday and when they arrived at home their boiler was broken. Another graduate commented that a particularly difficult week in work had aided their recollection of the census. A third graduate found it easy to recall the census week because they were in the middle of an exam period in that week.
- 3.14 A few graduates commented that recalling the census week was helped by the fact that it fell in the run up to Christmas.
- 3.15 Overall, switching from a census day (as is the case on the outgoing DLHE survey) to a census week worked well.

Recommendation: While the census weeks are already set, describing them in relation to shared cultural landmarks, sporting or social events like public holidays or Wimbledon will help graduates' recall of what they were doing around that time generally and then more specifically in the census week

Do graduates perceive the questions asked by the Graduate Outcomes Survey to be relevant to them?

- 3.16 A critical objective of the Graduate Outcomes survey must be that it asks questions which are relevant to the stage of life / career which graduates find themselves at: that is, its questions must be **relevant**.
- 3.17 Overall the survey worked well in this respect. The majority of graduates found the survey to be relevant and applicable to their circumstances reflecting that most had relatively straightforward outcomes in the census week. As we saw earlier in the chapter, the vast majority recorded just one single activity in the census week and of those who were working, most had one 'job' or role.
- 3.18 Many graduates praised the fact that the survey does not exclusively focus on their present circumstances. Graduates were positive about questions that explored their experiences since graduating and their reflections on their career path.
- 3.19 However, there was a group of graduates who did not feel that the survey was relevant to them. These were students whom one might term "non-careerist": graduates who had undertaken their study for reasons other than career development such as those who studied a HE qualification later in life or out of general interest.

Does the proposed questionnaire capture the complete picture of graduates' outcomes 15 months after their graduation?

- 3.20 When considering how complete a picture the survey built of a graduate's situation, we have focussed our thinking around the central question: *'What were graduates doing in and around the census week that they wanted to tell us about, but the line of questioning didn't allow?'*
- 3.21 The majority of graduates felt that the survey offered a relatively holistic exploration of their situation in the census week. In particular, the survey was felt to capture a complete picture amongst graduates in traditional career paths. If a graduate was exclusively working or studying full-time, the survey generally worked as intended. In these instances, few graduates noted that the survey failed to capture a rounded picture of their situation. Some graduates also enjoyed being asked for their opinion on certain aspects of their current situation, alongside being asked about more factual aspects of their life.

"I liked the questions where I was asked my opinion and you go with your gut response."

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined course, HEI

- 3.22 However, a minority of graduates did note that they would have liked the opportunity to relate other aspects of their life, including activities that they considered to be of great importance or value. Graduates who felt that they had not been given the opportunity to fully detail where they were in their lives found the questions on "their career to date" particularly challenging to respond to. We look at this in more detail in Chapter 9.
- 3.23 This complaint was articulated most commonly where the graduate was engaged in activities such as volunteering. A handful of graduates noted that they felt that this was an important part of their life, which was beneficial both to themselves and to society, and which was also a positive outcome of their Higher Education experience.
- 3.24 Where graduates were employed in multiple job roles, and / or where they had been involved in a range of (sometimes part-time work) over the 12 months leading up to the census week, some felt that the survey did not allow them to sufficiently articulate how their career / life was coming together, as a work in progress. We explore this in greater detail in Chapter 5 – Graduates' 'work' in the census week.
- 3.25 Linked to this point about "lives in progress", a few graduates commented that they would like to be asked about their future plans more in the survey. One individual did not enjoy their job and wanted to be presented with the opportunity to show that they were attempting to find other work in a field of their interest. Another graduate who also did not enjoy their current job wanted to feed back that they had plans to undertake postgraduate study. Graduates who wished to be asked about their future plans were generally looking for the survey to give them an opportunity to talk about a planned change in career or to reflect upon the ways that their current situation was being used as a basis to work towards a different future.

"I think it needs to be broader doesn't it, the questionnaire? So that people can include those mixes of ambitions and the mix of needing to make money and pursue what you're passionate about or what you want to do in the future."

Doing something else in the census week, Creative Arts and Design course, HEI

- 3.26 In the core section of the Graduate Outcomes survey, graduates are not asked for their views and experiences pertaining to their specific Higher Education Provider. HEPs will have the opportunity to add opt-in banks to questions on to the end of the survey, of which two ask graduates directly about their perception of their HE provider ('Net Promoter Entity' and 'Graduate Choice').
- 3.27 As graduates were randomly allocated one or two opt-in banks for the purpose of the cognitive testing, it is possible that some were not asked any questions about their HEP. Where this was the case, a handful of graduates expressed that they wanted the survey to enquire about the opinion of their Higher Education Provider in more detail. These individuals generally felt that a survey that measured the outcomes of graduates should also attempt to gauge graduate opinion of their provider.

'It didn't ask me if I liked my degree... I think if you really loved your degree like I did, you'd like it if somebody asked you that.'

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined course, HEI

- 3.28 A couple of graduates felt that the survey did not ask enough about the stresses and challenges of their HE experience or those that result from the HE experience. Examples of such challenges included impacts upon mental health, lower economic status or a diminished social life.

"We should talk about stress. It didn't ask me about any negative ways of impacting my life... We should have looked at the other side as well."

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law course, HEI

Will people complete the Graduate Outcomes Survey?

- 3.29 No matter how well drafted the survey questionnaire is, there is a truism in research that a study can only be as effective as its sampling and the response rates it achieves. The Graduate Outcomes Survey is likely to be faced with significant challenges in this regard, with a target response rate of 70% set for the study at this stage.
- 3.30 This project was neither intended nor designed to explore likely response rates to the main Graduate Outcomes survey.
- The survey was tested in an artificial environment in which graduates were incentivised to take part both in the cognitive testing and the standalone online survey.
 - There was no organised communications campaign before the exercise to raise awareness of the standalone online survey among graduates and no ongoing campaign throughout the fieldwork period to encourage participation (e.g. sending out multiple email invitations and reminders and a telephone follow-up), as will be the case when the Graduate Outcomes Survey proper launches
- 3.31 However, we can look at metrics from this exercise such as the average time taken to complete the survey and dropout rates (overall and to specific questions) to get an indication of the basic level of engagement with the survey, and to better understand what line of questioning might deter graduates from completing.

3.32 The average interview length of the standalone online survey was 9 minutes and 42 seconds. This makes the survey slightly longer than the average online survey length we have recorded for the 16/17 January DLHE survey, which took graduates on average 8 minutes and 55 seconds to complete the core sections of.

3.33 The vast majority of graduates found the length of the survey to be appropriate given its content and aims. Some even responded that they had expected the survey to be longer than it was. In almost all cases its brevity was seen as a positive.

“Perfect length, I wasn't waiting for the end but then I felt like I didn't have much more to say. There's not much else I can tell you about my university experience, so I feel like it has about the right amount.”

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law course, HEI

“I expected it to be a bit longer actually - I think I did the old one and it was longer.”

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined course, HEI

Dropout rates

3.34 Overall, 1,481 graduates started the standalone online survey element of the project (i.e. clicked onto A1 – What activities were you doing in [the census week]?), of whom 386 dropped out at some point before reaching the end of Section F: a dropout rate of 26%. Table 3.2 below shows dropout rates at each section of the survey based on those who a.) started the questionnaire and b.) answered A1.

Table 3.2 Number and proportion of survey dropouts per core survey section

	All who started the questionnaire and dropped out before completing section F		All answered A1 and dropped out before completing section F	
	N	%	Number of dropouts	Proportion of all dropouts
Total	1,481	100		
Completed the survey in full (up to the end of Section F)	1,095	73%		
Dropped out before reaching the end of the survey	386	26%	303	100%
Landing page	89	6%		
Section A Census Week Activities	102	7%	19	6%
Section B Employment	176	12%	176	58%
Section C Further study, training or research	8	1%	8	3%
Section D Employment in the last 12 months	52	4%	52	17%

	All who started the questionnaire and dropped out before completing section F		All answered A1 and dropped out before completing section F	
Section E Further study, training or research in the last 12 months	40	3%	40	13%
Section F Reflection on career to date	8	1%	8	3%

- 3.35 Most dropouts occurred in the longest of the survey sections, Section B - Your employment in the [census week] in which approaching three-fifths of all dropouts occurred (58%). We will look at issues relating to specific questions in more detail in each chapter of the report, but it is worth noting here, that the most common question for dropouts to occur, both at the overall level and within Section B was at B5 – What did you mainly do in your job? This is in keeping with our experience of the DLHE survey in which we find graduates most commonly drop out at the page which asks graduates for their job title and job duties. This is mainly because graduates find it laborious to provide this level of detail.
- 3.36 It was at the same question in Section D - Employment in the last 12 months that saw the second highest number of dropouts - 12%.

Recommendation: The version of the Graduate Outcomes survey used for the cognitive testing exercise did not use any form of integrated automated SOC coding as graduates started to type in their job title. As the question is mandatory and requires an answer from graduates, it may well be worth revisiting the idea of integrating such software in to the main Graduate Outcomes survey, to reduce the burden on graduates.

For the most recent iteration of the DLHE Longitudinal survey, we developed a version of these questions which used a “keyword assessor” to enhance the respondent experience and minimise / reduce drop outs. The key design principal was to avoid asking people with “obvious” job titles (which we can automatically code to 4-digit SOC) to answer further (potentially irritating) questions about what their daily duties / day-to-day activities involved.

Admittedly, the tool was limited to just small number of occupations but is something that could be developed further in advance of the launch of the Graduate Outcomes survey.

- 3.37 It is also worthwhile to look at dropouts according to a graduate’s most important activity, summarised in Table 3.3 below. It shows that the survey was most likely to lose graduates whose main activity was either working (or due to start in the next month) or studying (or due to start in the next month) in the census week. Just under one-quarter of those who were working (or due to start in the next month) dropped out of the survey (23%) and just under one-fifth of those studying (or due to start in the next month - 19%).
- 3.38 Dropout rates among graduates who were unemployed or doing something else in the census week were comparatively lower (11% and 10% respectively) suggesting that these sorts of outcomes were over-represented in the survey.

Table 3.3 Proportion of survey dropouts per core survey section by graduates' most important activity in the census week

	Working (or due to start)	Studying (or due to start)	Unemployed	Doing something else
Completed question A1	1,055	199	62	134
Did not complete the questionnaire	244	37	7	13
% who did not complete	23%	19%	11%	10%
Of those who did not complete ...				
Section A Census week Activity	5%	3%	29%	8%
Section B Employment	66%	30%	0%	23%
Section C Further study, training or research	0%	19%	0%	0%
Section D Employment in the last 12 months	16%	16%	29%	46%
Section E – Further study, training or research in the last 12 months	10%	32%	29%	8%
Section F – Reflection on career to date	2%	0%	14%	15%

3.39 The table also shows that around six per cent of graduates who considered study to be their most important activity in the census week quit the survey before they even began to provide any details of this study outcome (representing a third of those studying who quit). In later chapters, we will also see that some graduates involved in work as well as study in the census week considered the survey to place too much emphasis on their work outcome. This suggests that graduates reporting both a work and study outcome (and consider study to be their most important activity) may need some assurance that they will have a chance to provide information about their study later in the survey.

Recommendation: We suggest that some signposting text is built into the survey which is displayed to graduates reporting both a work and study outcome and consider study to be their most important activity to reassure them that the survey aims to capture information about both activities, and that before asking more questions about their study, they will be required to answer a few questions about their employment in the census week. The text should reassure graduates that they will have opportunity to elaborate on their study outcome in due course. Although our work on cognitively testing the NSS survey showed that students tended to ignore such text, on balance we feel adding something in will do more good than bad

Survey name

3.40 “Brand” will be important to the survey and the response rate it achieves. This project did not fully explore branding, but we did test reactions to the proposed name to understand whether it will ‘draw graduates in’.

3.41 Most graduates felt that the name of the survey was clear and concise. They felt that the name worked well and explained the contents of the survey without sounding overly technical.

‘I think it covers what you are researching. When I received the email I already had a rough idea of what we would be talking about. The name is good.’

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences course, HEI

3.42 Several graduates spontaneously remarked that they preferred it to the name ‘Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education’.

‘Better than the current survey... feels more open, positive and not dry.’

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined course, HEI

‘Much better than ‘Destinations of Leavers. ...’

Working in the census week, Combined course, HEI

3.43 This was echoed by graduates who completed the standalone online survey and were asked a few summary questions about their experience of completing it – one of which asked specifically about the name of the survey. Just over 40% gave an opinion on the name and of these, four-fifths (80%) were positive about it.

3.44 In the small number of cases where graduates were not keen on the name, it was because they felt it to be too judgemental or to imply a greater sense of finality than is appropriate. In these cases, the ‘outcome’ associated with tests and measurements too much, and there was concern that anybody who was not in a ‘fulfilling career’ may be made to feel that they have failed that test. Others were worried that, just eighteen months after graduating, the ‘outcome’ of their graduation has yet to be reached. Instead, these individuals regarded the survey as a tool to track their progress, rather than their final destination.

“It feels a little like there’s pressure to be doing well, I think it’s because “outcomes” makes it seem like you need to be in a fulfilling career, because “outcomes” is so frequently associated with tests

and pressure situations... If I wasn't in a career, I would be less likely to complete an "outcomes" survey."

Working in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences) course, HEI

"Outcome to me sounds like the end, which isn't a nice thing to think about my life at age 24."

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences course, HEI

- 3.45 Three of the six graduates with whom we cognitively tested the survey in Welsh did not think the name worked well in the Welsh language. From their perspective, the word 'ganlyniadau' ('outcomes') is more commonly used in Welsh to mean 'results', particularly in relation to results of tests or degrees. One of these individuals suggested renaming it to use 'sefyllfa', meaning 'situation' or 'cynnydd' meaning 'progress'. However, two commented that they thought that the survey name worked well and explained the contents of the survey appropriately while one did not pass judgement on the name.

4 Census week activities

4.1 The first section of the questionnaire aims to capture at a top level what a graduate was doing in the census week. The section explores:

- All activities the graduate was engaged in at this time
- Which of these activities they consider to be their main activity, and
- Whether they consider themselves to have been involved in starting up their own business and/or developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio

4.2 This is a critical section of the survey. The answers graduates provide here will determine their route through the questionnaire and will be central to informing the new metric of 'graduate success'.

How well did the section work overall?

4.3 The section worked well for many graduates who found the list of census week activities to be comprehensive and relevant. Several spontaneously commented that being asked to focus on a particular week, helped to frame their answer.

4.4 However, the section was not without issues – some that affected specific groups of graduates, and others that caused challenges for all graduate groups:

- Graduates grappled to understand and interpret consistently the term 'portfolio' and this was the case among both those who said that they were and those who said that they were not developing a portfolio in the census week. There is a strong risk both of false positives and false negatives here.
- Graduates who were involved in **running** their own business during the census week raised questions about the narrow interest in '**setting** up a business' in this section. They mentioned that they were engaged in tasks that were part of running their business, rather than specifically about setting it up and as such felt they were being overlooked in this section
- The 'non- careerists' - i.e. those who studied a HE qualification later in life or out of interest who found the response categories were too skewed towards capturing an 'employment outcome' and didn't take into account that some go to university for reasons other than securing a job or improving their employability prospects
- Interpretation of the census *week* was varied, while some considered the full 7 days (from Monday to Sunday inclusive) others only considered the working week (Monday to Friday)
- The list of census week activities was perceived by some to be too broad and too vague which in some instances led to graduates not recording all their activities

Selecting census week activity / activities

- 4.5 At the first question in the section, graduates are presented with a list of nine 'activities' they might have been doing during the census week:

For this survey we are going to focus on what you were doing in the week commencing 4th December 2017 (from Monday 4th December 2017 to Sunday 10th December), around 15 months after you graduated from SAE.

What activities were you doing in the week commencing 4th December 2017?

Please select all that apply

☐ Working

☐ Contracted to start a job in the next month

☐ Studying

☐ Due to start studying in the next month

☐ Travel/Taking time out to travel – this does not include short-term holidays

☐ Caring for someone (unpaid)

☐ Retired

☐ Unemployed

☐ Doing something else

- 4.6 Generally, graduates regarded the list as complete and relevant to their situation and some considered it to be a helpful 'checklist' of activities that served as a recall prompt.
- 4.7 However, there was a relatively strong opinion that several of the response options at this question were too broad which confused some graduates as to how they should record their activity or activities, and in some cases meant that they simply omitted some activities from their answer. This was the case for several of the response categories which we discuss below.
- 4.8 The table below presents findings from the standalone survey. Key findings to note are that:
- The vast majority of graduates described themselves as working in the census week (75%)

- The second most common activity was studying: one-fifth of graduates said they were studying in the census week (19%)
- There was relatively little multi-coding of activities: the total of all responses sums to 113%

Table 4.1 Activities graduates were engaged in during the census week

Activity	Graduate Outcomes Survey
Base: All respondents who completed the standalone questionnaire	1,094
	%
Working	75
Contracted to start a job in the next month	3
Studying	19
Due to start studying in the next month	1
Travel/Taking time out to travel – this does not include short-term holidays	2
Caring for someone (unpaid)	2
Retired	1
Unemployed	6
Doing something else	4

4.9 Below we discuss the considerations and choices that underpin these descriptions of key activities.

What counts as working?

4.10 Many graduates considered the ‘working’ option to be too ‘broad’ and therefore too vague. Graduates were unsure as to whether the term:

- included self-employment and / or freelance work
- included voluntary or unpaid work (or whether this should be included under ‘doing something else’)

4.11 It was often the case that a graduate’s voluntary or unpaid work was not captured in this section because they did not think that it should be classified as ‘work’ which graduates generally assumed meant paid work.

4.12 Several commented spontaneously that volunteering should constitute an activity in its own right.

“I think voluntary / unpaid work should be a separate category, because someone [doing this] may not consider themselves to be working in the traditional sense”

Unemployed in census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

“Volunteering / unpaid work could be considered their own categories, as they are different from working (which I consider to be ‘paid employment’).”

Employed in census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

Recommendation: In order to provide greater clarity, we recommend that the list of activities at A1 / A2 be restructured as follows:

1. ‘Working’ to be amended to ‘Paid work for an employer’
2. ‘Self-employment / freelancing’ to be added as a separate response option
3. ‘Voluntary / unpaid work for an employer’ to be introduced as a separate response option

What counts as studying?

4.13 Much in the same way as ‘working’, some graduates considered the term ‘studying’ to be too vague and were left unsure as to the type of study this term included. For example, it was not clear how formalised this study should be especially among those who were also working in the census week i.e. should it lead to a qualification? Should one-off short courses or distance learning be considered along with more informal types of on-the-job training?

“I’m doing a distance learning course, but I did not select ‘studying’, I wasn’t sure if this counted. I understood studying to be a full-time, professional course at an HE institution.”

Employed, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

“I wasn’t sure whether to include my evening class in electrical engineering, which involves getting an HNC qualification as study. It would be helpful to have some clarification around whether the study has to be full-time or part-time and what level of qualification.”

Employed, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

Recommendation: We recommend changing the studying code from ‘Studying’ to ‘Engaged in a course of study, training or research’ in line with later survey sections

What counts as being unemployed?

4.14 There was reluctance among a small number of graduates to select unemployed as an outcome and this revolved around two reasons, both of which were rooted in sensitivity bias. Firstly, some graduates wanted to frame their response in more positive terms by saying that they were looking for or applying to jobs and because it was not explicit in the response category whether unemployed meant unemployed **and looking for work**, they decided not to select it.

4.15 Secondly, some graduates, while technically unemployed, did not feel that description was reflective of their status. This was the case among a few who had recently completed subsequent study and were in the process of thinking about the next stage of their career development. So, while there were not actively applying for jobs nor working, they were planning their next steps.

“I would like to be able to indicate that I am a recent graduate, I’m not yet ‘unemployed’”.

Unemployed, STEM (excluding biological sciences), HEI

- 4.16 This second issue could prove to be significant within the graduate outcomes survey. The DLHE survey has traditionally been conducted six months following graduation: graduates who have enrolled on a further course of study tend to still be on this course of study after six months. With the move to a timeframe 15 months after graduation, it is likely that a greater number of graduates who have engaged in a further course of study will have completed that study but not yet transitioned to a new activity by the time of the Graduate Outcomes survey.
- 4.17 In both cases there seemed to be a perceived stigma with selecting the unemployed response option because it could be thought to imply some degree of idleness or lack of success on part of the graduate.

Recommendation: We suggest that at the very least the 'Unemployed' response option is changed to 'Unemployed and looking for work'

Graduates raised a small number of other minor issues relating to the response categories at this question which we detail and provide recommendations on in Appendix A.

Selecting 'conflicting' outcomes

- 4.18 The question which captures graduates' activities in the census week is set up in such a way to not allow what on the face of it appear to be an illogical combination of options. For example, graduates are not allowed to select 'working' along with 'retired' and / or 'unemployed'.
- 4.19 A particular gripe among graduates pursuing a more 'fluid' or less 'traditional' career route and the 'non-careerists' i.e. those who had gone to university at a later stage in life or for the love of learning, was that this set-up was too geared towards graduates at the beginning of their working career or who had entered into a stable and relatively fixed job role. These groups felt that the set-up did not sufficiently accommodate the peculiarities of their situation which might entail 'conflicting activities'.
- 4.20 Although few in number, the strength of feeling among these graduates was fervent.
- 4.21 One such example was a mature student who was a freelance worker running her own business but was also (semi) retired receiving a pension from her previous job as a psychiatrist. She complained that it was not possible to select 'retired' and 'working', which in her mind, were not mutually exclusive.

"It did really annoy me. There's nothing worse than forced categories and when the categories don't quite fit, it makes you feel like not completing the questionnaire."

Doing something else in census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

- 4.22 Another was a graduate who was also freelancing and meant the nature of their working pattern was very irregular and required them to be on the constant lookout for new opportunities.

"I work, but very irregularly (self-employed), so I wanted to select unemployed as well as working. If there was 'looking for more work' option, I would select that."

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

Identifying the main activity

- 4.23 Graduates engaged in more than one activity in the census week were asked to identify which of these they considered to be their 'most important' activity. Graduates were not provided with any guidance and were left to their own devices to decide what 'most important' meant to them.

And which of these activities do you consider to be your most important activity in the week commencing 4th December 2017?

Please select one option only

☒ Working

☐ Studying

- 4.24 On the whole, graduates identified their main activity relatively straightforwardly and generally made their selection based on the amount of time they spent on each activity (which, in most but not all cases, also aligned with their longer-term career goals).

"I selected studying [as opposed to working] as my main activity – I am studying full-time and working part-time to get teaching experience"

Studying in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), HEI

In fewer cases, graduates were more explicit about how their respective activities tie in with their longer-term plans

"I selected studying as it's more important in terms of my priorities, it will help me get to uni. The work is just a stop gap. I put effort into the work I do, but not that much."

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, FEC

- 4.25 However, for some graduates, selecting a main activity was not as clear-cut and this was especially the case among those who had selected a job or study that was due to start in the next month as one of their activities and as such were not actively engaged with it during the census week. An example of this was a graduate who was due to start a postgraduate course within the next month but selected his relatively low-skilled work because it was what he considered to be the main activity at that point in time. HESA may wish to review the inclusion of activities that are due to start after the census week, how these activities should be recorded in relation to activities that are actually being undertaken and their respective importance when reporting a main activity.

Recommendation: We suggest that the response categories at A1 relating to graduates' *intended* activities i.e. 'Contracted to start a job in the next month' and 'Due to start studying in the next month' are removed from A1 and asked as a separate question in Section A.

Starting up a business

- 4.26 As a result of the NewDLHE Review, HESA committed to providing a suite of questions for graduate entrepreneurs so that the experiences of these individuals could be better understood. As such a new question was introduced to Section A of the Graduate Outcomes Survey to establish whether graduates were starting up their own business in the census week².

You've already said that you were working in the week commencing 4th December 2017, were you also engaged in starting up your own business, or in developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio?

Please select all that apply

☐ Yes, I was starting up my own business

☐ Yes, I was developing a professional / artistic or creative portfolio

☐ No

- 4.27 Only a very small proportion of graduates completing the standalone online survey were starting a business in the census week (3%) and the vast majority of those who said they were, had already selected 'working' from the list of census week activities at A1 (83%). On the face of it, this indicates that graduates had considered their start-up activities when thinking about their activities in the census week.
- 4.28 This was generally supported by the cognitive testing – most graduates who said that they were starting up a business in the census week had also selected 'working' at the earlier census week activities question and this was either because graduates considered the two activities to be the same thing or because 'working' was the option that best described what they were doing.

"I selected 'working' at A1 because that was the nearest fit, to what I was doing: trying to earn money from making and selling craft items."

Working in the census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

- 4.29 The cognitive testing also highlighted that graduates felt the question was too focussed on starting up a business as opposed to *running* a business and as such felt overlooked by this question. This was further compounded when graduates were unsure whether or not the 'working' response category in the list of census week activities at the first question included 'self-employment'.

² Additional questions asked specifically to graduates who were starting up a business in the census week were added to 'Section B - Your employment in the [census week]' of the survey. The testing of these questions is discussion in Chapter 5 – Graduates' 'work' in the census week.

- 4.30 This also raises a bigger question around whether *starting* a business is inherently different from *running* a business or being self-employed and is an issue we pick back up and offer recommendations on in Chapter 5.

"I was running a business having already set it up in the past. The question kind of just infers that you started that business in December."

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

Recommendation: We previously recommended that the list of options at A1 / A2 be restructured and to this revised list, we also suggest adding 'running my own business', either combined with the new 'Self-employment / freelancing' code or as a standalone option

Portfolio careers

- 4.31 A criticism of the outgoing DLHE survey series is that 'successful' graduate outcomes are too narrowly defined according to the seniority of an individual's job role using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. Critics believe this to be an outmoded way by which to classify job roles, especially in the context of career evolution and the prevalence of more fluid job roles, working patterns and definition of employment activities. As such, one of the key aims of the new Graduate Outcomes Survey is to ensure it better accommodates those pursuing less traditional career paths especially those involved in 'portfolio careers'. Therefore, a main focus of the cognitive testing exercise was to better understand what the development of a portfolio entails, how graduates regard this in relation to other activities they might be involved in during the census week and how well the survey caters to graduates developing a portfolio.

Who is developing a 'professional, artistic or creative portfolio' and what is it?

- 4.32 In addition to whether or not they were starting up a business, all graduates were asked if they were developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio at this time. Just over one in ten of those who completed the standalone online survey (11%) said they were, this doubled among graduates who considered their main activity during the census week to be unemployment and increased almost four-fold among Creative Arts and Design graduates³.

Table 4.2 Proportion of graduates developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio

	All graduates	Main census week activity: unemployment	Subject area: Creative Arts and Design
<i>Base (unweighted)</i>	1094	55	110
% developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio	11%	22%	40%

- 4.33 Regardless of whether they selected yes to this question, as part of the cognitive interview all graduates were asked what 'developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio' meant to

³ It is worth noting that unemployment was highest among Creative Arts and Design graduates (11% compared to 5% overall).

them. Answers were mixed and there was no general consensus, even among those who had said that they were doing this in the census week, on what the term meant.

- 4.34 In its broadest sense, the term was taken to mean a body of evidence of skills and competencies that could be used in a variety of ways (showcased, 'exhibitioned', listed) to improve one's employability, chances of securing typically paid work or to further their career through additional study. Graduates did not consider a 'portfolio' to take one specific format but rather a variety of forms including hard copy or electronic / online.

"[Building a portfolio involves] developing a record of work, skills or practice and documenting the journey of what I've been doing and reflecting on how I can improve either electronically or in a book which I can reference and show people or use on my CV"

Working in the census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

"I am developing a portfolio of my writing - chapters / memoirs etc because I'd like to apply for an MA in creative writing."

Studying in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

- 4.35 Some took this to its extreme and felt that everyone in fact developed a professional, artistic or creative portfolio by virtue of having a CV and as such graduates may not even be conscious of the fact that they are developing a portfolio.

"I guess it is something that you would add to a CV, things that you have done. That's what I think of...I think most people should have one."

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

- 4.36 Several picked up on the idea of developing an online presence and a 'personal brand' as being an integral aspect of a 'portfolio'. One graduate explained that she had developed her personal brand online via LinkedIn and through blogging and felt that building this personal brand was important in securing her current job. Upon further probing, another graduate considered other examples of a portfolio to include LinkedIn work which he termed as 'personal brand' work which he does sporadically.

- 4.37 There was certainly a prejudice among graduates, both among those who were and were not developing a portfolio, of their interpretation of the specific term 'portfolio' towards Arts based activities which, as we saw earlier was also borne out in the online survey data.

"I thought of artistic professions, photography, music, and that a portfolio is likely to be developed for these professions"

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

"I suppose that would be something in a creative industry, where employment is less typical, you might not tend to be on a contract so much, you might be doing a bit of freelance work or doing a bit on the side with another job to make ends meet initially."

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

- 4.38 Views were mixed as to whether the development of a professional, artistic or creative portfolio was rooted in employment-based activities, study type activities or extra-curricular type activities and linked to this, how graduates come to develop a portfolio in the first instance.

- 4.39 We have already noted that, broadly, graduates considered the development of a portfolio to improve employability, but several were unsure how this crossed over with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) especially those in scientific, medical or veterinary professions. For example, one graduate noted that CPD was an integral and regular part to her job as a student mentor at a university, but she decided not to classify this as 'portfolio development'. Similarly, another graduate explained that as part of his nurses' registration he has to do additional study each week and keep a log as part of his CPD but again decided not to mark this a portfolio work in the survey.
- 4.40 Meanwhile other graduates deliberated whether they should consider the portfolio they were developing as part of any study there were doing in the census week. In some cases, they chose not to because portfolio work was an integral part of the course and as such did not consider it to be a standalone activity.

"I could have said I was developing a portfolio because I study Graphic Design, but as the main purpose of my studies isn't to create a portfolio I didn't select it."

Studying in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), FEC

- 4.41 One graduate raised the point that there was no explicit reference to an 'academic' portfolio in the question text and felt that this was perhaps an oversight. In her case she had completed a Biology degree and had written papers off the back of this which she has collated along with notes from other courses and conferences she had attended which she felt could help to secure employment in the field. Arguably an 'academic' portfolio might be covered by the term 'professional' but it is an important point to raise to illustrate further the differing interpretations of the concept.
- 4.42 In a very small number of cases, graduates took portfolio development to mean the pursuit of a hobby. One graduate mentioned that he was playing in a band during the census week and that is what he had in mind when he stated he was developing a portfolio (with the emphasis being on artistic or creative and not professional). While he had long term ambitions to pursue a career in music, he wasn't sure how feasible this was and, in the meantime, was happy to just enjoy playing in the band without any real expectation of being able to make a living from it.

Is developing a portfolio the same or different to 'working'?

- 4.43 To try and further understand the 'portfolio' concept, all graduates who had stated they were working at the first question and had said that there were 'developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio' were asked whether the work they were doing was separate to their portfolio work. This question was added solely for the purpose of the cognitive exercise to aid understanding of the term 'portfolio' and will not feature in the actual Graduate Outcomes Survey. Of those completing the standalone online survey, half said these activities were different (49%) and half said they were the same (51%) which just serves to further illustrate the complexity of defining a portfolio career, particularly in relation to work.
- 4.44 When this issue was explored in the cognitive interviews with graduates who were developing a portfolio, views were also very split with some not able to come down on one side because they felt the two to overlap. Where the activities were considered to be different it very much came down to earning a wage – whereas employment earns one a living, developing a portfolio doesn't.

"You're kind of building your own status in an industry without necessarily being paid for it."

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

"The goal of creating a portfolio is to get a job, rather than it being potentially wage-paying in itself."

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

4.45 Where the activities were considered to be the same, graduates felt that it was only through the experience and opportunities available to them because of their day to day work, they could develop their portfolio.

4.46 The same issue was also explored among those not developing a portfolio as part of the cognitive exercise. Views among this group were more consistent; these graduates were generally more inclined to think that work and portfolio development are different and again this was based mainly around the idea that working meant 'earning a wage' whereas developing a portfolio didn't but was a means by which to secure work. On the one hand this steadfastness might provide some reassurance that portfolio development would not be missed in the survey, but on the other might be perceived as too narrow a view on what constitutes portfolio development and mean that this sort of activity is not captured.

Recommendation: Given the mixed views as to whether developing a portfolio and working amount to the same thing and acknowledging that portfolio development can be rooted in a combination of employment-based activities, study type activities and extra-curricular type activities, we strongly suggest that 'developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio' is added as separate code to the list of census week activities. However, this is subject to agreement being reached on the definition of the term (see next section).

4.47 The cognitive testing has shown there to be little or no consensus among graduates themselves on what a 'portfolio career' is, even among those involved in developing a portfolio. This presents significant challenges when it comes to actually capturing whether this is something a graduate is involved in and more widely, the sector interpreting the 'portfolio career' concept and any data collected in relation to it.

4.48 The cases studies below and overleaf serve to further demonstrate the complexity of the concept and the need for more detail on 'portfolio careers' to be captured as part of the Graduate Outcomes Survey.

4.49 In the context of career evolution and the move away from 'traditional' employment outcomes it is imperative that a revised 'destinations survey' accounts for this shift and as such we recommend that further exploratory work is undertaken in this area, prior to the launch of the main survey in December.

4.50 We feel that developing a portfolio is also very different to the concept of a 'portfolio career' which the current version of the questionnaire does not explore. Again, we feel that any further developmental work should also extend to include portfolio careers'.

Recommendation: As a next step we recommend that HESA reach an agreement on what the term 'professional, artistic or creative portfolio' means, frame a series of survey questions around this agreed term and undertake further substantial testing with a range of graduates before the survey launch.

Further work should also be undertaken to explore the concept of portfolio careers – where graduates are working in multiples roles (which we begin to explore in the next chapter) – and how graduates involved in these can be better catered for in the survey

'Katie' graduated from a Creative Arts and Design course from an HEI. Her account demonstrates the potential a revised Graduate Outcomes survey has for collecting comprehensive information about graduates who are developing their portfolio

In the census week she was employed in two jobs, one as an assistant dance teacher on a freelance basis and another as a drama teacher in a voluntary capacity. When asked if she was developing a portfolio alongside her jobs, she said yes and for the purposes of the survey, declared that her portfolio work was different to her employment activities. She initially described the concept of a portfolio as:

"Developing a record of work, skills or practice and documenting the journey of what I've been doing and reflecting on how I can improve which I can reference and show people or use on CV".

However, as she talked through what her jobs entailed and what contributed to her portfolio, she realised there was in fact a great deal of overlap. There were elements of her assistant teacher role that contributed to her portfolio which also involved some directing, reading scripts and facilitating (roles she undertook as a drama teacher).

"I would say that actually, developing a portfolio is an umbrella term which can incorporate employment, as well as other activities not necessarily classed as work or employment".

She would have liked the opportunity to provide more information about her portfolio as part of the survey – what it was about, whether she received money / funding to work on it, what sorts of activities / work fed into the portfolio - whether it was through some form of paid work or voluntary work and how the opportunities came about for her to be able to add to her portfolio (e.g. how did she get the opportunity to work in a voluntary capacity as a drama teacher)

When asked if it would make sense to ask her job title in relation to her portfolio development she felt that it was a reasonable question and that she'd give herself the job title of 'Drama Facilitator' or 'Artist'.

'Yvette' graduated from a Creative Arts and Design course from a specialist HEI. Her account demonstrates how limiting the idea of a census week can be for graduates who are developing their portfolio.

In the census week 'Yvette' was studying for her Master's and working part-time in a boutique garden centre. She said she was also developing a portfolio in the census which, which she described very much in relation to her study and what she was doing in the actual census week:

"At university we are given various briefs one of which is a personal project about personal development, what I'm learning as part of the course and for that I need to make a portfolio."

"'Portfolio' is the right way to describe these activities but it is essentially a CV - it is your body of work as a designer which may need to be curated for different audiences. It is your marketing".

She found it hard to state definitively whether her part-time work in the garden centre was the same or different to her portfolio work – on the face of it i.e. creatively, she didn't consider them to be the same but also felt her work intertwined with her development as part of the personal project she was undertaking as part of her course.

Only upon further discussion towards the end of cognitive interview, when no longer confined by the survey questions, did Yvette go into more detail about other activities that feed into her portfolio development. She spoke about other events she had been involved in outside of the census week which she felt were important contributions to her portfolio. She had exhibited 3 times since June....

"They have given me opportunities to meet different people, for them to view my work, take a business card and then contact me at another time"

She'd also run a few market stalls selling products she's designed and taken on some freelance work for people she has met through exhibiting or on social media.

"I'm having my portfolio viewed a lot at the moment - it may not be giving me any opportunities yet but by seeing a creative director from a company, you've at least got your foot in the door. I've got their email address, so I can email them again and ask for future work opportunities".

What do graduates take the census 'week' to mean?

- 4.51 An issue which arose across the section was how graduates thought the census week. For the purposes of the cognitive testing we asked graduates what they were doing in w/c 4th December 2017. We asked them to consider the full week and the question text included the wording 'from Monday 4th December to Sunday 10th December' in the full question text.
- 4.52 Despite setting out the range of dates to consider, graduates interpreted w/c 4th December 2017 differently and this tended to be determined by the type and / or the number of activities the graduate was involved in during the census week. Some considered the full week i.e. all seven days from Monday through to the Friday; typically, these were graduates involved in multiple activities which took place on different days of the week or those who were involved in non-employment type activities. Whereas those who considered the 'traditional working week', tended to be graduates who recorded one activity – working, or considered this to be their main activity at that time.

"I have a 9-5 job Monday to Friday, so I was thinking more about the working week"

Employed in census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

"I thought about both the week and the weekend because I am at uni during the week and I work at the weekends"

Studying in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

- 4.53 There was some, albeit rare, evidence of sensitivity or bias among graduates who felt that by virtue of the survey being about graduate outcomes, HESA's main interest was to find out if the graduate is working or not and as such this shaped whether a graduate considered the working week or the full seven days – whichever allowed them to report a working outcome.

Recommendation: While there is explicit mention of the timeframe graduates take account of when considering the census week in the introductory text before the question, we suggest that it would be better placed as part of the question text itself

- 4.54 A larger, more significant change, that may be worth considering is the inclusion of a new overarching question at which graduates consider more broadly where they are in their life plan before getting them to consider specific activities they were doing during the census week. The inclusion of such a question would be an effective method by which to 'warm up' graduates up to the survey and something that would be of particular value for graduates pursuing less traditional career paths.

Recommendation: Add in a new question at the very beginning of the survey which establishes a graduate's 'general status' to warm up graduates by encouraging them to focus on what they were doing generally around the time of the census week. We suggest what the new question and response options could look like below which will require thorough testing.

Q. We know that graduates' lives and careers can evolve in lots of different ways in the early years after leaving university: not everyone takes the classic career path of going straight into a full-time job. Our questionnaire is going to try to capture the full complexity of your own circumstances, and all of the different activities that you are engaged in.

To start off with, we'd like to get a feel for the sorts of activity that you are currently engaged in. Would you say that...?

- i.) You are firmly settled in what you want to be doing on a long-term basis
- ii.) You are starting to settle into what you want to be doing on a long-term basis
- iii.) You know what you want to be doing on a long-term basis but you've not yet managed to break into it
- iv.) You're still trying to work out what you want to be doing on a long-term basis
- v.) You have not considered what you want to be doing on a long-term basis

5 Graduates' 'work' in the census week

Introduction

- 5.1 In this chapter, we look at how the current questionnaire seeks to establish the types of work that graduates are engaged in: whether that is employment, self-employment or running a business. (This is done through Section B in the survey questionnaire, see appendix A).
- 5.2 This is a critical part of the questionnaire both in the sense that it is likely to derive the largest volume of responses (we can expect that more graduates will be in some form of work than in any other activity; indeed for the quantitative part of this study 74% of graduates were routed through questions in Section B) and in the sense that the ability of questions to accurately and fully record work activity will have the greatest impact in indicating positive outcomes from Higher Education.
- 5.3 The survey is structured to establish a mixture of factual questions, descriptive questions and perceptual questions:
- Whether the graduate was working for an employer or whether they were self-employed
 - The contractual nature of their work, including whether it was full-time or part-time and how much they were remunerated for doing it
 - Their job title, and what the job involved (questions designed to derive a SOC code for their employment)
 - The name of the organisation for which they worked, and the nature of that organisation's activities (questions designed to derive a SIC code for the business)
 - The location of their place of work
 - The role that their qualification played in helping them to get the job
 - How they found out about the job and the reasons they decided to take it
- 5.4 Where graduates were working in more than one job in the census week, the questionnaire asks them to select one job to provide this information for.
- 5.5 The survey additionally poses a similar but extended set of questions for those who were in the process of starting up a business during the census week. This latter set of questions is a new set of questions (and a new approach) which has not previously been used in the DLHE series (either the 6-month DLHE or the Longitudinal DLHE).
- 5.6 The survey also establishes whether the graduate has had other jobs in the last 12 months as a route to a set of questions which establish the graduates' 'career history'. This is also a new set of questions for the Graduate Outcomes, although the set mirrors an approach taken in the first Longitudinal DLHE quite closely.

Overall views of the survey

5.7 Reflecting the fact that the questions used through this section are largely tried and tested questions, the section mostly works. However, there are a number of challenges which reflect the different types of work situations that graduates are in:

- Where graduates were working in a single job (the classic or traditional employment situation – whether full or part-time) the questionnaire worked well – though there is still potential for minor questionnaire changes to optimise their survey experience. This is the situation in which 48 of the graduates in the cognitive phase of the project found themselves, as did 64% of the graduates in the quantitative survey.
- Where graduates are working in multiple jobs, the graduate is asked to choose one of those jobs to focus on through the questionnaire and there is a challenge in identifying which job they should focus on. Nine graduates in the cognitive survey described themselves as working in multiple jobs, as did 6% in the quantitative survey
- Where graduates are self-employed, there are a number of challenges associated with specific questions and which questions this group should see – those about employment that they currently see, or a set specifically about running a business (similar to those starting a business). Four graduates who participated in cognitive interviewing were self-employed or running a business, as were 3% of the graduates who participated in the quantitative survey.
- Actively being in the process of setting up a business was a particularly challenging concept to handle in the survey, with a degree of confusion inherent in many of the questions posed to those who described themselves as being in the process of setting up a business, and a lack of relevance in others. With this there is a danger that – as the questionnaire is currently set-up – the survey will generate both false positives (people who say they are in the process of setting up a business but who are not really actively doing so) and false negatives (people who are in the process of setting up a business but who do not answer positively that they are in the survey). Six graduates who participated in cognitive interviewing were in the process of starting up a business during census week, as were 3% of the graduates who participated in the quantitative survey.

5.8 In the remainder of this chapter we first discuss general issues with the questions as faced by all graduates who responded to this section of the survey, covering those in a single job, multiple jobs or self-employed work. We then walk back through the responses to section B from the position of different subgroups to cover the issues unique to each, covering those working in multiple jobs and those who were self-employed.

5.9 The end of this section is dedicated to the second half of the Section B questions, specifically for those starting a business during census week, assessing how these new questions worked overall and highlighting specific areas of issue to address.

General question issues impacting all groups of respondents

5.10 The subsections below provide details of each issue experienced by respondents in the employment section overall, namely those completing questions B1-B24.

Consistency of timeframes

5.11 Across this section, graduates seemed to be unclear about whether they should be answering the questions based on the day they took the survey or thinking back to the census week mentioned earlier.

5.12 This was found to be a particular issue at question B20, which asks whether they have worked for their employer for '12 months or more'. The use of present tense in the question meant most graduates assumed it was asking about the 12 months prior to the interview, not 12 months from the census week. Other graduates assumed that this could be cumulative, across all the times they have worked at an organisation rather than consecutive months.

5.13 Mentioning consecutive months in this question would have helped to clarify how graduates should approach the calculation and referencing the census week throughout this section, would have helped to clarify this issue more generally and ensure the questions were being answered consistently.

Recommendation: Throughout this section, but especially at B20, it will be important to continuously remind graduates which week they should be referring to in their responses. At B20, consider adjusting the question wording to: 'At the time of [census week], had you worked for your employer for 12 consecutive months or more?'

Part-time vs. full-time work (B3)

B3. Were you working full time or part time?

Were you working full time or part time?

Please select one option only

☐ Full time

☐ Part time

5.14 There were some differences in how graduates interpreted this question: while they seemed clear on how to define themselves, explanation of their responses showed that how each person defines full-time and part-time does differ.

5.15 Definitions of full-time ranged from over 35 hours, over 37 hours, jobs deemed to be '9 to 5', usually based on what is in their contract. This is unlikely to have a meaningful impact on responses, as most can easily assign themselves to one or the other.

- 5.16 However, those on zero hours contracts or fluctuating weekly rotas seemed less certain of how to define themselves. This in part due to a lack of explanation of how full- and part-time are defined for this purpose, as well as many needing a reminder of the census week for people to think back to.
- 5.17 Altogether, 88% of quantitative survey respondents classified themselves as working full-time, while 12% classified as part-time.

Recommendation: Provide a definition of what is meant by full-time and part-time for our purposes. There could be value adjusting the question to better suit those in zero-contracts or fluctuating rotas, for instance asking people how many hours they work per week *on average* and coding this to full-time and part-time in the background for analysis

Formal supervision (B6)

B6. Were you responsible for formally supervising anyone?

Were you responsible for formally supervising anyone?

Please select one option only

☐ Yes

☐ No

- 5.18 The majority of graduates were typically very clear on what this question was asking about, namely whether they supervise or oversee junior members of staff as part of their job
- 5.19 However, there was some ambiguity in the interpretation of this question amongst those in the education or health and social work sectors, where 'formally supervising' was interpreted as looking after students or children in their care, rather than line management or the overseeing of junior members of staff. As a result, most would consider this as a core part of their role.
- 5.20 The quantitative survey results show 26% responded yes to this question.
- 5.21 As further context, cognitive interview feedback shows that if the 'formally' was removed more graduates would have said 'yes' at this question, as many do what they considered to be 'informal supervision', such as just overseeing an occasional task by a junior member of staff. This type of supervision is not the objective of the question but does potentially provide additional insight into graduate responsibilities in the workplace.

Recommendation: Consider adding a short sentence to the question clarifying what it means by 'formal supervision' responsibilities, to ensure more consistent responses across professions. If of interest, consider changing the question to ask about what type of supervision they do in their role, if any, with options to include formal, informal and none (include definitions for each).

Annual pay (B8)

B8. What was your annual pay for your main employment to the nearest thousand before tax?

What was your annual pay for your main employment to the nearest thousand before tax?

Please type in your answer below

☐ Refused

What currency were you paid in?

Please type in your answer below

☐ Refused

- 5.22 In general, the request for graduates to provide details of their annual pay was not perceived as intrusive, with many happy to provide it without question. However, a minority were concerned about why it was being requested and how the information would be used.
- 5.23 Those who do not have a set number of hours per week or month did find this more difficult to answer, as their annual pay is dependent on the number hours they have worked over the course of the year, rather than being a set amount.
- 5.24 Consistent with the findings above, the quantitative survey, some 15% of respondents refused to provide an answer.

NHS organisations (B12)

B12. Was this organisation part of the NHS?

Was this organisation part of the NHS?

Please select one option only

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

- 5.25 While this question does not create any confusion in terms of how graduates respond to it, some found it an odd question to ask; all the more so after they have confirmed their job title and the name of their organisation. Some, especially those in the health sector, felt that this should already be clear and therefore there did not seem a need to ask this question. Others not in the health sector also felt this should be obvious from their profession and employer and did not think it needed to be asked.
- 5.26 In Wales, however, the acronym NHS did translate well into Welsh ('GIG'), as the translation of NHS was not felt to be used as widely as the English acronym. Many Welsh graduates were initially unable to figure out what the acronym stood for and though most eventually established that this was a translation of NHS, they felt that this should be written out in full to ensure this question is clear 'Gwasanaeth Iechyd Genedlaethol'.

Recommendation: Assess if there is any way that we can filter this question only for those where there is potential for confusion / uncertainty, using similar approaches to that we have used for pre-identifying certain occupations.

For the Welsh translation, we should spell out in full "Gwasanaeth Iechyd Genedlaethol/National Health Service (GIG/NHS)".

Employer location (B13 & B14)*B13. Where was your place of work?**B14. What was the postcode for your place of work?***Where was your place of work?**

If it varied, please select the country you consider to be your main place of work. This might be where you spent most of your time.

Please select one option only

☐ England

☐ Scotland

☐ Wales

☐ Northern Ireland

☐ Outside the United Kingdom (please start typing in the country below and select from the list, if it does not appear please type it out in full)

5.27 When asking about their 'place of work', many were confused by the use of 'place' in this phrase, immediately thinking about the town or city, rather than country. Once they saw the response options, this was clarified.

5.28 Overall, asking about the physical location of their employer was not seen as intrusive and graduates were generally willing and able to provide this information without issue. However, there were a few graduates that did have some concerns about why this information was being request and if it may lead to HESA contacting their employer.

"I was afraid that maybe they [HESA] would contact the employer, what are they going to say to them...? I wondered why they would need the post code."

Studying in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

Recommendation: Update B13 to read 'In which country of the UK were you working, or were you working outside of the UK?'

Necessity of the qualification (B16)

B16. Did you need the qualification that you completed 15 months ago to get the job?

Did you need the qualification that you completed 15 months ago to get the job?

Please select one option only

☐ Yes: the qualification was a formal requirement

☐ Yes: while the qualification was not a formal requirement it did give me an advantage

☐ No: the qualification was not required

☐ Don't know

5.29 Some graduates were unclear whether this question was asking about the *specific* qualification they gained, whether they needed the subject area, level of qualification and class of degree or whether having a qualification generally was a prerequisite to getting their role.

5.30 For some graduates it was a formal requirement to have a qualification but the specific qualification they undertook was not. In these cases, graduates were unsure as to whether they should select 'Yes: the qualification was a formal requirement' or 'Yes: while the qualification was not a formal requirement it did give me an advantage'. If the question had been framed around having any qualification at that level, it seemed that graduates would have been more likely to select that it was a 'formal requirement'.

5.31 In the quantitative survey, 49% said their qualification was a formal requirement, 28% said it gave them an advantage and 22% said it was not required.

Recommendation: Revise the question wording to better specify what the question is trying to get to. For example it may be better to split out the question into several statements so that it asks whether graduates needed the subject area, level of qualification and class of degree

Job search and take-up (B17, B18 & B19)

B19. How did you first find out about this job?

B17. Why did you decide to take up the job?

B18. What was the main reason for you deciding to take up the job?

How did you first find out about this job?

Please select all that apply

☐ Your university/college Careers Service

☐ Employer's website

☐ Other university / college source (e.g. lecturer, website)

☐ Recruitment agency / website

☐ Media (e.g. newspaper / magazine advertisement)

☐ Speculative application

☐ Personal contacts, including family and friends

☐ Already worked there (including on an internship / placement)

☐ Social media / professional networking sites

☐ Online job site

☐ Other

- 5.32 In the main, graduates could easily recall how they first found out about their job (B19) and felt the answer options reflected all the different ways someone could find out about a job opportunity. There was some concern around the option 'Personal contact, including family and friends', which some in the cognitive interviews felt came across as judgemental and implied the person only obtained the job through favouritism. One graduate suggested the term 'network' may be more appropriate and more neutral in this instance.

Why did you decide to take up the job?

Please select all that apply

<input type="checkbox"/> It fitted into my career plan / it was exactly the type of work I wanted
<input type="checkbox"/> It was the best job offer I received
<input type="checkbox"/> It was the only job offer I received
<input type="checkbox"/> It was an opportunity to progress in the organisation
<input type="checkbox"/> To see if I would like the type of work it involved
<input type="checkbox"/> To gain and broaden my experience in order to get the type of job I really want
<input type="checkbox"/> It was in the right location
<input type="checkbox"/> The job was well-paid
<input type="checkbox"/> In order to earn a living / In order to pay off debts

5.33 When asked about why they decided to take their job (B17 and B18), the question was easily understood, however many felt the answer choices did not always suit their rationale or did not always make sense. These included:

- 'In order to earn a living / In order to pay off debts': felt to be two different options, with many agreeing to the first half, but not always with the second;
- 'It was the only job offer I received': the tone of this statement feels very negative and suggests the person only managed one offer, however in some cases it was the only application they submitted, which is an achievement. Graduates felt there needs to be a distinction between those that have completed multiple applications but had only successfully received one offer and those that have specifically chosen to only submit one application for the job they really wanted.

Recommendation: In both cases amend the tone of certain codes to be more neutral and/or better reflect the natural distinction graduates make, including:

- Change 'personal contacts' to 'network' or similar;
- Split 'earn a living' and 'pay off debt' into two options;
- Either create two options to better reflect the difference between a single offer from multiple applications and only submitting one application, e.g. 'It was the only job offer I received' and 'It was the only job I applied for' or delete the response option

Graduates employed in multiple jobs

5.34 The Section B questions were problematic for graduates in multiple jobs. Approximately 6% off those who completed the survey were working multiple jobs during census week, either for multiple employers or one instance of working multiple part-time jobs for the same employer (a university).

5.35 The issues within this section tended to stem from the need to select a 'main' job at the start of the section. The information provided in the survey to assist graduates in this decision did not seem to help clarify which job they should chose as their 'main' job. This information was:

'For the following questions, please provide details of what you consider to be your MAIN job during w/c 4th December 2017. Your main job might be the one that you spend the most time doing, the one which pays you the most money or the one which is most related to your future plans.'

5.36 The key issue here seemed to be that the explanation covered a variety of definitions and therefore the graduates did not feel that it helped them to understand which job to focus on and discuss in the rest of the section.

"It depends how you define that, is it by time or by passion or by income?"

Doing something else, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

5.37 Although there is clarification within the question text, this appeared to go "unheard" or "unread". Graduates tended to consider a range of factors when deciding which job to discuss. Commonly they considered the following to try and help them decide which job to select as their 'main' job:

- Which job pays me the most?
- Which job have I been in the longest?
- Which job is the most important to me?
- Which relates to my future career?
- Which job is the most related to the qualification I completed?

5.38 The factors that most commonly determined the final choice were: which job was most important to them financially or the one with the greatest personal value. Those that choose the latter (personal value) did so because that job was the most important to them, that they were most passionate about and / or that they were the most emotionally invested in.

- 5.39 In contrast, graduates who made the decision to focus on the job that paid them the most did so because they would be unable to financially support themselves and 'pay their bills'. Their other jobs may be more important to them to achieve their future career goals but without this 'main' job to support them they would be unable to undertake their other jobs.

"I don't think it facilitates the opportunity for some people to say what is really important to them, because what I would ideally like to have written is counselling, because that's what I want to do. I do get money from that, but not enough at the moment to keep my head above water."

Working, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

- 5.40 Those that decided based on money (not personal value or importance) did want the opportunity to provide details about their other job(s), as those were felt to be equally, if not more, important than the 'main' job discussed, as they would help shape their future career.

Recommendation: There is a fundamental choice to make here. If the question text is left as it is, graduates will make their choice as to their "main job" based on different criteria. These different criteria will reflect that people have different concerns and priorities. As such, these differences may be acceptable.

There is an extent to which the choice that graduates make could be impacted by the order in which the different criteria are presented – i.e. at the moment, the question text cites: (i) a time consideration, (ii) a financial consideration and (iii) a consideration based on future plans, in that order. Changing the order in which these considerations are presented could impact on where graduates land in making their choices.

Alternatively, before asking graduates to consider their main job, it may be worth asking an additional question which establishes why graduates are working in more than one role (e.g. to gain experience in another area while working in a lower skilled job to earn money) to contextualise the job they then go on to identify as their "main

- 5.41 We only spoke to one individual who had multiple roles in an organisation, he had two contracts for separate positions within a university. His decision-making process was slightly different as he split his time equally across his two roles but really considered this to be one job, as it is for the same employer and in his mind really equated to one full-time job. He eventually decided to focus on the role that he started recently and was related to the qualification he achieved, as he felt this was most linked to his future plans. However, as previously discussed he would have liked an opportunity to outline his other role, as a technician within the university.

‘Penny’ graduated from a Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences course. In the census week she was working in four part-time jobs. Her account demonstrates the conflict that graduates in face in weighing up the relative important of short term versus long term gain when identifying their main job.

Penny is 51 and works across 4 part-time jobs. She is a support worker for disabled students, a fund raiser for the Anglican Ministry, has her own counselling business and works in a voluntary counselling role within the NHS.

Penny ultimately decided that the ‘main’ role she was going to focus on in the survey was her part-time job as a support worker for disabled students at a university. This role involves mentoring students, supporting them emotionally and note taking in lecturers for students with visual impairments. She decided to discuss this job as it financially supports her the most and has enabled her to start her own counselling business, which is the career she would like to focus on in the future.

However, Penny would have liked the opportunity to discuss all of her jobs, as she feels they are achieving different goals. And on further reflection, she would have liked to discuss her counselling business and voluntary work in particular in more detail as she feels they reflect who she is and what she wants to focus on in the future. In addition, they are related to the qualification she completed 15 months ago.

“Well my main job for me is not what I have written [in the survey]. The job that I have written about is to maintain my income, while I am trying to get to where I need to be with the job I have been trained to do. I went with a income based [answer] rather than one about my future plans.”

*“I don't think the survey facilitates the opportunity for some people to say what is **really** important to them, because what I would ideally have liked to write about is counselling, because that's what I **want** to do. I do get money from that, but not enough at the moment to keep my head above water.”*

Self-employed graduates

5.42 Elements of this section also did not work well for the self-employed, as the positioning and phrasing of the questions was generally perceived to be geared towards those on salaried (PAYE) contracts.

5.43 This was notable in two key areas:

- Questions relating to annual pay (B7-9): 'What was your annual pay for your main employment to the nearest thousand before tax?' 'What currency were you paid in?'
- Questions relating to the necessity of their qualification for their role (B16), their motivations for taking "the job" (B17-18) and how they found "their job" (B19): not applicable to this group, as they would not have gone through a traditional job search, application or selection process.

5.44 Ultimately, self-employed graduates did not feel the survey is designed for them, nor recognise their unique needs and challenges as business owners. Self-employed graduates need questions better catered to their needs.

Recommendation: Consider directing self-employed respondents through the business section of the survey (B25-36), as these questions would have been more appropriate for their circumstances. As discussed elsewhere, we also believe that this section should be amended to ask about 'running' a business rather than 'setting-up' a business. Running a business is a more easily understood and more concrete concept which is not properly catered for in the current questionnaire.

Graduates starting a business

5.45 Graduates starting up their own business during the census week were asked a fundamentally different set of questions than those who were working for an employer. Six of the cognitive interviews were conducted with individuals who claimed that they were starting a business during the census week; and 3% of respondents to the standalone quantitative survey gave this response.

5.46 This set of questions specifically focussed on business set up was a new addition to the Graduate Outcomes survey, covering similar themes to the employed graduates, but amended to capture their unique situation, covering:

- What tasks they undertook in the census week in relation to setting up their business;
- Financial information about the business, its funding and their personal income, as well as business location and presence/absence of any employees;
- Motivations for setting up the business and what the business does;
- Activities undertaken during set up week in order to set the business up;
- If they needed their qualification in order to do the work undertaken by their business.

5.47 There were a range of views on the suitability of the questions for graduates who were engaged in setting up a business, although more were negative than were positive.

5.48 Some questions felt more oriented towards people who were running a business, rather than those in the early stages of setting up a business. And some of those who answered positively that they were starting a business during the census week revealed themselves to be stretching the definition when probed in the cognitive interviews:

“I was just kind of thinking for myself because I’d actually already set it up, so mine’s a continuous thing ... obviously you’re always trying to increase members [gym members for his business].”

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law; FEC

5.49 This highlights the fluidity with which graduates interpret the notion of setting up a business. The survey needs to distinguish between those at the formative stages of business development vs. those in the later stages who may already have the business set up but are now starting to build it up. The latter are less likely to be engaged in activities during the census week that can be considered part of business ‘set up’.

5.50 Overall, the questions generally worked well for those that were working on this a large proportion of the time or for whom this was a high priority activity, however for those not setting up a business full-time, the line of questioning felt tedious.

“The jobs [activities involved in running a business] that I’m already working in form part of what I want to do in the future, it’s just I’m not doing it full-time yet.”

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined; HEI

5.51 Linked to this was the concern that the survey assumes that setting up a business is the graduate’s full-time activity, however for many this was a side-job alongside full-time work or study. This meant that for many the questions fundamentally lacked relevance.

5.52 There were also some concerns over the need to focus on activities from a single week period, which is out of sync with the flow of business set up and can be difficult to recall.

Recommendation: We suggest amending these questions to focus on ‘business owners’ as a whole. A question would need to be added to assess which stage they are in and their degree of commitment, with the remaining questions adapting based on where they are in this journey. For example, those early in the process who are not highly engaged might only see the questions about motivations, business purposes and what they were doing during census week, while those actively running or building the business would see these plus the more involved questions around business finances, administration and so forth. Those working elsewhere full-time could complete the minimum in this section but complete the full employment section to capture their main work.

Census week business activity (B24)

B24. What tasks did you undertake during [the census week] when setting up your business?

What tasks did you undertake during the week commencing 4th December 2017 when setting up your business?

Please type in your answer below

- 5.53 As one graduate pointed out, setting up a business is not necessarily an activity one works towards continuously, meaning while they were 'setting up' a business during that general period, they may not have actually done anything specific towards 'setting up a business' in the census week.
- 5.54 Additionally, the inconsistent and sometimes low-level nature of work needed to set up a business meant some struggled to remember the detail of what they were doing in that specific week. This was particularly true for those who worked elsewhere full-time to fund their business or study alongside the business they are setting up and who may not necessarily have considered their business to be their main activity and, as such, did not have it top-of-mind.

Recommendation: We recommend that this question be removed from the questionnaire. If there is genuine interest in understanding whether graduates who are not yet in a position to claim that they have established a business have made attempts to do so, then the question could be reframed to talk beyond the confines of the census week timeframe.

Drawing funds from the business (B25)

B25. How much, if anything, were you drawing in salary from the business?

How much, if anything, were you drawing in salary from the business?

Please type in your answer below

☐ Refused

What currency were you drawing your salary in?

Please type in your answer below

☐ Refused

5.55 It was clear from the standalone quantitative study that this was a problematic question: 10 of the 29 respondents said they were not drawing anything during census week, and a further 12 refused or were unable to provide an answer to this question.

5.56 The cognitive survey showed that there was confusion among those who said they were starting a business during the census week as to whether this question was asking for a weekly, monthly or annual figure. Clearer instruction is needed in this instance and whatever is decided, needs to consider the short timeframe many will have been operating their business.

"[As went through the questionnaire] On the salary one [question], do you want that yearly... or just a monthly figure? Do you want me just to put a monthly figure in, because I haven't really gone that long, so I couldn't really tell a yearly [figure]...?"

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law; Further Education College (FEC)

Recommendation: We do not believe that graduates who were in the process of starting a business should be asked this question about drawing a salary.

If the question is retained, the questionnaire needs to provide more explicit instruction on which pay period it is looking for information against, with a monthly figure the most likely to gain meaningful response.

Importance of the qualification (B32A)

B32A. Did you need the qualification that you completed 15 months ago to start your own business?

Did you need the qualification that you completed 15 months ago to start your own business?

Please select one option only

☐ Yes: the qualification was a formal requirement

☐ Yes: while the qualification was not a formal requirement it did give me an advantage

☐ No: the qualification was not required

☐ Don't know

5.57 Commentary from the cognitive interviews suggests that this question was interpreted in three different ways:

- A. If the graduate needed their qualification to *set up* a business, namely to go through the actual process to register and establish the business⁴;
- B. If they needed their qualification to *run* their business, namely to do all the business tasks to develop and manage the business day-to-day; or
- C. If they needed their qualification *for* their business, namely if their qualification is needed to be able to do business, for example one respondent setting up a translation business needed his MA in Translation in order to do this.

5.58 In general, graduates in the cognitive interviews considered whether their degree was needed to *run* the business they were in the process of setting up, rather than the physical set up itself, with about half feeling it was necessary and the rest not.

5.59 In the quantitative survey, 17% said their qualification was a requirement, 52% said it was not a requirement but gave them an advantage, and 31% said their qualification was not needed.

Recommendation: Amend the questionnaire instruction to clarify what which aspect of the business is being referred to. Most assume this is about running their business, rather than setting it up (which does not require a qualification).

⁴ This interpretation potentially demonstrated a degree of over-thinking, reflecting the cognitive interviewing context.

Business motivations (B32 & B33)

B32. Why did you decide to start up your own business?

B33. What was the main reason that you decided to start up your own business?

Why did you decide to start up your own business?

Please select all that apply

☐ It fitted into my career plan / it was exactly the type of work I wanted

☐ I did not receive any job offers

☐ It was an opportunity to progress in the industry I am interested in

☐ To see if I would like the type of work it involved

☐ To gain and broaden my experience in order to get the type of job I really want

☐ It was in the right location

☐ It was well-paid

☐ In order to earn a living / In order to pay off debts

5.60 Some graduates who were setting up a business felt their motivations were fully not captured in the response options provided, leaving them unable to express the factors influencing their decision to set up a business. In most cases, they felt their circumstances were more complicated than the response options afforded.

Recommendation: Update the focus of this question once agreement has been reached on how to treat those 'starting up their own business'

Detailed factual information about the business which was being set-up (B34 & B35)

B34. What is your companies house number?

B35. What is the website for your business?

What is your companies house number?

☐ Don't know

What is the website for your business?

☐ We do not have a website

5.61 The Question Appraisal System (QAS) exercise raised concerns about whether graduates who were setting up a business would be able (and / or willing) to respond to these detailed questions, and these concerns proved well founded through the cognitive interviewing and the standalone quantitative survey.

5.62 Very few respondents were familiar with the concept of a Companies House Number and those who were did not know what their business's number was. Although no graduates dropped out of the standalone online survey at this question, of the 29 quantitative survey graduates who were asked this question, only 2 were able to give a legitimate number. In the cognitive interviews, one participant provided his house number.

5.63 Graduates who were starting a business were more likely to be able to respond to the question asking about their website address. Of the 29 quantitative survey respondents, 13 were provided a website address. And none of the respondents in the cognitive interview found the questions to be intrusive. However, the value of recording this information is questionable:

"That's what it [the business] is registered as for tax, but my website isn't live or anything... so I wouldn't be found [under that name] currently."

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

Recommendation: It is worth reflecting on how responses to these questions could be used in analysis. If most graduates are unable or unwilling to provide a response, then it is questionable whether worthwhile analysis could be conducted. And in any case, it is hard to conceive how this information could be used in an aggregate format. From this perspective, posing these questions represents questionable practice, all the more so as we enter the age of GDPR when there is a heightened emphasis on only collating data which can be usefully used in analysis. We would therefore strongly recommend that these questions are not posed of graduates who were in the process of starting a business. We would also question whether such questions should be posed of those who are actively running a business

B36. How was your business or company funded before or during the census week?

How was your business or company funded before or during the week commencing 4th December 2017?

Please select all that apply

☐ Self / family

☐ Crowdfunding

☐ Loan

☐ Venture capital

☐ University business incubation

☐ Other

5.64 On the face of it, graduates found this question relatively straightforward to answer – all who completed the cognitive study selected one option - self / family. This was in keeping with findings from the standalone survey in which the vast majority selected self / family **only** (89%). Findings from the standalone survey are shown in the table below (which shows absolute numbers rather than percentages given the relatively low base size).

Table 5.1 Funding used to set up business

Base	29
Self / family	26
Crowdfunding	1
Loan	2
Venture capital	2
University business incubation	1
Other ⁵	1

⁵ This graduate entered 'income' into the other specify box and instead of selecting the 'Self / family' option

- 5.65 Very few selected any of the other options in the standalone survey and while no graduates who cognitively tested the survey selected these other options, they were asked what they understood the following terms to mean; 'crowdfunding', 'venture capital' and 'university business incubation'.
- 5.66 In summary, graduates generally struggled with these terms. Only one graduate felt confident enough to offer an explanation of crowdfunding and the terms 'venture capital' and 'university business incubation' were not familiar to graduates.

"[Crowdfunding is] Lots of individuals contributing to a worthy cause"

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

Recommendation: A short explanation of 'crowdfunding', 'venture capital' and 'university business incubation' is required to ensure graduates understand what these terms mean

Assumption this is full-time work

- 5.67 The questionnaire design assumes that setting up a business constitutes full-time work. Cognitive interviews showed that many people who were in the process of starting a business during census week did not consider this their full-time job; indeed, many were working full-time jobs elsewhere to fund their business or get by in the short-term, while others were studying and setting up the business on the side.

"It asks is it your first full-time job since graduating, but it's not full-time for me."

Working in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined; Higher Education Institution (HEI)

Recommendation: Just as those with a job were asked if it is full- or part-time, there would be sense in asking those setting up a new business what their time commitment to this activity was. Where it is not a full-time commitment, consideration should be given to whether or not they need to answer all the questions in this section or whether they are better answering for their 'main' job instead (or both).

6 Employment history

- 6.1 Section D of the questionnaire was a new set of questions designed to complete a “career employment history since graduation” for graduates who had not been employed during the census week, had been working on a part-time basis, or whose full-time job in the census week was not the first full-time employment they had had since graduating. As such, it has the potential to “fill the gap” between outcomes recorded 15 months after graduation and at the early DLHE stage (6 months after graduation).

How well did the section work overall?

- 6.2 Broadly speaking, this set of questions worked well when graduates answered the questions, however this was the section that saw the second highest rate of survey drop out.
- 6.3 In all, 25 of the 95 participants provided responses to this set of questions, as did 242 (22%) of the respondents to the standalone quantitative survey. Of these, the majority had been in just one (other) full-time job.

Table 6.1 Number of (other) full-time jobs captured in the employment history section

Number of (other) full-time jobs	
<i>Base: All graduates not working (full-time) in the census week or whose full-time census week job was not their first since leaving HE</i>	242
One	79
Two	17
Three	3
Nine	*

- 6.4 However, this section saw the section highest proportion of dropouts; in the standalone survey, almost one-fifth of all dropouts 17% occurred at this section (see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3) with most of these occurring at the first iteration of D3 - What was your job title? (77%).
- 6.5 Most participants found it easy to recall the range of full-time employment they had been engaged in during the past 12 months (and recognised that the section was asking them to consider full-time work exclusively – although defining full-time work was sometimes problematic and there was also some degree of frustration that only full-time work was of interest).
- 6.6 Similarly, interpretations of the questions suggest that most graduates understood that they were not being asked to rearticulate the features of the job they were doing during the census week, although a significant minority felt this could have been made clearer (this issue is explored further below).
- 6.7 There was a noticeable divergence between graduates who interpreted the timeframe in this section as 12 months prior to the census week and those who considered it to be 12 months prior to the date of the interview. The implications of this are explored in the key discussion areas section.

- 6.8 Participants were universally positive about the layout of this section. Most said it didn't cause them any difficulties, and others who directly commented on the layout appreciated that the job-specific questions were displayed on one page and operated in a looped function (as shown below).

Most recent job

What was your job title?

Please type in your answer below

What did you mainly do in your job?

Please type in your answer below

What was the name of the company / organisation that you were working for?

What did the company / organisation you were working for mainly do?

Did you work for your employer for one year or more?

Please select one option only

☐ Yes, 12 months or more

☐ No, less than 12 months

Previous

Pause

Next

Key discussion areas

Accounting for part-time employment and the understanding of ‘full-time’ work

- 6.9 Some graduates were uncertain about what constitutes full-time work. A few graduates weren't sure whether to include multiple, sometimes interconnected, part-time roles that, when combined, equated to a full-time role. Another graduate was unsure whether to include a job that they were doing full-time that did not pay them anything, and another decided to omit a full-time, seasonal job because they did not consider it to be ‘proper work’ – for this graduate, ‘proper work’ denoted that which is done over a sustained period of time.
- 6.10 In all these cases, establishing an incontrovertible definition of full-time work will be vital to avoid this uncertainty, particularly as the nature of the workforce is rapidly changing, and graduates are less likely to be working in traditional full-time roles.
- 6.11 Relatedly, a minority of graduates who had done part-time work during the past 12 months felt aggrieved that the section only considers the full-time employment graduates have been engaged in. These graduates were frustrated that they couldn't give a full account of the work they had done since graduating from university. For them, a multitude of factors contributed to their decision to undertake part-time rather than full-time employment, but they weren't able to qualify this.

'It [the questionnaire] sort of expects that you're going to come out of university and be in a full-time job and that's not [always] the case.'

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law; FEC

- 6.12 Additionally, some graduates in this situation were frustrated that they cannot discuss the highly-skilled, part-time work they been engaged in during the last 12 months that could be considered of a ‘graduate level’.

Uncertainty around inclusion of census week employment

- 6.13 Graduates who were working full-time during the census week were very clear that the section D questions were intended to explore **other** (full-time) employment.
- 6.14 Where there was confusion about this, it was almost always where the graduate in question had been working in a part-time role during the census week. This is a questionnaire design issue: such graduates do not currently benefit from the text substitution instructing graduates to ‘exclude your current job’. The impact was that the questionnaire started to feel repetitive.

“I don't mind answering it [this section]... [but] I think you have covered my part-time working anyway... [so I'm] not sure you need to ask anything again”

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences; HEI

Recommendation: For clarity, the text substitution should be removed, and the last sentence should be amended to ensure all full-time work is captured, excluding current work. It should read: “The next set of questions will be asked of all the full-time jobs you have undertaken in the last 12 months. Please tell us about your jobs in chronological order, starting with your most recent job and then working backwards from that. Please exclude any work you were engaged in during the census week”

- 6.15 The cognitive study also threw up an unusual situation which might be worth catering for with a further instruction in the questionnaire. This was where a graduate who was working part-time in the census week in a job had worked in the same role but on a full-time basis during the previous 12 months. Providing details of this full-time role would effectively have meant repeating the details they provided about their part-time role. This is not likely to be a common situation, far from it. But it will be worth reflecting on whether for the purposes of later analysis it would have been better to include / repeat this detail or not.

Ambiguity around the 12-month timeframe

- 6.16 As referenced in the summary section, the 12-month timeframe was interpreted in two distinct ways – those who interpreted it as 12 months prior to the census week and those who considered it to be 12 months prior to the date of the interview. One person, who interpreted this time period as twelve months prior to the date of the interview, felt the shift in focus towards the last 12 months could have been made clearer.

“I saw it but it might be a good idea to underline it, because I think a lot of people might assume it's the same [as before i.e. 12 months prior to the census week].”

Unemployed in the census week, Social science, Business and Law; HEI

Recommendation: In its current form, the questionnaire is ambiguous, and the timeframe in question should be explicitly referenced throughout this section to ensure all graduates are referring to the same period of time.

Repetitiveness of section

- 6.17 A few graduates did find this section repetitive. This was either because graduates had worked for the same employer in different full-time roles (and weren't able to indicate this) or had misunderstood the instruction about not including the job they were doing during the census week. Only one graduate said they wouldn't have finished the survey as a result of this – they had misunderstood the instruction about not including current work.
- 6.18 Additionally, graduates may find this section repetitive if they worked in multiple, similar roles in the previous 12 months, such as teachers who had worked in full-time roles at different institutions. In this situation, an instruction could be added to ensure the survey only collects information about different *types* of work the graduate has been engaged in since graduation.
- 6.19 There was some concern amongst graduates that the question concerning what they mainly did in their job could prove laborious if repeated for multiple jobs. Indeed, some requested more guidance around the level of detail needed here; this is particularly pertinent if they were

working during the census week and had provided a significant level of detail at B5 (“What did you mainly do in your job?”).

“Nobody wants to read four paragraphs about all the projects I have done. I was looking for a short answer that described the whole scope of the job in one sentence.”

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law; HEI

- 6.20 However, although graduates are unlikely to have had more than two full-time jobs in the last 12 months, approaches to avoid survey fatigue will need to be explored here, such as limiting the number of full-time jobs a graduate can talk about.
- 6.21 In addition to this, the instruction prior to question D3 (“What was your job title?”) about referring to jobs in “chronological order” does not make intuitive sense for graduates who have only worked in one full-time role during the past 12 months.

Recommendation: Add a text sub here for people who stated that they worked in more than one (other) full-time job in the last 12 months which reads: ‘Please tell us about your jobs in chronological order, starting with your most recent job and then working backwards from that.’

Intrusiveness of questions

- 6.22 Only one graduate raised concerns about the intrusive nature of these questions. They felt it was slightly excessive to ask graduates to disclose a record of their employment history 12 months prior to the interview and queried what this information was going to be used for.

7 Study in the census week

- 7.1 This section was asked to those graduates who were either undertaking further study, training or research in the census week or who were due to start studying in the next month. Information collected in this section includes:
- Mode of study
 - Qualification type
 - Institution name
- 7.2 All questions asked in this section also appear in the DLHE survey, however compared to the DLHE, graduates are asked fewer questions about their census week study, training or research in the proposed Graduate Outcomes Survey. This is because it will be possible to acquire some information, for example, course title and subject area via linking to the student record.
- 7.3 Around one-fifth of graduates who completed the standalone online survey stated they were undertaking further study, training or research in the census week (19%) and a further 1% were due to start in the next month.
- 7.4 This survey section was cognitively tested with 18 graduates (21% of all graduates interviewed).

How well did the section work overall?

- 7.5 Most graduates found this section straightforward, clear and quick to complete. Upon starting the standalone online survey, very few dropped out (three per cent) and there were no differences in response to this section by survey completion mode (telephone and online, or between devices) when tested cognitively.
- 7.6 The vast majority of graduates thought the questions were applicable to their study, training or research. However, in some very niche cases, graduates did not find the section applicable, for example those who considered their work in the census week to straddle both employment and study.
- 7.7 A few graduates noted that significantly fewer questions were asked about their census week study, compared to their census week employment. As mentioned above this is because of the ability to link to the student record. However, this did lead to some graduates to feel that the survey was more interested in capturing the detail of 'working' outcomes than 'studying' outcomes.
- 7.8 The section introduction states that the questions refer to the study, training or research conducted in the census week (or the following month). This was clear for most graduates; however, one graduate answered these questions with regard to the course they completed 15 months ago and not the study they were engaged in during the census week.
- 7.9 This section along with the last of the core survey sections (Reflection on career to date) saw the lowest dropout rate. Of all graduates who dropped out of the online survey just three per cent did so at this section.

Recommendation: Although the section introduction currently states that the questions are to be answered with regards to the study, training or research engaged in during the census week (or due to start the following month) and that only one graduate had difficulty with this instruction, we recommend that a prompt should appear throughout the section to remind graduates to only consider their study in the census week.

Key discussion areas

- 7.10 In this section we dig deeper into the summary of issues raised above; where and how graduates struggled to answer questions, any significant interpretation issues and explore the relative success of the section by different groups of graduates.

What counts as 'studying?'

- 7.11 This is a continuation of an issue first raised in Chapter 4 where we discussed how graduates went about selecting their census week activities. In this chapter we explore how graduates' interpretation of 'study' impacted their experience of completing the 'Further study, training and research during the census week' survey section.
- 7.12 One example is of a graduate who was employed as a Research Assistant at a university in the census week and therefore selected 'working' and 'studying' as his census week activities (he identified 'working' as his main activity). As he progressed through this section, it was obvious that these questions were not applicable to him and he therefore recalibrated his understanding of the term 'studying'. As a result of attempting to answer these questions, he recognised that studying or researching was an aspect of his job and not separate to his job and as such decided this section was not relevant to his situation.
- 7.13 Despite this being a fundamental issue for this particular graduate, we do not advise any recommendations beyond what has already been suggested in Chapter 4 relating to the 'studying' option at the list of census week activities. This is mainly due to the limited scale of the problem highlighted by the cognitive testing which is reinforced by the fact that such a low proportion of survey drop outs occurred in this section.

The perceived relative importance of study versus work in the census week

- 7.14 A few graduates who were both working and studying in the census week felt that significantly fewer questions were asked about their census week study, compared to their census week employment. The streamlining of the study section is a benefit of being able to link to the student record and capture some study information that way, rather than by asking graduates directly in the survey. However, some perceived a comparatively shorter study section to mean that the survey was more interested in capturing work outcomes than study outcomes.
- 7.15 The perceived lack of interest in study outcomes was compounded by the type of questions graduates were asked about in relation to their study. Whereas the survey section on graduate employment asked for factual information alongside attitudinal questions (e.g. reasons for taking the job), no equivalent attitudinal questions were asked in relation to graduates' study.
- 7.16 This is summed up by one graduate who was running and promoting his own personal fitness boot camp in the census week alongside studying on a full-time basis towards a diploma /

certificate. He considered his study to be more important than his day to day work activities and consequently, thought that the survey did not provide him with the opportunity to express how he felt about his study in the census week, in the same way that it did about his work.

“If the research is trying to look at the value of study, it might be worth a direct question upfront to ask ‘What do you think was the value of your study [in the census week] - whether it was personal, monetary, personal satisfaction, job, employment opportunities, - whatever it might be”

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, FEC

Mode of study

Were you studying full time or part time?

☐ Full time

☐ Part time

7.17 Most graduates were able to identify their study mode with ease and confidence, with the majority studying on a full-time course (73% of those completing the online survey).

7.18 In identifying study mode, graduates primarily considered the institution’s classification of their course, followed by the number of contact hours. A few graduates also considered the number of hours spent in individual study outside of formal contact hours, in their understanding of whether their course was full or part-time.

Qualification type

Which of the following best describes the type of qualification you were aiming for?

Please select one option only

☐ Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)

☐ Higher degree, mainly by taught course (e.g. MA, MSc, MBA)

☐ Postgraduate diploma or certificate (including PGCE / PGDE)

☐ Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)

☐ First degree (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, MEng)

☐ Other diploma or certificate

☐ Other qualification

☐ Not aiming for a formal qualification

7.19 Graduates thought the range of qualification options to be comprehensive. The majority were studying for a higher degree (Master's or PhD) which was also mirrored in the standalone online survey (see below).

Table 7.1 Type of qualification graduates were working towards in the census week

Qualification type	
Base	218
Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)	33%
Higher degree, mainly by taught course (e.g. MA, MSc, MBA)	33%
First degree (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, MEng)	10%
Postgraduate diploma or certificate (including PGCE / PGDE)	10%
Other qualification	5%
Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)	4%
Not aiming for a formal qualification	4%
Other diploma or certificate	1%

- 7.20 However, there were some comprehension issues at this question. A handful of graduates mentioned that the option 'First degree (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, MEng)' caused ambiguity, as the phrase 'first degree' implied the first degree undertaken, rather than any undergraduate level qualification.

'Because it's not my first degree I ignored it, but actually thinking about it, I should have clicked that one.'

Studying in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

- 7.21 A few graduates also felt the examples given in the 'Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)' response option were too prescriptive and limited the definition of 'Professional qualification' to the types of courses in the example.
- 7.22 In some cases, the 'Other diploma or certificate' response was felt to be less clear compared to the other response options. The data from the standalone online survey, might also suggest this to be an issue given just one per cent of graduates in study, training or research in the census week selected it.
- 7.23 Graduates raised a small number of other minor issues relating to the response categories at this question which we detail and provide recommendations on in Appendix A.

Recommendation: We suggest some tweaking to the wording of the response options at this question as follows:

1. Given the ambiguity of the term 'first degree' and its association with the **first** undergraduate degree undertaken, we suggest changing the wording to 'Undergraduate degree (including integrated master's degrees) (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, MEng)'. The additional wording 'including integrated master's degrees' may also be worth including here to account for the MBChB and MEng provided in the examples.
2. At the 'Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)' response option, we suggest removing the examples from the response category
3. To add clarity and distinction between the 'Other diploma or certificate' and other response categories, we suggest modifying the wording to be 'Other diploma or certificate **not specified above**'

8 Study history

- 8.1 All graduates were asked whether they had undertaken any further or additional study, training or research in the last 12 months (excluding any they had already covered in the census week).
- 8.2 The content and structure of this section broadly replicated the earlier section on census week study, training or research and included questions on:
- Whether graduates had undertaken further or additional study, training or research in the last 12 months
 - The number of courses undertaken in the last 12 months
 - Mode of study
 - Qualification type
 - Institution name
- 8.3 The survey is designed to be repeated according to the number of times a graduate had undertaken further or additional study, training or research in the last 12 months to build up a complete and rich picture of their study history. It is a new section introduced to the Graduate Outcomes Survey and one that has not previously featured in the DLHE survey.
- 8.4 Around one-quarter of graduates who completed the standalone online survey stated they had undertaken further study, training or research in the last 12 months (23%). Of those who had, around one quarter had also stated they were studying in the census week (23%) and so this was the second time they encountered this block of study related questions.
- 8.5 On average, graduates went through this section 1.4 times; the vast majority reported just one incidence of further study, training or research in that timeframe (78%) and a further one in seven, two (14%).
- 8.6 This survey section was cognitively tested with 18 graduates (21% of all graduates interviewed)

How well did the section work overall?

- 8.7 There was a sense of confusion around the time reference for this set of questions, not necessarily around what the 'last 12 months' was taken to mean, but in the step change away from the focus earlier on in the survey which was very much on the census week, to the time of the interview.
- 8.8 As was the case in the first survey section where graduates confirmed their census week activities, there was a varied interpretation of the term 'further or additional study'.
- 8.9 Some graduates who were studying in the census week or who were due to start studying in the following month also included this when answering this section meaning that their census week study was captured twice in the survey
- 8.10 Although graduates did not raise any concerns about repetition in this section in the cognitive interviews, this was the third most common section for graduates to drop out of the standalone

online survey. Of all graduates who dropped out of the survey, 13% did so from this section (equating to 13% of all those who started the section).

Key discussion areas

- 8.11 In this section we dig deeper into the summary of issues raised above; where and how graduates struggled to answer questions, any significant interpretation issues and explore the relative success of the section by different groups of graduates.

‘What counts as ‘studying?’

- 8.12 As seen in earlier sections of the survey, graduates were unsure as to what counted towards further study, training or research and graduates repeated the same sorts of questions around the inclusion of online courses and informal training.
- 8.13 However, the issue was further compounded in this section due to the inconsistency in the question phrasing. The wording that introduces the section explicitly refers to additional ‘study, training or research’, but in the first question this is truncated to ‘further or additional study’ and in the second question, ‘courses’ (see below and overleaf).

The next set of questions are about any additional study, training, or research you have undertaken in the last 12 months.

Previous

Pause

Next

Have you undertaken further or additional study in the last 12 months?

☐ Yes

☐ No

How many courses have you undertaken in last 12 months?

TYPE IN NUMBER OF COURSES.

- 8.14 Around one quarter (24%) of graduates cognitively interviewed were unsure of which kinds of courses were referred to by the term 'further or additional study'. These graduates queried whether courses undertaken through organisations other than universities and colleges were included in the definition, for example online courses, work-based training, CPD, or courses taken for leisure, such as languages.
- 8.15 A notable, yet small proportion (15%) answered 'no' to any further or additional study but during the cognitive questioning they said they had participated in some form of further study or training within the last 12 months. These graduates tended to interpret 'further study' as academic-level qualifications, undertaken through a recognised HEI, and which resulted in a qualification upon course completion. The word 'further' implied to them a higher-level degree than the one they completed 15 months prior.
- 8.16 A subgroup of the graduates identified above included graduates who said they regularly do 'informal' study or training, for instance peer-led learning or skills sharing sessions at work. They would have liked to have been asked about their professional development activities even though they were not arranged through a provider or led to a qualification. One graduate felt this was important because employers don't have a lot of money to spend on formal training or study, so the survey could capture what other types of learning people are engaged in at work.

'Every day is a school day for me'

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

Recommendation: At the very least we recommend that phrasing is consistent throughout the section (and throughout the survey) and refers to 'study, training or research'. The broader point around how formalised any 'study, training or research' also needs to be considered

- 8.17 Furthermore, graduates who said they regularly undertake work-based training as part of their role, for example those in the medical profession or on a graduate scheme, found this set of questions to be less well suited to their type of further study. For example, graduates who had taken a series of short work-based courses of a few days' duration struggled to recall each of the courses they had undertaken.

"I think depending on what someone has done it would be pretty hard to remember all training that you undertake for a job, but study and research is over a longer period of time so easier to recollect."

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

- 8.18 Finally, a handful of graduates queried whether the further study needed to be completed in order to count as having undertaken further or additional study in the last 12 months.

Recommendation: Assuming that HESA want to collect information on all types of study, training or research regardless of whether it is still ongoing by the time of the interview, we suggest adding an instruction to the beginning of the section to include any study, training or research even if it is still ongoing or not complete (and to make it clear that this still excludes their census week study, training or research)

'Issues relating to the timeframe'

- 8.19 Unlike the issue raised in relation to graduates' employment history discussed in Chapter 6, graduates generally answered consistently in terms of the period of time they were considering when recounting their study history. Most graduates understood the question to be asking about the 12 months prior to the date of the interview as opposed to the 12 months prior to the census week. However, this felt like a change in the focus of the survey which had previously asked graduates to concentrate on what they had been doing on the census week, or if in work in the census week, whether they had been in that role for 12 months at the point of the census week. Therefore, some graduates were confused or thrown from their train of thought and needed some time to re-focus their answer.

Recommendation: In keeping with the recommendation made in relation to the 'employment history section' the timeframe in question should be explicitly referenced throughout this section to ensure all graduates are referring to the same period of time.

- 8.20 Despite the section introduction stating that graduates should not include the 'course' they were undertaking in the census week or who were due to start in the month after the census week, some graduates answered this section with their census week study in mind. A total of 8 graduates encountered comprehension issues at this question in the cognitive exercise and of these, four ended up detailing their census week study as part of their study history. Arguably, the inconsistency of phrasing here and the use of the specific term 'course' at this instruction may have caused some confusion among graduates.

"I have to admit I skimmed through it. Maybe the wording could be clearer. I didn't remember to not include the course I was already on. I was studying so it is natural to assume to answer these questions."

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

Recommendation: We suggest a couple of recommendations to the instruction to graduates to not include their census week study:

1. The introductory wording to the section for those in study in the census week is changed to 'Please do not include the study, training or research you were doing in the [census week] / about to undertake in the month after the [census week].'
2. At questions E1 and E2 which ask whether additional study has been undertaken in the last 12 months and if so, how many courses, an additional prompt should be added to remind graduates not to include any study, training or research they were doing in the census week

Mode of study

- 8.21 Study mode (E3) was particularly challenging for graduates who had studied courses other than at university level qualification. Graduates on work-based short courses of a few days' duration, or those who had taken online courses, did not feel that the full or part-time distinction was applicable to these types of courses. Graduates on these types of courses suggested that guidance could be provided as to what constitutes a full or part-time course.
- 8.22 Graduates also noted that the phrasing of this question implied that they had completed their course, or it had ended 'Were you studying full time or part time in your previous study?' Although this was the case for just one graduate who completed the cognitive interview, a couple noted that they could still be on the same course that they started within the last 12 months.
- 8.23 The issues encountered by graduates at this question were also borne out in terms of dropout rates from the standalone online survey. Of the graduates who quit the survey in this section, one third did so at this question (33%).

Recommendation: Assuming that HESA intend to capture all forms of study, training or research in this section (including more information types) we suggest that an N/A code is added to this question to account for graduates studying in more informal ways

Qualification type

- 8.24 Compared to Section C (study in the census week), graduates generally reported fewer higher degree qualifications. The table below based on data from the standalone online survey shows greater numbers reporting 'Other qualifications', 'Professional qualifications' and other types of diplomas or certificates.
- 8.25 A higher proportion of graduates also reported having undertaken study, training or research not leading to a qualification than in the census week, (up to ten per cent from four per cent). This suggests that graduates were more inclined to include more informal types of training e.g. training received on the job, when thinking about the study, training or research they had done in the last 12 months. This is supported by the types of issues graduates raised in the cognitive interviews about the suitability of some of these questions when asked in relation to work-based training which we discussed earlier under 'What counts as 'studying?'

Table 8.1 Type of qualification graduates were working towards in the census week compared to the last 12 months

Qualification type	C2 (Census week)	E4 iteration 1 (Study history)
Base	218	257
Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)	33%	7%
Higher degree, mainly by taught course (e.g. MA, MSc, MBA)	33%	35%
First degree (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, MEng)	10%	7%
Postgraduate diploma or certificate (including PGCE / PGDE)	10%	12%

Qualification type	C2 (Census week)	E4 iteration 1 (Study history)
Other qualification	5%	9%
Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)	4%	8%
Not aiming for a formal qualification	4%	10%
Other diploma or certificate	1%	9%

8.26 Reflecting this, graduates generally felt the response options from which they could select their qualification type were skewed towards Higher Education courses that resulted in a qualification.

'They felt like questions designed to find out about an academic qualification whereas mine was a professional qualification.'

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

8.27 We suggest carrying through the recommendations from the equivalent question in Section C – 'Further study, training or research during the census week' to this section.

Recommendation: We suggest some tweaking to the wording of the response options at this question as follows:

1. Given the ambiguity of the term 'first degree' and its association with the **first** undergraduate degree undertaken, we suggest changing the wording to 'Undergraduate degree (including integrated master's degrees) (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, Meng)'. The additional wording 'including integrated master's degrees' may also be worth including here to account for the MBChB and Meng provided in the examples.
2. At the 'Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)' response option, we suggest removing the examples from the response category
3. To add clarity and distinction between the 'Other diploma or certificate' and other response categories, we suggest modifying the wording to be 'Other diploma or certificate **not specified above**'

9 Reflection on career to date

- 9.1 This is a new section of survey questions added to the Graduate Outcomes Survey which look to capture the graduate voice and the diversity of graduate outcomes. They are designed to gain a personal impression from graduates about how 'on track' they think they are, how they feel their current situation fits with their future plans and former studies, as well as the degree to which they feel their current activity or activities (be it work, study or something else) feels meaningful and important. This addition marks a shift away from previous DLHE questions which asked graduates how well their higher education experience prepared them for work or study, into more perception-based outcomes from a graduate perspective.
- 9.2 All participants were asked three questions, with the text adapted according to what they were doing in the census week (namely, work only, study only or a combination of multiple 'activities'). The questions were:
- F1 / F4 / F7: The extent to which graduates agree or disagree their current work / study / activities fit with their future plans
 - F2 / F5 / F8: The extent to which graduates agree or disagree their current work / study / activities is / are meaningful and important
 - F3 / F6 / F9: The extent to which graduates agree or disagree they are utilising what they learned during their studies in their current work / study / activities

How well did the section work overall?

- 9.3 On the whole, the section worked fairly well for all graduates. Very few struggled to give a response and there were no major issues in survey design or functionality. Many felt the section added nicely to the rest of the survey, providing a more personal and emotional view of their current situation. The section felt like it covered 'important ground' to many, especially in enabling those in multiple activities or who were unemployed to show the value of their current situation, even if atypical or not their ideal.
- 9.4 This was one of two sections that saw the lowest dropout rate. Of all graduates who dropped out of the standalone online survey just three per cent did so at this section.
- 9.5 The predominant issues, as explored in this section, were specifically related to textual clarifications, whereby most question wording had some degree of ambiguity from a graduate perspective. These do not generally require wholesale change, but simply more explanation or definition of what is meant by specific words and/or which activities to consider when answering. This ambiguity led to a broad range of question interpretations and, therefore, some irregularity in responses.
- 9.6 The most important issues were:
- Ambiguity in the definition of 'meaningful' and, to a lesser degree, 'important' – whether this referred to work or study being meaningful / important to the self, society at large or some level in between. Graduates interpreted the words in very different ways, which impacted the rationale of responses significantly.

- Those doing more than one thing – e.g. working multiple jobs or both working and studying during census week – found the term ‘activity’ or ‘current activity’ vague and therefore were not clear about which activity they should be responding to. Similarly, some students had completed multiple degrees and were not clear which degree the question referred to. Ultimately, some would think about the most recent, while others would consider both together. Those who were working alongside volunteering outside of work also tended to consider this in their responses to this block of questions because they deemed their voluntary work to be more relevant to their career aspirations than their actual paid work.

Recommendation: It may be worth revising how the questions are asked so that those who are engaged in multiple activities are asked this series of questions in relation to their main activity (or job for those in multiple roles).

- 9.7 For those in a more transitional place, the section felt restrictive and somewhat irrelevant, namely when future plans were changing or undecided. Two of the three questions in each block were considered to assume that the graduate’s current situation is what they want – the extent to which graduates agree or disagree their current activity is / activities are meaningful and important and the extent to which they agree or disagree they are utilising what they learned during their studies in their current activity / activities. For a similar reason, some unemployed graduates also struggled with some questions, which they felt assume some activity or progression since their degree that they may not have achieved.
- 9.8 Finally, where graduates’ degree and current career aspirations did not match, e.g. where aspirations had changed, the questions were generally more difficult to respond to, even if they were happy with their current work and new career direction. This was particularly true for F3, which asks if graduates are using what they learnt on their degree in their current work. In some situations, the response would be fairly negative (as their degree was not related to their current work) though not actually being a negative (as the current work may fit their altered aspirations).

Recommendation: Suggest adding a N/A code to F3

- 9.9 There were a few comments from graduates asking why these questions were on separate pages, rather than all on one page as in earlier sections. Some felt it made the survey feel longer than it actually was.

Recommendation: Display all three questions into one survey page

Question Set 1: Fit with Future Plans (Questions F1 / F4 / F7)

Question text: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work (F1) / study (F4) / activity or activities (F7) fit(s) with my future plans?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current activities fit with my future plans?

Please select one option only

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

9.10 On the surface, this question was easy for the majority to respond to, with few issues.

9.11 The interpretation of 'future plans' was broadly consistent, generally referencing a person's longer-term plans (five to ten years in the future) with regard to their career aspirations and goals and the attainment of the job they want in the future. However, a sizable minority also defined this in terms of personal development (soft skills, personal growth), as well as including personal plans and goals, including marriage, family, friends and location, thinking about how their present activity would help them achieve this.

"Future plans are the kind of idea and path that you think you're following, and I feel like I'm kind of developing as a person. Not just a career, but also building up hard and soft skills."

Working in the census week, Social Sciences, Business and Law, HEI

Recommendation: Update question text to clarify the definition and limits of 'future plans', e.g. "To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work fits with my future plans? Please take into account both your career plans and any aspirations in your personal life."

9.12 However, graduates' rationale for their responses shows that they took a very broad definition of the phrases 'current work' and 'current activities' when responding. Graduates took into account all activities they do (even those just asked about work) and choosing either one to assess or taking an average across all. This could include some or all of work, formal study, further training and volunteering activities based on their individual preferences. The result of this is

graduates each answering the question for a different set of activities, not necessarily paid work, for example:

- Those with multiple jobs did not know which to focus on, asking whether this should be their 'main' job or an average of all jobs. Responses ultimately were a mix of 'main' job and averages, based on individual preference and interpretation. Those taking an average typically answered 'agree' or 'neither agree nor disagree', as often in these situations one job does not fit, while the other job does.
- Those working and studying had a similar issue, not knowing which activity to consider when responding. Ultimately, this group chose to take the activity most relevant to their future plans, typically study. Few responded based on an average of both.
- A number of graduates also do volunteer work, often more in line with their longer-term aspirations than their work. These people would often consider their volunteer work in their response, either in full (as the most relevant activity) or alongside their work. It was not uncommon for the voluntary work to be more in line with the person's career aspirations than their paid work (which was used simply to pay bills), meaning the result was often more neutral than if answering just for work.
- A small proportion of graduates also included other training and courses in their response, for example short and online courses to develop specific skills, which were tactical choices to support future plans. Since this was being undertaken through or to support their work, it was often relevant to their future plans and often altered their response from the one they would have given had it just been based on their current work.

9.13 There were no major issues regarding recollection of activity in census week, however similar to the above, a very small minority whose situation had changed since that week chose to respond based on their current activity i.e. at the time of interview. For example, if a graduate was unemployed in the census week but employed at the time of interview, then their answer given in this section would be based on their employment outcome.

9.14 Despite this confusion over what to include in responses, the rationale for each response code was extremely consistent across all interviews and can be summarised as follows:

- **Strongly Agree:** what they are doing is an exact fit for their career goals, likely already in the job they were aiming for or a role that fits with their desired career progression. This is most common for those who studied for a very specific role, e.g. veterinarians, lawyers, teachers.

"I want to continue being a vet for the next 40 years"

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, Specialist HEI

"I am '99%' my job will help me develop a career in PR."

Working in the census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

- **Agree:** this response indicates that while the role is not a 'perfect' fit, it is seen as a good 'stepping stone' to progress in the right direction, for example, in the right industry but not the exact area / role desired. A good example of this is a graduate whose current job is 'too basic' for her ambitions, but she sees it as a 'starter job' and a 'stepping stone to better

things'. Her current employer is a good fit with her future plans and working there has helped shape her career ambitions further.

- **Neither agree nor disagree:** this response is given for two reasons:
 - a) the graduate is completely uncertain of their future plans and has few or no specific goals, or
 - b) they have taken an 'average' of multiple jobs or activities, where one fits and one does not. An example of this is a graduate who could see herself working with children who have additional learning needs (like her current job), but at a higher level. She took her current job for the experience and to have on her CV if she chooses this career, but she is still considering other options. This lack of certainty means her current role may or may not be a good fit, depending on what she ultimately decides.
- **Disagree:** people not working in a relevant area will give this response when they see the benefit of the experience (even if irrelevant to future plans) and the value of the income. One graduate studied accountancy, business and economics but currently works in a café 30 hours a week. This role ensures he is working and paying his bills but does not match his studies or actual ambitions.
- **Strongly disagree:** this response is given when the role is not at all in line with ambitions and when the person does not see any value in the experience or income for their future plans. For example, a graduate who said she is just doing her current job to make a living, but ultimately wants to work in public health. Similarly, another talked about his current work in a call centre, but that he has ambitions to work in marketing. He does this right now to pay the bills, but it is not what he wants to do every day.

9.15 Those who were working in the census week, tended to select more ranging response options than those who were studying full-time. Graduates who were studying in the census week were extremely consistent in their response patterns and rationale in the cognitive interviewing: all answered 'strongly agree' to this question, as they considered their current degree as a valuable stepping stone to their desired career. However, for students working towards a PhD, there were responses to suggest the PhD itself is their 'future plan', with no other clearly defined goals after this. In such cases, this question was more difficult to respond to, but not impossible.

9.16 The standalone survey results are shown in the table overleaf. The response patterns across the three questions by type of outcome show a distribution consistent with the cognitive interview findings - that those who were in study were almost half as likely to select the 'Neither agree nor disagree' option (seven per cent compared to 13% overall).

Table 9.1 Extent to which current work / study / activity fits with future plans

	Overall (F1, F4, F7 combined)	Employed (F1)	Studying (F4)	Mixed / Other (F7)	Unemployed (F7)
Base	1,094	713	127	199	55
Strongly agree	42%	43%	55%	39%	5%
Agree	33%	33%	36%	33%	16%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	13%	7%	14%	31%
Disagree	5%	4%	2%	9%	11%
Strongly disagree	7%	6%	0%	5%	36%

Question Set 2: Being Meaningful and Important (Questions F2 / F5 / F8)

Question text: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work is (F2) / My current studies are (F5) / My current activities are / activity is (F8) meaningful and important?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current activities are meaningful and important?

Please select one option only

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

9.17 Asking graduates about the value of the work, studies or other activities they are doing is well received and provokes considerable thought. However, in the cognitive interviews, the vast majority explicitly asked for a definition of 'meaningful', citing different ways this could be defined and how their response would change based on this. This was the single greatest issue with these questions.

"I feel like everyone will say it is meaningful to them. I think needs to be more is it meaningful to your career path or society? Maybe some clarity so people know how to answer it."

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

9.18 Graduates articulated four definitions (referred to as levels) of 'meaningful' that could be considered when answering these questions. They are:

- **Self:** the graduate feels like the work they do has personal value, either personal enjoyment, the benefit of income or having the personal satisfaction of knowing it was wider value.
- **Company or colleagues:** the work the graduate is doing is valued by their colleagues or is important to the business' work as a whole; alternately they may see the company's work as having social value, even if their specific work doesn't.
- **Clients or customers:** what they do has meaning and value to the people they serve – makes their lives better in some (even small) way.
- **Society at large:** the work has clear social benefit or impacts society positively in some way, e.g. teaching, medical professional, policy/government legislation, etc.

9.19 Responses tended to be inconsistent in terms of what people ultimately considered: most based their response on a combination of two of the above, rarely more. There was almost always a personal element to their response (namely, personal plus one other level was considered), but the importance of the personal aspect in their final response differed by the individual, usually based on the strength of the personal element to them, where strongly positive (high degree of personal meaning) or negative (very low degree of personal meaning) had a greater weight in their considerations than otherwise.

"Meaningful to whom, important to who? It is personal or meaningful and important to society?"

Studying in the census week, Languages, History and Education, HEI

9.20 Responses were often relative: while graduates might consider their work to be meaningful to the 'self', customers or company, they might compare this to work that they see as being 'more meaningful', e.g. that of doctors, thus reducing their own work's wider importance. Those who compared in this way were less likely to respond with 'strongly agree' and they downgrade their work as a result of this comparison.

Recommendation: Update question text to clarify what people should take into account for 'meaningful', for example, 'You can think about this in terms of how meaningful your work / study / activities are to you, to others or to society at large.' A quick clarification in the question text stating this will help to minimise confusion and ensure more consistent response criteria.

9.21 Additionally, many graduates who were working in the census week also pointed out that the terms 'meaningful' and 'important', while related, are actually quite different questions. Based on the findings from the cognitive exercise, the difference between 'meaningful' and 'important' is:

- Meaningful is personal and is either

- a) more of a personal judgement about the value of the work or
 - b) if the work is meaningful to the individual in question, which can be either that they find the work as being valuable (fulfilling) or that it pays their bills.
- Important is a relative judgement about the work in the wider scheme of things, e.g. if the work has social benefit or value (rather than personal), or the work is integral to society.
- 9.22 Ultimately, unless work is both clearly meaningful and important, this question is not easy for working graduates to answer and often feels like two separate questions.

Recommendation: Consider splitting these into two questions (which could be shown on the same screen) or choose just one of the terms to focus on. Based on the cognitive interviews, 'meaningful' seems to have more respondent value and engagement, making this a potentially superior choice if deciding to focus on one alone.

- 9.23 The exception to the above, are those currently studying, where the terms 'meaningful' and 'important' are interpreted purely based on personal importance. All graduates said they 'strongly agree' with the statement because their degree is an important next step in their future plans. Degrees are deemed to be meaningful because students are learning something they will use in the future and often on a subject they are personally passionate about. They are also important and necessary steps in their career, giving them necessary qualifications and/or training to achieve their goals. Only one graduate, when asked how she understood the terms, said she considered her contribution to society, helping others but with an element of personal happiness.
- 9.24 Those not working full-time or unemployed also responded solely based on the personal meaning and importance of their activities: even if not ideal, they recognised that volunteering, job hunting and other endeavours gave them purpose and / or supported them in their career in some ways (e.g. via experience or as a 'stepping stone').
- 9.25 Taking into account all interpretations of the question, the response rationale for each response was still fairly consistent and can be summarised as follows:
- **Strongly agree:** often seen to be the obvious answer, where people believe their work has a clear and obvious social benefit or benefits multiple 'levels' to some degree. Those in certain fields, like medicine, see this as an easy answer. All students chose this option, due to the importance and meaning the degree has for their future plans.

"It's meaningful to the patients that I help, it's meaningful to me, it's meaningful to the whole of the UK... so that's an easy one."

Working in the census week, Social Science, Business and Law, HEI

"I work in life insurance, so again, people coming in at really difficult times, like if someone has passed away and they need to get their money and it's really difficult situations."

Working in the census week, Social Science, Business and Law, HEI

- **Agree:** those selecting 'agree' do so for two reasons,

either a) they see their work as meaningful, but not as meaningful as others' work (e.g. doctors), or

b) they believe their work is meaningful to some levels but not others. These are situations in which a graduate's work specifically has no major importance, but where the work their company does as a whole is meaningful or when the company's work is not particularly important but where a person's work is clearly valued by their colleagues. In this situation, graduates took a 'net' result for their response – when the impact is high enough or personal enough, this will result in a response slightly more positive than an otherwise neutral answer.

"Are we helping the homeless, no...[but] it is meaningful in a work sense, and meaningful for our customers."

Working in the census week, Social Science, Business and Law, HEI

- **Neither agree nor disagree:** this response option was often less about just not knowing, but rather the result of having too many competing options and taking an 'average' result, not dissimilar to the 'agree' rationale. The difference is that the importance and meaning is not personal or broad enough to feel important to the person. This is also common when the scores for 'meaningful' and 'important' are opposing, resulting in a neutral response.

"It's probably meaningful and important to my boss, because it pays her bills, but not in the grand scheme of things. I'm impartial in the answer. You do it because you like it and you have to work."

Working in the census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

- **Disagree:** no graduates who participated in the cognitive exercise gave this score. Based on other response patterns, we believe this is a situation whereby if responses are not positive or 'net neutral' then the work is not meaningful or important at all, leading to an automatic 'strongly disagree' score.
- **Strongly disagree:** this response was given by graduates who feel their work – either personally or across multiple levels – has genuinely no value or importance. For example, one graduate gave this response because she felt like whether she was there or not would not make much difference to her company, so she saw no personal meaning in the work, while another felt like all she is doing in her role was making money for someone else. It is not uncommon for those responding in this way to be working in a role not in line with their career goals.

9.26 The standalone survey results are shown in the table below. Consistent with the cognitive interview feedback, the majority of graduates find their current work, study or activities 'meaningful and important' to some degree (80%), with graduates engaged in study in the census week showing a higher proportion of 'strongly agree' or 'agree' (93%). Those who were unemployed in the census week were least likely to agree that what they were doing was meaningful and important.

Table 9.2 Whether current work / study / activity is 'meaningful and important'

	Overall (F2, F5, F8 combined)	Employed (F2)	Studying (F5)	Mixed/Other (F8)	Unemployed (F8)
Base	1,094	713	127	199	55
Strongly agree	46%	48%	62%	39%	11%
Agree	34%	33%	33%	41%	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	10%	3%	14%	22%
Disagree	5%	5%	2%	4%	16%
Strongly disagree	4%	3%	0%	3%	31%

9.27 Other specific issues of note were:

- Welsh speaking graduates: many graduates were not familiar with the Welsh translation of the word 'meaningful' (ystyrlon). Once explained, a few suggested using the word 'worthwhile' (gwerth chweil) as an alternative.

Recommendation: In the Welsh translation, find an alternative and better-known word to use for 'meaningful'. Respondents suggested 'worthwhile' (gwerth chweil).

- Business owners: this question felt unnecessary and redundant to them, as they feel anyone with a business would clearly find what they are doing meaningful and important, otherwise they wouldn't be starting / have started a business for it.

Recommendation: Clarifying the definition of 'meaningful' as recommended above should help this, as it will force them to think about the question beyond themselves (where it becomes obvious / redundant).

Question Set 3: Utilisation of Studies (Questions F3 / F6 / F9)

Question text: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current work (F3) / I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current study (F6) / I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity / activities (F9)?*

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activities?

Please select one option only

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

- 9.28 Most understood the question without issue and there were very few places in which clarification was needed.
- 9.29 Several graduates questioned what is meant by the phrasing 'what I learnt', which in the context of a degree could mean just the core subject matter or could also include wider skills development, e.g. writing and analysis skills, communication skills, team work, etc. How they interpreted this and the value they applied to subject matter vs. wider skills gained greatly impacted their response.
- 9.30 As in earlier question sets, the way in which graduates chose to define this impacted the way they answered. Unless the graduate did a degree that related to a specific job (e.g. lawyer, teacher, etc.), the response was based on a trade-off between learnt subject matter and wider skills gained – with the value placed on each determined by the individual. For example, those who put a high value on the associated skills gave a positive score despite not using their actual degree subject matter, whereas others who placed less importance on these skills gave a lower score due to not using their degree subject matter as desired.

Recommendation: Consider either splitting the question into two, one asking about subject matter and the other skills separately (which, again, could be on the same screen), or adjust the question text to specify that this is asking about both the subject matter and other skills gained, namely everything learnt on the degree.

9.31 Some teachers, lawyers and similar, downgraded their response to 'agree' simply because they felt their degree could never fully prepare them for the real work in their sector. They still use what they learnt, but find the practical experience is very different.

9.32 Based on this, question response patterns can be summarised as:

- **Strongly agree:** their current work, studies or other activities have a clear and direct link to their degree's subject matter and coursework. The degree was often a necessary qualification in order to do that work, thus they apply the skills and subject knowledge on a daily basis. This is more common in more 'applied' degrees (e.g. teaching, law, accounting) over more theoretical degrees (e.g. psychology, business, etc.).

"You are either using it or you're not"

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, Specialist HEI

9.33 Another graduate who studied orthotics quickly commented *"I better be"* when asked this question, as it was a minimum requirement for his work. Graduates who were studying in the census week were more likely to choose this also, due to carrying on with a specific mode of study, for example a graduate who had carried on studying maths at the PhD level.

- **Agree:** these graduates were using some aspect of their degree regularly, either subject matter or wider skills gained, most commonly writing and analytical skills. They placed a high importance on these wider skills and their usefulness in their work, often stating that their skills set them apart from others and enabled them to do their day-to-day tasks more easily. This was also true for students who had changed subjects, but still use these other skills. One graduate spoke about specific modules and marketing courses being useful, rather than the whole degree, as well as the value in her work of *"generally being able to write well."*
- **Neither agree nor disagree:** as above, these graduates were not using their degree, but were using wider skills. This resulted in a 'net neutral' response, where they made a trade-off between using one set of skills but not using any of the other.
- **Disagree:** tended to be selected by graduates not using their degree but may have been using some wider skills in their day-to-day work. However, they either took the question more literally (use of subject matter taught) or they placed lower value on these wider skills and often expressed frustration on not using their degree.

"I don't use anything that I actually learned - in uni everything was somebody's theory and somebody's model... I've never heard of it since and I've forgotten it all to be honest. What I do use is my research skills that I learned and probably indirect things like the importance of time management, which is gained at uni, but not actually anything which I was taught."

Working in the census week, Social Sciences, Business and Law, HEI

- **Strongly disagree:** these graduates did not feel they used anything of value from their degree in their current work. Some referenced wider skills gained but did not see this as a trade-off to not using their actual degree. One graduate worked in a low-level administrative role, which used none of her university skills and which she felt should have been done without a degree – she commented that perhaps her emails are a slightly higher written standard, but she sees no other impacts. Many who selected this response option

expressed frustration at not being in the work they want. In some cases, their role was so basic that a degree would not be needed to do it.

9.34 The standalone survey results are shown in the table below. Graduates who were studying in the census week work most likely to feel they were applying what they had learnt as part of the studies they'd completed 15 months prior (85% versus 69% overall).

Table 9.3 Utilisation of studies in current work / study / activity

	Overall (F3, F6, F9 combined)	Employed (F3)	Studying (F6)	Mixed/Other (F9)	Unemployed (F9)
Base	1,094	713	127	199	55
Strongly agree	35%	34%	51%	33%	9%
Agree	34%	34%	39%	38%	16%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	13%	6%	14%	13%
Disagree	11%	12%	4%	10%	24%
Strongly disagree	8%	8%	0%	6%	38%

9.35 In most cases, the rationalisation for agreeing or disagreeing was nearly identical, it just came down to personal interpretation and the wider work context.

9.36 Other key issues relating to clarification included:

- Those currently studying and / or who have multiple past degrees were not sure which degree they should focus on when considering 'what they had learnt in their studies'. They often chose the most useful degree or responded based on a combination of the two.
- Those who had completed subsequent training courses tended to consider these also as part of their studies, even though they were not part of the degree. Often this training was more relevant to their current work, thus impacting their responses.

Recommendation: Add an instruction clarifying which study graduates should consider when answering these questions

10 Opt-in banks

- 10.1 While the focus of this exercise was to cognitively test the main survey, some testing of the opt-in banks was also undertaken.
- 10.2 The opt-in banks are additional to the core survey sections covered in the earlier report chapters and providers will be able to choose which, if any, of these 10 banks they would like to be asked to their graduates. All opt-in banks have been approved by the Graduate Outcomes steering group. For the purpose of cognitively testing the banks, and to avoid the survey becoming too long, graduates were asked a maximum of two opt-in banks (depending on their length).
- 10.3 Due to limited numbers, the research graduates and qualified teacher banks were asked of very few graduates both in the cognitive and quantitative testing and therefore findings should be treated with caution.

Relative success of opt-in banks

- 10.4 To summarise, some opt-in banks worked better than others, for example banks G - Net Promoter Entity and I - Graduate Choice were well understood and easy to respond to while bank J - Impact of higher education raised several issues around the response scale and the wording and relevance of the statements. Each opt-in bank is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

G Net Promoter Entity

- 10.5 This bank is made up of only two questions which asks graduates on a scale of one to ten how likely they are to recommend their institution to a friend or colleague, and then gives an open text box asking why they gave their score. Fifteen graduates responded to this as part of the cognitive exercise.
- 10.6 The bank worked well overall and the idea of recommending the provider to a friend or colleague seemed to chime with graduates, although some felt they were more likely than others to do this in real life. However, the question was felt to be very wide and therefore led to differences in interpretation and sometimes difficulty responding. Graduates considered different aspects of their provider such as the social life, the culture, the course itself or what else they had read and heard about the university. Responses to the open text question included:

“Excellent personal contact with tutors, small class size, excellent feedback on assignments, good atmosphere and well-structured modules.”

Studying in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), HEI

“The experience of this programme gave me extensive self-awareness, personal growth and education. It turned my life around and it was one of the best things that I have done.”

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

- 10.7 Several graduates said they did not know how to respond because they felt differently about these different aspects, but gave a score of either 8 or 10, suggesting results may have a

positive bias. This is reflected in the standalone online survey in which 79% scored their provider between 7 and 10 and 38% scored 10.

Table 10.1 Likelihood to recommend provider

<i>Base</i>	<i>278</i>
0 – Not at all likely	4%
1	1%
2	2%
3	3%
4	1%
5	4%
6	4%
7	14%
8	15%
9	12%
10 – Definitely	38%
Mean	7.8

H Subjective Wellbeing

10.8 This bank asks five wellbeing questions all based on scales from zero to ten:

- How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- How happy did you feel yesterday?
- How anxious did you feel yesterday?
- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Most people can be trusted?

10.9 The first four statements are consistent with the ONS' Personal Well-being question set. The questions were also added to the last iteration of the DLHE Longitudinal survey and were asked to the majority of graduates.

10.10 The questions marked a significant shift in the tone of the line of questioning, away from a very factual survey to something much more personal and sensitive.

10.11 Fourteen graduates responded to this as part of the cognitive testing exercise and on the whole, their feelings about the bank were mixed. Some found it inappropriate and questioned the purpose of gathering the data, while others commented that although it seemed out of place, they understood that it would be relevant to assessing their overall Higher Education experience.

"It makes sense - has university helped someone have a happier life? That's a worthwhile thing to ask."

Doing something else in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI

"I didn't expect the survey to be this broad, but regarding the purpose of the survey, which is not to focus only on jobs or studying, I think it makes sense."

Unemployed, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

"[Were you surprised they were in the survey?] Yeah, because it's about higher education, something could have upset me this week that had nothing to do with that and made me really unhappy and that's only a reflection of me at that time, not because of my education."

Studying in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), HEI

10.12 Questions H4 and H5 ask graduates to rate how anxious or happy they felt yesterday on a scale of 0 to 10. Nearly all graduates took this literally and thought specifically about what was happening in their life the day before. However several commented that their score would vary greatly from one day or week to the next, so their answer did not necessarily reflect how they felt in their life in general. Some felt their answer if they were asked in the census week would have been very different to their answer at the time they were surveyed.

Recommendation: It may be worth changing the question wording at these questions to read: How happy / anxious do you feel most days?

10.13 Responses may also have been biased towards more positive scores as several graduates mentioned they felt they needed to give affirmative responses or that it was easy to answer because they were feeling fine, but it might be difficult to respond to if they were not.

[Did you have any reservations when answering?] "Not really no, but maybe because right now I'm not going through any hard moments in my life and you know, if I did, it would be a bit more difficult to answer these questions"

Working in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), HEI

I'm not sure, I wasn't particularly sad so I just figured, eight

Studying in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), FEC

I Graduate Choice

10.14 The Graduate Choice bank consists of one question of four iterations and has featured in all iterations of the DLHE Longitudinal Survey:

If you were to choose whether or not to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...

- Do a different subject?
- Study at a different provider?

- Work towards a different type of qualification?
- Decide to do something completely different?

10.15 The bank was cognitively tested with 17 graduates. Although this bank of questions worked well for most, conceptually it caused some problems for a minority of graduates. Some thought they were being asked whether they would do their degree again at present.

“Oh is it the same course again? Oh right I thought it was asking if I was a student if I was doing something now, like not repeat the same course but if I was to continue my education now... Obviously if I was to understand the question correctly I would have answered completely differently”

Studying in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, HEI

10.16 While others found it difficult to imagine that they could have taken a different path in the past, for instance because the course they did was their only option at the time, or because they needed to go to a local university due to responsibilities at home.

“A different provider would be, who? And it would have to be someone very local, and it would mean I'd have to go back to [provider name] which I didn't really want to do, [provider name] didn't really offer the same options.”

Studying in the census week, Languages, History, Education and Combined, HEI distance learner

10.17 Statements 1, 'do a different subject' and 3, 'work towards a different type of qualification' were thought to overlap because graduates, especially those who were referring to their first degree, did not instinctively see many alternative 'types of qualifications' that they would have considered.

10.18 A handful of graduates mentioned that the statements have a negative implication by asking if they would do something differently, which when reading them in full felt like a double negative.

Recommendation: Re-frame the statements positively to avoid the implication of a double negative and possible confusion e.g. 'Do the same subject'

J Impact of Higher Education

10.19 This was asked of 39 graduates in the cognitive exercise and was the most problematic of the opt-in banks. It consists of one initial question, 'To what extent has your HE experience enabled you to...?' and ten statements, with response options on a scale of 'A great extent', 'Some extent', 'Not at all' and 'Don't know'.

To what extent has your HE experience enabled you to...?

Please select one option only for each

	A great extent	Some extent	Not at all	Don't know
be innovative in the workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
make a difference in the workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
change organisational culture and/or working practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
influence the work of others in the workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
access immediate or short-term job opportunities in your chosen career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
enhance your credibility or standing in the workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
progress towards your long term career aspirations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
enhance social and intellectual capabilities beyond employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
enhance your quality of life generally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent has your HE experience had an impact on you that hasn't been previously specified	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.20 Statements one to six were asked only of people who said they are working at in the census week while the last four were asked of everyone routed to this optional bank.

How graduates approached the scale

10.21 Issues were encountered with the scale, the number and meaning of the statements and their relevance to different groups of graduates.

10.22 The scale of 'not at all', 'some extent' and 'a great extent' was interpreted and applied differently, with some using 'to some extent' as a 'neutral' option and others seeing it as a positive.

"You know when you have the gradings where there'll be like a maybe, not at all, so I put some extent as a maybe, like in the middle."

Working in the census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

"If you're not bothered you can just click 'Don't Know' I'm not sure if you're learning anything more from it in terms of research. I put 'Some extent' for most of them and I'm not really sure you are learning anything from that answer"

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, FEC

10.23 The potential 'overuse' of the 'some extent' response option is also borne out in the standalone survey data. The table below shows that this was the most commonly selected option at seven of the ten statements at this question.

Table 10.2 Online survey response patterns to the 'Impact of Higher Education' optional bank

	A great extent	Some extent	Not at all	Don't know
Be innovative in the workplace	34%	51%	11%	3%
Make a difference in the workplace	35%	50%	13%	2%
Change organisational culture and/or working practices	15%	44%	34%	7%
Influence the work of others in the workplace	19%	56%	20%	5%
Access immediate or short-term job opportunities in your chosen career	37%	36%	20%	6%
Enhance your credibility or standing in the workplace	41%	45%	12%	3%
Progress towards your long-term	51%	34%	11%	4%

	A great extent	Some extent	Not at all	Don't know
career aspirations				
Enhance social and intellectual capabilities beyond employment	43%	40%	13%	4%
Enhance your quality of life generally	39%	46%	12%	3%
To what extent has your HE experience had an impact on you that hasn't been previously specified	28%	40%	11%	22%

10.24 Many graduates said they would prefer an agreement scale which has a neutral option and allows for more granular responses while a minority would prefer a simple 'yes/no' response option as they felt the statements were binary in nature.

"This is really silly, but instead of being like strongly agree, agree, disagree, I found the options harder to pick from... you don't normally get that, you normally get strongly agree, agree or disagree so it's easier to put a feeling to them."

Working in the census week, Medicine, Veterinary and Biological Sciences, FEC

Recommendation: Review how the data is currently used and if granular data is required amend the response scale of 'A great extent to not at all' with an 'Agree to disagree scale with a 'neither agree nor disagree' option'. If a less granular data is required, we suggest updating the response categories to be a binary 'yes' or 'no'.

The number of statements

10.25 The length of the list of statements was off-putting to some and was also frustrating for a small number of graduates who were using a mobile device or tablet who had to scroll back to the top to check the initial statement.

Recommendation: It may be preferable to reduce the number of statements that graduates felt were similar. For example, the first four could be replaced with just 'make a difference in the workplace' and 'influence the work of others in the workplace'; and 'enhance your credibility or standing in the workplace'.

10.26 Telephone graduates also found it difficult to remember the full list of statements when asked the final statement: 'To what extent has your HE experience had an impact on you that hasn't been previously specified'.

Suitability of statements 1-6 for graduates who were working in the census week

10.27 Statements 1-6 about behaviour in the workplace and career development were asked to anyone who said they were 'working' at A1. However, the statements were only felt to be relevant for graduates from their first degree going into their first graduate level employment and less applicable to other groups.

10.28 Mature graduates who had already been in work felt they were less applicable because they had already developed many of these skills before starting their course. One individual who was a sole trader felt statements 2 – 6 were not relevant as they referred to the 'workplace', suggesting they may need specific routing for self-employed graduates in general.

10.29 Furthermore, a minority who were studying and were doing casual work part time to support their studies also saw the bank as less applicable to them because they did not see their job as a place to develop these work skills. These graduates felt they should logically give a low score to the statements however some were concerned that by doing so they may mis-represent how positive their Higher Education experience actually was to them.

Recommendation: Statements 1-6 should be asked to just those graduates who are employed (rather than self-employed or setting up their own business)

Comprehension issues

10.30 There were comprehension problems with the question and statements. Not all graduates were familiar with the abbreviation of 'HE' for Higher Education and we would recommend including the full wording in the question.

Comprehensions issues: Statements pertaining to graduates' work in the census week

10.31 Statements 1, 3, 5 and 6 about being innovative, changing culture in the workplace, accessing job opportunities and graduates' credibility in the work place, were not well understood by a notable minority. Table 10.2 also shows that statements 3 and 5 recorded among the highest levels of don't know responses (seven per cent and six per cent respectively). Some graduates were unsure how 'changing organisational culture' would apply to them or felt unable to say whether their experience had 'enhanced their credibility or standing in the workplace'.

"Change organisational culture - what working practices? My working practices or individuals?"

Studying in the census week, STEM (excluding biological sciences), HEI

"I don't have an insight into other people's perceptions of me in the workplace. I don't feel like I can answer it."

Studying in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, FEC

10.32 Some had difficulty applying the terms in statements 1 and 3 to their personal situations for example they could not imagine being 'innovative' or changing the 'organisational culture' because their job roles or working culture did not allow it. These graduates either answered 'don't know' or 'to some extent', again suggesting that 'some extent' was being used as a middle / neutral point in the scale.

10.33 However, most graduates understood these statements and generally had a consistent interpretation. 'Innovative' was generally thought of as 'using skills in a different way' and 'thinking outside the box' while 'accessing immediate or short-term job opportunities in your chosen career' prompted most to think about the application process and being considered for jobs they otherwise would not have been without their qualification. Rather than changing the wording of the questions it may be helpful to give some examples of what is meant by these statements to address the concerns of those who were unsure.

10.34 The terms 'innovative' and 'organisational culture' were not well comprehended when translated into Welsh. Several said they understood the word 'arloesol' meaning 'innovate' but that it was very rare, while one did not know it and interpreted it as 'survive' in the workplace. The term for organisational culture was not recognised at all and graduates tended to ignore it and think about changing working practices. One graduate suggested having the English translation next to the statements may help their interpretation.

Comprehension issues: 'enhance social and intellectual capabilities beyond employment'

10.35 Statement 8: 'enhance social and intellectual capabilities beyond employment' prompted a wide variety of considerations among graduates which often seemed to reflect what was important to them personally, including their confidence socialising with others, their ability to think independently, having political debates or knowing what career steps to take. Some took the statements together while others focused either on the word social or intellectual and on further discussion a handful felt they would have responded differently if asked about the two aspects separately.

"That question I sort of had to read it and read it again. Intellectually I did learn new knowledge / new skills, but social skills, not so much."

Working in the census week, Creative Arts and Design, HEI

10.36 Graduates often missed the intellectual aspect and answered about the social:

[On the "intellectual" aspect] "I didn't even hear it, not that you didn't say it clearly, but I didn't even take it into consideration."

Working in the census week, Social science, Business and Law, HEI

Recommendation: Given the wide variety of interpretations to both elements in the statement, it is unlikely that separating the two aspects would significantly improve the consistency of what is being measured here. We would suggest that the statement is too broad, and it should be removed, while the final statement is further developed to allow students to write in in the 'other ways' their HE experience has impacted them.

Comprehension issues: 'To what extent has your HE experience had an impact on you that hasn't been previously specified'

10.37 Graduates often did not understand what was being asked by statement 10, 'To what extent has your HE experience had an impact on you that hasn't been previously specified' and more than one fifth selected 'don't know' to this question in the standalone online survey (22%) – the highest level of don't know recorded at any of the statements at this bank. The question intended to ask if there was 'any other' effect on them and if so to what extent. When this was explained most graduates understood the meaning quickly

10.38 However, the statement was still slightly problematic for those who did grasp the meaning. Some had a distinct factor in mind for example it increased their confidence, limited the deterioration of their health condition or helped their children see them in a different light. While many others felt the question was too vague or 'big' to respond to easily because there were too many factors that could be included. Furthermore, some graduates had very positive factors and others very negative factors in mind, but the scale does not distinguish between the two.

Recommendation: Either Reword the final statement to ask:

1. If the graduate's HE experience had an impact on them in any other way not already mentioned
2. If so, specify this impact and
3. The extent their HE experience impacted them in this way

Or drop the statement entirely

O: PhD / Research Degree Experience

10.39 Optional bank O posed the same questions in bank J to graduates of research degrees and findings for this bank, although limited by the number of graduates, were generally in line with the above.

Recommendation: We suggest the same recommendations to this bank as those put forward in relation to Optional Bank J.

L to N: Research Students

10.40 These banks were only completed by two graduates, so findings should be treated with caution, but all question banks have featured in the DLHE Longitudinal survey. The banks generally worked well and findings focus on possible additional options to response lists. One graduate mentioned spontaneously that they appreciated being asked about their research degree as usually surveys stop asking questions after they state they are doing a PHD.

10.41 Bank L asks about the 'main' and 'other' reasons for undertaking a research degree, and funding sources for fees and maintenance costs. Quantitative and cognitive findings both suggest that additional responses may be required to the lists at questions L1 and L2, about reasons for completing the research degree. Those tested cognitively said they wanted to

change careers and did not feel the existing response category 'It would improve my career prospects' was suitable, or that they were encouraged to do it by a supervisor. However, only one graduate entered an 'other' response in the standalone survey, stating that their 'university encouraged and was supportive'.

Recommendation: Add in additional response options at L1 and L2 as follows:

1. I wanted to change career
2. Encouraged to do so by university (including lecturer, tutor)
3. The extent their HE experience impacted them in this way

10.42 The cognitive interviewing revealed that graduates couldn't always correspond their sources of actual funding to the list of options provided at L4-L7. One-third of those completing this section in the standalone survey selected 'other' when asked about their funding source for their fees (L4 and L5 – 33%) however their write in answers included hospital charity, the NHS and scholarships, most of which could have been aligned to the existing response options (e.g. NHS to 'Support from employer or industry body) or scholarship to 'Other competitively awarded scholarship or award'. As such we do not recommend any changes to this set of questions – in the cases where these issues do occur, it will be possible to resolve them through the coding of responses at the data reduction and preparation stage.

10.43 At L6 and L7 about the main and other sources of funding for maintenance, those cognitively tested said they may have used a salary from employment and graduates from the standalone survey selected other and wrote in sources such as freelance work, scholarships and personal savings. This highlights more of an issue with L3 (Did you receive any funding towards these research studies in terms of fees or maintenance, or were you self-funded?' as opposed to L6 and L7 as graduates did not regard personal income or savings as being self-funded. It may be that this issue is exacerbated by the fact that self-funding is grouped with no funding as a response option at L3 and is therefore gets lost in the mix.

Recommendation: We suggest splitting out 'no funding / self-funding' into two response categories at L3 to reduce the chance of graduates overlooking the self-funding option and subsequently adding self-funding type options as free text responses at later questions in the section

10.44 Block M asks to what extent the graduate's research topic required various elements such as collaborating with others in and outside of their discipline, international mobility and work placements or internships. The bank worked well overall, however the scale caused similar problems as mentioned in section J, in which 'some extent' was sometimes used for statements that were sometimes much less applicable than others.

10.45 It was felt that another statement could be included, mirroring M1_7 'periods of international mobility (working or studying in non-UK research teams)' to reflect periods spent working with

research groups at different areas in the UK. This still involves mobility and was a particularly large part of one research student's experience.

10.46 Bank N is only asked of research graduates who said they were employed during the census week at A1. It poses the question 'In the job you were doing in the census week, how often did you...' and then gives ten statements including 'conduct research', 'use general disciplinary knowledge', and 'work as part of a team'. Again, this bank generally worked well for the small number who were tested although the term 'disciplinary knowledge' was not understood by all and may require expanding.

10.47 Statement number 10 replicates question B6 'Were you responsible for formally supervising anyone' which is asked to everyone in employment. We would therefore recommend removing it from the optional bank and using sub-group analysis of B6 to assess the question just for research students.

Recommendation: Remove statement N1_10 which duplicates question B6 about whether the graduate was responsible for supervising anyone in their job.

Appendix A – Table of question by question specifics

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
A – What were you doing in the census week?	A1	What activities were you doing in the census week?	Clarity, Memory	Recall of specific week was aided by significant events in graduates' lives	Describe census weeks in relation to shared cultural landmarks, sporting or social events like public holidays or Wimbledon
	A1 / A2	What activities were you doing in the census week? / Most important activity	Clarity	Graduates interpreted the census week - w/c 4th December 2017 - differently	While there is explicit mention of the timeframe graduates should take account of when considering the census week in the introductory text before the question, it would be better placed as part of the question text itself
			Clarity, Response	Graduates were unsure what types of work the 'working' response option covered	'Working' to be amended to 'Paid work for an employer'
					'Self-employment / freelancing' to be added as a separate response option
			Clarity, Response	Graduates were unsure what types of work the 'studying' response option covered	'Voluntary / unpaid work for an employer' to be introduced as a separate response option
			Sensitivity / Bias	In some cases, graduates were reluctant to select the 'Unemployed' response category	'Studying' to be amended to 'Engaged in study, training or research' in line with later survey sections
			Clarity, Response	Some graduates were unsure how to select their most important activity when	'Unemployed' response to be amended to 'Unemployed and looking for work'
					'Contracted to start a job in the next month' and 'Due to start studying in the next month' to be removed from

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
				one of these activities had not yet started	A1 and asked as a separate question in Section A
			Clarity, Response	Graduates had mixed views on whether developing a portfolio and working amount to the same thing	'Developing a professional, artistic or creative portfolio' to be added as separate response option
			Clarity	Graduates were unclear as to whether the 'Caring for someone (unpaid)' response option related to caring for someone with a health problem or disability or children (or both)	Provide some guidance on what type of care 'Caring for someone (unpaid)' covers
	A2	Which of these activities do you consider to be your most important activity in the census week?			
B – Your employment in the census week	Introductory wording		Response	30% of graduates who considered 'studying' to be their main activity and dropped out of the survey did in the preceding section on employment	Add some signposting text which is displayed to graduates reporting both a work and study outcome and consider study to be their most important activity to reassure them that the survey will capture details on their study outcome in the following section
	B2 – Introductory wording	For the following questions, please provide details of what you consider to be your MAIN job during [the census week].	Instructions	If the question text is left as it is, graduates will make their choice as to their "main job" based on different criteria. These different criteria will reflect that people have	Changing the order in which these considerations are presented could impact on where graduates land in making their choices.

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
		Your main job might be the one that you spend the most time doing, the one which pays you the most money or the one which is most related to your future plans		different concerns and priorities. As such, these differences may be acceptable. There is an extent to which the choice that graduates make could be impacted by the order in which the different criteria are presented – i.e. at the moment, the question text cites: (i) a time consideration, (ii) a financial consideration and (iii) a consideration based on future plans, in that order.	Alternatively, before asking graduates to consider their main job, it may be worth asking an additional question which establishes why graduates are working in more than one role
	B3	Were you working full time or part time?	Clarity	Graduates interpreted full-time and part-time differently (esp. those on zero hours contracts)	Provide a definition of what is meant by full-time and part-time. Ask graduates in zero hours contracts how many hours they work per week and code this to full-time or part-time in the background
	B4, B5 &	What was your job title? / What did you mainly do in your job?	Response	The highest levels of dropout from the survey occurred at these questions	Incorporate an integrated automated SOC coding which allows graduates to select from a list of relevant job titles based on the answer they start typing in
	B6	Were you responsible for formally supervising anyone?	Clarity, Assumptions	Some graduates in the education or health and social work sectors interpreted 'formally	Add a short sentence to the question clarifying what it means by 'formal supervision' responsibilities

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
				supervising' as looking after students or children in their care	
	B8	What was your annual pay for your main employment to the nearest thousand before tax?	Sensitivity / Bias, Assumptions	<p>A minority were concerned about why it was being requested and how the information would be used</p> <p>The question also assumes that graduates in paid work can provide an annual salary</p>	<p>Add a short sentence into the text stating why this is being asked, to allay concerns over its use.</p> <p>Also consider changing this to either a monthly pay or asking those not on fixed pay to provide an annual average or estimate.</p>
	B12	Was this organisation part of the NHS?	Response, Reading	<p>Some graduates in the health sector, felt that this should already be clear from their job title and employer name</p> <p>The acronym NHS did not translate well into Welsh ('GIG'),</p>	<p>Assess if there is any way to filter this question only for those where there is potential for confusion / uncertainty, using similar approaches used for pre-identifying certain occupations.</p> <p>In the Welsh language version, National Health Service should be written out in full - Gwasanaeth Iechyd Genedlaethol</p>
	B13 and B14	Where was your place of work? / What was the postcode for your place of work?	Sensitivity / Bias,	Some graduates had concerns about why this information was being requested and if it may lead to HESA contacting their employer	Update B13 to read 'In which country of the UK were you working, or were you working outside of the UK?'
	B16	Did you need the qualification that you completed 15 months ago to get the job?	Clarity	Some graduates were unclear whether this question was asking about the <i>specific</i> qualification they gained, whether they needed the subject area, level of	Revise the question wording to better specify what the question is trying to get to. For example, it may be better to split out the question into several statements so that it asks whether graduates needed the subject area,

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
				qualification and class of degree or whether having a qualification generally was a prerequisite to getting their role.	level of qualification and class of degree
			Assumption, Clarity	Interpreted by graduates who were starting up their own business differently	Amend the questionnaire instruction to clarify which aspect of the business is being referred to. Most assume this is about running their business, rather than setting it up (which does not require a qualification).
	B17 & B18 B32 & B33	Why did you decide to take up the job? / What was the main reason for you deciding to take up the job?	Response	Many graduates felt the answer choices did not always suit their rationale or did not always make sense	Split 'earn a living' and 'pay off debt' into two options
					Create two options to better reflect the difference between a single offer from multiple applications and only submitting one application, e.g. 'It was the only job offer I received' and 'It was the only job I applied for'.
				Some graduates setting up a business felt their motivations were not fully captured in the response options provided	We recommend that a separate much shorter set of questions be reduced and further developed and appear towards the end of the working section, or towards the end of the questionnaire, which is asked of graduates who are looking to set-up a new business
	B19		Response	Many graduates felt the answer choices did not	Amend 'Personal contacts' to 'Network' or similar

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
				always suit their rationale or did not always make sense	
	B20	Have you worked for your employer for 12 months or more?	Clarity	The use of present tense in the question meant most graduates assumed it was asking about the 12 months prior to the interview, not 12 months from the census week.	Amend wording text to be 'At the time of [census week], had you worked for your employer for 12 consecutive months or more?'
	B24	What tasks did you undertake during [the census week] when setting up your business?	Assumptions, Memory	Setting up a business is not necessarily an activity one works towards continuously The inconsistent and sometimes low-level nature of work needed to set up a business means some graduates struggle to remember the detail of what they were doing in that specific week	Remove from the questionnaire. If there is genuine interest in understanding whether graduates who are not yet in a position to claim that they have established a business have made attempts to do so, then the question could be reframed to talk beyond the confines of the census week timeframe.
	B25	How much, if anything, were you drawing in salary from the business?	Clarity, Response	High levels of non-response at this question in the standalone online survey Confusion whether this question was asking for a weekly, monthly or annual figure	Remove this question. Graduates who were in the process of starting a business should not be asked this question about drawing a salary. If the question is retained, the questionnaire needs to provide more explicit instruction on which pay period it is looking for information against, with a monthly figure the most likely to gain meaningful response.

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
	B34	What is your companies house number?	Recall, Response	Few graduates were familiar with the concept of a Companies House Number	Remove from the survey
	B35	What is the website for your business?	Recall, Response	Although more graduates were able to answer this question compared to 'What is your companies house number?' – it remains questionable as to how valuable this data is	Remove from the survey
	B36	B36. How was your business or company funded before or during the census week?	Clarity	Graduates were unfamiliar with the terms 'crowdfunding', 'venture capital' and 'university business incubation'	Include a short explanation of 'crowdfunding', 'venture capital' and 'university business incubation' in the survey
C – Your further study, training or Research during the census week	C1-C3	<p>Were you studying full-time or part-time?</p> <p>Which of the following best describes the type of qualification you were aiming for?</p> <p>What is the name of the university or college at which you were registered?</p>	Instruction	Although the section introduction states that the questions refer to the study, training or research conducted in the census week (or the following month), one graduate answered these questions about the course they completed 15 months ago and not the study they were engaged in during the census week.	A prompt should appear throughout the section to remind graduates to only consider their study in the census week.
	C2	Which of the following best describes the type of qualification you were aiming for?	Clarity, Response	Some graduates interpreted 'First degree' to mean the first degree they ever undertook as opposed any	Amend the response option to 'Undergraduate degree (including integrated master's degrees) (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, Meng)'.

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
				undergraduate level qualification	The additional wording 'including integrated master's degrees' may also be worth including here to account for the MBChB and Meng provided in the examples.
			Clarity	Some graduates found the 'Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)' response option too prescriptive	Remove the examples from "Professional qualification"
			Clarity	Some graduates found 'Other diploma or certificate' to be less clear compared to the other response options	Amend 'Other diploma or certificate' to 'Other diploma or certificate not specified above'
			Response	'MRes' is missing from the example options at the 'Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)' response code	Add 'MRes' to the 'Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)' response code
			Response	Foundation degree courses are not accounted for in the response options	Add 'Foundation degree' as a response option either as a separate option or combine with 'Other diploma or certificate'
D – Employment in the last 12 months	Introductory wording	We would now like to find out a bit more about any (other) full-time employment you have had in the last 12 months.	Instruction, Clarity	The 12-month timeframe was interpreted in two distinct ways – those who interpreted it as 12 months prior to the census week and those who considered it to be 12 months prior to the date of the interview.	The timeframe in question should be explicitly referenced throughout this section to ensure all graduates are referring to the same period of time.

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
	D3 – introductory wording	The next set of questions will be asked of all the full-time jobs you have undertaken in the last 12 months [DISPLAY IF NOT FIRST JOB SINCE GRADUATED B24=2: excluding your current job].Please tell us about your jobs in chronological order, starting with your most recent job and then working backwards from that.	Instruction	Graduates working in a part-time role during the census week were confused as to whether they should include that a part-time work when detailing their employment history	Amend instruction to 'The next set of questions will be asked of all the full-time jobs you have undertaken in the last 12 months. Please tell us about your jobs in chronological order, starting with your most recent job and then working backwards from that. Please exclude any work you were engaged in during the [census week]'
				The instruction about referring to jobs in "chronological order" does not make intuitive sense for graduates who have only worked in one full-time role during the past 12 months.	Amend the instruction so that it just appears for graduates who have worked in more than one job full-time in the last 12 months i.e. 'Please tell us about your jobs in chronological order, starting with your most recent job and then working backwards from that.'
E – Further study, training or research in the last 12 months	Throughout section		Instruction, Clarity	Graduates were unsure as to what counted towards further study, training or research (compounded in this section due to the inconsistency in the question phrasing)	Question phrasing should be consistent throughout the section (and throughout the survey) and refers to 'study, training or research'.
	Introductory wording	The next set of questions are about any additional study, training, or research you have undertaken in the last 12 months	Instruction, Clarity	Although most graduates understood the question to be asking about the 12 months prior to the date of the interview, it was considered a change in the focus of the survey and so some graduates needed some time to re-focus their answer	In keeping with the recommendation made in relation to the 'employment history section', the timeframe in question should be explicitly referenced throughout this section to ensure all graduates are referring to the same period of time.

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
	Introductory wording E1 & E2	<p>Please do not include the course you were starting a month after [the census week].</p> <p>Have you undertaken further or additional study in the last 12 months?</p> <p>How many courses have you undertaken in last 12 months?</p>	Instruction	Although the section introduction states that graduates not to include the study, training or research they were doing in the census week (or the following month), some did	<p>Update the introductory wording to 'Please do not include the study, training or research you were doing in the [census week] / about to undertake in the month after the [census week].</p> <p>Add an additional prompt at E1 and E2 to remind graduates not to include any study, training or research they were doing in the census week / about to undertake in the month after the [census week].</p>
	E1		Instruction, Clarity	Some graduates queried whether the further study needed to be completed in order to count as having undertaken further or additional study in the last 12 months.	(Assuming that HESA want to collect information on all types of study, training or research regardless of whether it is still ongoing by the time of the interview) Add an instruction to the beginning of the section to include any study, training or research even if it is still ongoing or not complete (and to make it clear that this still excludes graduates' census week study, training or research)
	E3	Were you studying full time or part time in your previous study?	Response	Graduates on work-based short courses of a few days' duration, or those who had taken online courses, did not feel that the full or part-time distinction was applicable to these types of courses	(Assuming that HESA intend to capture all forms of study, training or research in this section (including more information types)) Add an N/A code
	E4	Which of the following best describes the	Clarity	Some graduates interpreted 'First degree' to mean the	Amend the response option to 'Undergraduate degree (including

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
		type of qualification you were aiming for?		first degree they ever undertook as opposed any undergraduate level qualification	integrated master's degrees) (e.g. BA, BSc, MBChB, Meng). The additional wording 'including integrated master's degrees' may also be worth including here to account for the MBChB and Meng provided in the examples.
			Clarity	Some graduates found the 'Professional qualification (e.g. ACA, Chartered Institute of Marketing)' response option too prescriptive	Remove the examples from "Professional qualification"
			Clarity	Some graduates found 'Other diploma or certificate' to be less clear compared to the other response options	Amend 'Other diploma or certificate' to 'Other diploma or certificate not specified above'
			Response	'MRes' is missing from the example options at the 'Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)' response code	Add 'MRes' to the 'Higher degree, mainly by research (e.g. PhD, DPhil, MPhil)' response code
			Response	Foundation degree courses are not accounted for in the response options	Add 'Foundation degree' as a response option either as a separate option or combine with 'Other diploma or certificate'
F – Reflection on career to date	Throughout			Graduates found this section longer than it needed to be with questions displaying on separate pages	Display all three questions on one survey page

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
F – Reflection on career to date	F1 – F3	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work fits with my future plans?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work meaningful and important?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current work?</p>		Graduates working multiple jobs were confused about which job to respond for	Either adjust text for those with multiple jobs to explicitly ask about their 'main' or 'most important' job, or ask the question about all jobs they were doing during census week.
	F7 – F9	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current activities fit with my future plans?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current activities are meaningful and important?</p>	Clarity	Graduates working and studying in the census week were confused about which activity to respond for	Consider asking these individuals both questions sets individually, to capture the experience of each activity in isolation or asking just about the main activity

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
		To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activities?			
	F3, F6, F9	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my work / study activities?	Clarity	Graduates who were studying in the census week and had studied in the last 12 months were unsure what 'studies' they should be referring to when answering this question	Add some detail to the question text which specifies which 'study' graduates should consider when answering this question
			Clarity	Graduates were inconsistent in how they answered this question with some focussing (more) on subject matter and others on wider skills	Consider either splitting the question into two – one asking about subject matter and the other about skills por adjust the question text to specify what graduates should take into account when answering this question
	F3	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my work?	Clarity	Some graduates found it difficult to answer this question where their degree and current career aspirations did not match	Add an 'N/A' response code
	F1, F4, F7	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work / study / activities fit with my future career plans	Clarity	Some graduates defined future career plans in terms of personal development (soft skills, personal growth), as well as including personal plans and goals, including marriage, family, friends and location	Update question text to clarify the definition and limits of 'future plans',

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
	F2, F5, F8	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work / study / activities are meaningful and important?	Clarity	Graduates were inconsistent in what they understood 'meaningful and important' to mean	Update question text to clarify what graduates should take into account when considering if their activity is 'meaningful'.
			Clarity		Consider splitting this question into two questions (which could be shown on the same screen) or choose just one of the terms to focus on (based on the cognitive interviews, 'meaningful' seemed to have more respondent value and engagement)
			Clarity	Many Welsh speaking graduates not familiar with the Welsh translation of the word 'meaningful' (ystyrlon)	Find an alternative and better-known word to use for 'meaningful'. Graduates suggested 'worthwhile' (gwerth chweil).
			Clarity	Business owners found this question unnecessary and redundant to them	Review once decision made in relation to the recommendation above about providing clarification on the term 'meaningful')
G Net Promoter Entity	H3 & H4	On a scale of zero (extremely unhappy) to ten (extremely happy), how happy did you feel yesterday? On a scale of zero (not at all anxious) to ten (extremely anxious), how anxious did you feel yesterday?	Response	Some graduates felt their score could vary greatly from one day or week to the next, so their answer did not necessarily reflect how they felt in their life in general.	Consider changing the question wording at these questions to read: How happy / anxious do you feel most days?

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
I Graduate Choice	Throughout		Clarity, Reading	Some graduates were confused by the use of what felt like a double negative	Positively frame the statements e.g. 'Do the same subject' rather than 'Do a different subject'
J - Impact of Higher Education	Throughout	To what extent to has your HE experience has enabled you to...	Response	The scale of 'not at all', 'some extent' and 'a great extent' was interpreted and applied differently leading to the potential overuse of 'some extent'	Review how the data is currently used and if granular data is required amend the response scale of 'A great extent to not at all' with an 'Agree to disagree scale with a 'neither agree nor disagree' option'. If a less granular data is required, update the response categories to be a binary 'yes' or 'no'.
			Reading, Response	The list of statements was perceived to be overly-long and in some cases repetitive	Reduce the number of statements especially those which graduates considered to be similar
	J1_1 to J1_6		Sensitivity / Bias	Statements 1-6 about behaviour in the workplace and career development were felt to be less relevant to the self-employed	Ask statements 1-6 to just those who are employed (rather than self-employed)
	J1_8	To what extent to has your HE experience has enabled you to enhance social and intellectual capabilities beyond employment	Reading, Clarity	There were wide and varying interpretations of this question	Remove this statement from this bank of questions
	J1_10	To what extent has your HE experience had an impact on you that hasn't been previously specified?	Clarity	Graduates often did not understand what was being asked by statement leading to high levels of don't know response	Either reword the final statement to ask: 1.If the graduate's HE experience had an impact on them in any other way not already mentioned

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
					<p>2.If so, specify this impact and</p> <p>3.The extent their HE experience impacted them in this way</p> <p>Or remove the statement entirely</p>
L - Research Students	L1 & L2	Thinking about the research degree you completed 15 months ago, what was the main reason you decided to undertake it? / other reasons	Response	Some graduates felt their motivations were fully not captured in the response options provided	<p>Add in additional response options at L1 and L2 as follows:</p> <p>1. I wanted to change career</p> <p>2. Encouraged to do so by university (including lecturer, tutor)</p> <p>3. The extent their HE experience impacted them in this way</p>
	L3	Did you receive any funding towards these research studies in terms of fees or maintenance, or were you self-funded? Please include any accommodation costs under maintenance.	Clarity	Graduates later went on to details sources such as freelance work, scholarships and personal savings (at L4-L7) and did not consider these to be types of 'self-funding' at L3	Split out 'no funding / self-funding' into two response categories
N – Job during census week	N1_10	In the job you were doing in the census week, how often did you have the responsibility for supervising the work of others?	Repetition	This question overlaps with B6 - Were you responsible for formally supervising anyone?	Remove this statement from N1

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Type of issue(s) encountered	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
O – PhD / Research degree experience	Throughout	To what extent has your PhD degree experience enabled you to...	Response	The scale of 'not at all', 'some extent' and 'a great extent' was interpreted and applied differently leading to the potential overuse of 'some extent'	Review how the data is currently used and if granular data is required amend the response scale of 'A great extent to not at all' with an 'Agree to disagree scale with a 'neither agree nor disagree' option'. If a less granular data is required, update the response categories to be a binary 'yes' or 'no'.
			Reading, Response	The list of statements was perceived to be overly-long and in some cases repetitive	Reduce the number of statements especially those which graduates considered to be similar
	O1_1 to O1_6		Sensitivity / Bias	Statements 1-6 about behaviour in the workplace and career development were felt to be less relevant to the self-employed	Ask statements 1-6 to just those who are employed (rather than self-employed)
	O1_8	To what extent has your PhD degree experience enabled you to enhance social and intellectual capabilities beyond employment	Reading, Clarity	There were wide and varying interpretations of this question	Remove this statement from this bank of questions

Appendix B – Table of Welsh language issues

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
Survey name	N/A	Ganlyniadau Graddedigion	Views were mixed on how well the name of the survey translated into the Welsh language. Half of Welsh speaking graduates thought 'ganlyniadau' was more commonly used in Welsh to mean 'results'	Alternatives put forward included 'sefyllfa', meaning 'situation' or 'cynnydd' meaning 'progress'
B – Your employment in the census week	B12	Was this organisation part of the NHS?	The acronym NHS did not translate well into Welsh ('GIG'), in large part because the acronym is not used as widely as the English acronym	NHS should be written out in full 'Gwasanaeth Iechyd Genedlaethol'
F – Reflection on career to date	F2, F5, F8	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: My current work / study / activities are meaningful and important?	Welsh language speaking graduates were not familiar with the Welsh translation of the word 'meaningful' (ystyrlon)	Suggest replacing with 'gwerth chweil' meaning 'worthwhile'
J - Impact of Higher Education	J1_1	To what extent has your HE experience enabled you to be innovative in the workplace	The term 'innovative' did not translate well into the Welsh language (arloesol)	An alternative translation should be sought
	J1_3	To what extent has your HE experience enabled you to change organisational	The term 'organisational culture' did not translate well into the Welsh language (diwylliant drefniadol)	An alternative translation should be sought

Survey section	Question number	Question text	Detail of issue(s) encountered	Recommendation
		culture and/or working practices		
O – PhD / Research degree experience	O1_1	To what extent has your PhD degree experience enabled you to be innovative in the workplace	The term 'innovative' did not translate well into the Welsh language (arloesol)	An alternative translation should be sought
	O1_3	To what extent has your PhD degree experience enabled you to change organisational culture and/or working practices	The term 'organisational culture' did not translate well into the Welsh language (diwylliant drefniadol)	An alternative translation should be sought

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