

GRADUATE OUTCOMES COHORT A REVIEW

C18071 2018/19
MAY 2020

HESA



Graduate Outcomes

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SECTION 1 - LET YEAR TWO COMMENCE!

This update provides an overview of the first cohort (A) of year two of the Graduate Outcomes survey. Cohort A launched on Monday 2 December 2019 and closed on Saturday 29 February 2020.

Being our second year, we have been able to provide some comparisons in this update, for example on response rates. We continue to make improvements and it's pleasing to see these reflected in the stats. Improvement is a combined effort, including by providers who are improving the quality of contact details and continuing to engage in warm-up communications and awareness raising of the survey using our [communications guidance](#) provided.

With many learnings under our belt, we've approached year two with all of this in mind. The survey has had only minor modifications - you can read about these in section 5. At the start of this cycle, we tweaked our engagement plan, shared some extra communications materials and updated the privacy notice. We are working to continue our focus on response rates and on supporting providers to increase the quality of supplied contact details.

Behind the scenes we are looking at our process for finalising year two survey data next year and the release of the outputs which will be affected by the current pandemic. We are also further developing our operational processes, including those around data finalisation and data delivery. We have been working with sector representatives on this, creating an approach that delivers to the time, cost and quality standards that stakeholders, including the Steering Group expect.

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

Rob Phillpotts
Managing Director, Statutory Services

SECTION 2 - OUR COHORT A COLLECTION FINDINGS

RESPONSE RATES

As at Sunday 1 March (based on the previous day's surveying), the overall cohort A response rate was **43.3%**. The breakdown by target group can be found in the table below:

Main target group	Target	Cohort A year 2 response rate	Cohort A year 1 response rate
UK domiciled, full-time	60%	53.4%	47.4%
UK domiciled, part-time	60%	51.3%	45.9%
Research funded	65%	55.3%	50.9%
EU domiciled	45%	47.4%	41.5%
Non-EU domiciled	25%	32.8%	23.5%

Please note, all response rates and results published prior to the final release of data in 2021 are provisional.

Current response rates can be located in the [provider portal](#) in the 'Sector response rate report'. As per all of the data in the portal, it is a continual feed, updated on a regular basis. This includes after a cohort is closed.

As evident from this table, we continue to make strong progress on response rates having overcome several issues we experienced previously. In addition to the survey enhancements we implemented throughout year one, the following additional changes have been made so far.

Emails

At the start of the year two (18/19) survey, we tested three different email subject lines for invitation emails to identify specific themes that are more likely to encourage graduates to open their emails. Starting with an initial sample of 163,072, three equally sized randomised groups were created, each one receiving a different subject line. The content of the email was the same in all three cases. In order to get a non-biased representation of the population in each subset, graduates were equally distributed across the three groups by the following characteristics: domicile, level of study and type of provider.

Following analysis of paradata (administrative data about the survey), collected alongside the survey, we found one subject line achieving a much higher open rate and click rate, compared with the other two. To maintain the ingenuity of these subject lines we have deliberately chosen not to publish them. While there was one clear winner, a sizeable proportion did respond to the other two subject lines suggesting there is no perfect template for what works in this context. The use of multiple subject lines is likely to be the best course of action. This has been further confirmed throughout the rest of the cohort where we changed subject lines every so often which resulted in a sudden rise in open, click and completion rates. We have continued with this approach in cohort B.

Telephone interviewing (CATI)

Our contact centre achieved an extra 13,000 responses (approximately), compared with this time last year. The inclusion of third-party data collection and case prioritisation has also meant that response rates and their representativeness are much improved, compared with cohort A last year. (Learn more about third-party responses and case prioritisation in our [methodology statement](#).)

We are currently evaluating several different calling strategies such as the use of a single number and effectiveness of landlines versus mobile numbers to make contact with graduates.

DATA QUALITY

We have received feedback from the sector on improving quality of free text fields in the survey. In order to address this most appropriately, we are doing the following:

- Understand the distribution of quality issues across the dataset and identify patterns in terms of:
 - Providers.
 - Graduate characteristics.
 - Mode of data collection.
 - Specific data items in the survey.
- Depending on the nature of the problem, identify reasonable and cost-effective solutions to fix it.
- Where changes are implemented, monitor their impact on data quality within future collections

We will provide an update on our progress in due course.

SECTION 3 - COHORT A RESPONSE RATES AND ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS

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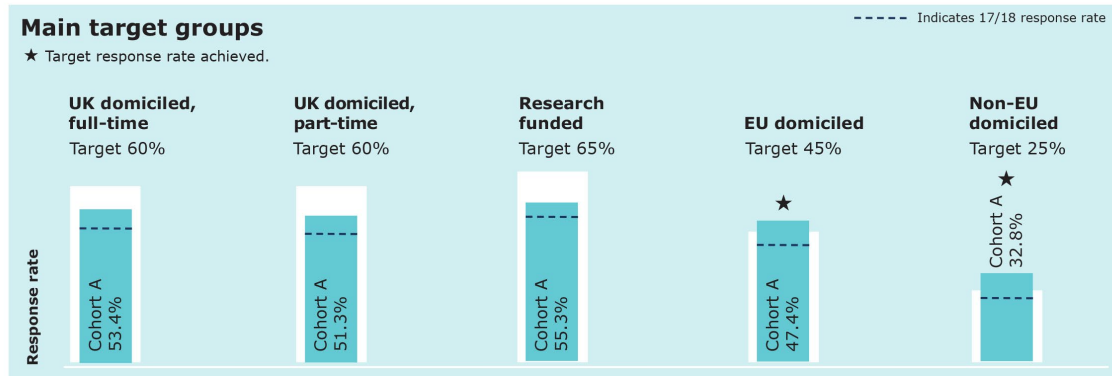


Cohort A

Opened on **Monday 2 December 2019** and closed on **Saturday 29 February 2020**.

Response rates

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



43.3%
Overall cohort A response rate

72,658
completed responses

Partial responses 5,947

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

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

- Q. What activities were you doing in the census week?
- Q. What was your job title during the census week?
- Q. Are you contracted to start a job within a month of [census week]?

Mode of completion:

Providers in cohort D: **271**

Phone	62%
Online	38%

Breakdown of Online mode:

Desktop	32%
Mobile	68%

Engagement statistics

- 7** rounds of email invitations sent
- 8** rounds of SMS messages sent

This is higher than previous cohorts as a result of a more stable engagement plan.

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

Unique page views of the Graduate Outcomes websites (to 29 February 2020)
graduateoutcomes.ac.uk

- English website: **281,391**
- Welsh website: **1,350**
- @grad_outcomes followers: **966**

Best time of day for completions

Phone	5-6pm
Desktop	2-3pm
Mobile	12-1pm

Best day for completion

TUE

Average time taken to complete

Phone	15 minutes, 22 seconds
Online	10 minutes, 17 seconds

Due to changes in the way we calculate duration, plus minor changes to survey questions, we will not be comparing to year one.



SECTION 4 - UPDATES FROM COHORT A

Provider domain emails

In September 2019, we provided guidance that where providers have supplied email addresses for graduates on their domain, they should be mindful of the expiry period for these addresses. Some providers allow graduates to keep these addresses for life, others expire them after a fixed period (e.g. six month post-course completion). These email addresses should only be returned as valid graduate contact details for Graduate Outcomes when they are still live accounts on your system.

We have found that, for some providers, this has led to the delivery failure of email invitations to the intended recipients.

It is vital that all providers are aware of this issue because, where we find a number of soft or hard bounces, this risks the blacklisting of HESA's Graduate Outcomes IPs which could mean we are unable to send emails to any graduates in the entire population. We must be very careful to ensure we only use contact details that are valid and accurate, as verified by the graduate. This is why we ask for the best contact details and to avoid supplying provider domain accounts where they have been closed due to the provider's email retention policy.

Where we have advised certain providers who are failing to resolve this matter within a suitable timescale, we may need to report this to the relevant statutory customer.

[Find out more about provider domain email addresses](#)

Position of contact details

At the end of January 2020, we provided some new guidance on the position of contact details within the provider portal. We've summarised this below:

Last year, we provided some guidance around the desire for providers to supply the "best" contact details for a graduate and for these contact details to be supplied in position 1. We have done some further investigating into the way the provider portal and Confirmit ingest these contact details and have found that they are not processed in the order in which providers may enter them into the portal. The portal treats all supplied contact details equally. This is due to the requirement that providers should be able to update and delete contact details throughout the contact period.

It is for this reason that unfortunately, despite our original guidance, it is not possible to record the contact detail in position 1 and hold its position throughout the field period. A full explanation of this can be found on the [HESA website](#).

However, further analysis has also confirmed that this does not have an impact on response rates as all contact details are used equally to send reminders and the response rates do not vary by position of contact detail.

We have updated this guidance on the [C18071 Contact Details coding manual](#) - note that the request to provide the best contact details remains.

SECTION 5 - MODIFICATIONS FOR COHORT B

Only minor modifications were made to the survey for cohort B, which included updates to contextual/supporting information for questions, cleaned question wording, and tidying of some

coding variables that run in the background of the survey. There were no major modifications to the survey undertaken for cohort B.

SECTION 6 - NEXT STEPS

17/18 DATA DISSEMINATION

We have provided a comprehensive update in the [midpoint review for cohort B](#).

LAUNCH OF HESA WEEKLY UPDATE

In January 2020, HESA launched its new weekly update email channel which condenses all appropriate operational emails sent to HESA Identity System contacts into a weekly digest spanning all collections. This is sent out every Thursday.

The HESA weekly update will only be sent to you when it relates to collections updates that you are an operational contact for. So, if you don't receive an email, there is no news or updates relevant for your role that week.

As Graduate Outcomes is still early in its implementation, we have determined the need to continue to provide operational and strategic communications outside of this channel i.e. in addition to it, sent directly to relevant contacts. However, we will use the weekly update as a summary of the previous week's communications about Graduate Outcomes.

As per all of our communications, we will monitor this over the coming collections, seek feedback from the Steering Group and advise providers.

[Sign up](#) to receive the weekly update or [view the archive](#).



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT GRADUATE OUTCOMES

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

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