# HESA fundamental review of graduate destinations and outcomes data: strategic group

## 03 October 2016, 10:30 – 15:00

## Brettenham House, 5 lancaster place, London, wc2e 7en

**Present:**

Sarbani Banjeree Higher Education Funding Council for England

Matt Barnard HESA

Natasha Calvert National College for Teaching and Learning

Dan Cook HESA (joined at 12.15)

Jackie Cresswell-Griffith Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

Pip Day HESA

Terry Dray Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services/ Liverpool John Moores University

Rosa Fernandez National Centre for Universities and Business

Bob Gilworth University of London, Careers Group

Rachel Hewitt HESA

Denise Jones HESA

Stephen Meredith Department for Education

Alan Roberts National Union of Students

Gary Sprules Higher Education Strategic Planners Association/ University of the Arts, London

Michael Weatherup Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland

Andrew Whitmore Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services/ University of Manchester

Chris Williams Welsh Government

Keith Zimmerman Open University

**In attendance:**

Clare Lyonette Warwick Institute for Employment Research

Rachel Moreton CFE Research

**Apologies:**

Claire Callender UCL Institute of Education and Birkbeck University

Helen Mansfield Health Education England

Eileen Schofield Association of Heads of University Administration/ University of Stirling

Alan Sloan Scottish Government

Martin Smith Scottish Funding Council

1. **Welcome and introductions**

RH welcomed the group to the second meeting of the strategic group for the destinations and outcomes review. All members of the group introduced themselves and their role within their organisation.

RH introduced the purpose of the day as being first to update the group on activity so far, and second to canvas their advice and guidance on areas where responses to the consultation had been unclear, complex or inconsistent. The key areas to be covered were the level of agreement that centralisation would offer more demonstrably robust results, and timescales for a survey or surveys.

1. **Minutes from the previous meeting**

It was agreed that all the actions from the previous meeting had been met, and no further comments were received on the Minutes.

1. **Commissioned research**

RH introduced the two pieces of research commissioned by HEFCE to support the review and informed the group that the research projects would be published alongside the consultation synthesis.

1. Richer information on student views (Paper 1)

CL presented on the Warwick Institute for Employment Research report titled ‘Richer information on student views’.

Questions were asked about the inferences which could be made about student views at different points in their HE experience, and the make-up of the focus groups.

1. What do good outcomes from HE look like? (Paper 2)

RM presented on the CFE research report titled ‘What do good outcomes look like?’

Questions were asked about consideration of how different size organisations have different outcomes from higher education.

1. **Outcomes from consultation**

RH and DC presented the main findings from the consultation responses. A copy of the draft *Synthesis of consultation responses* had been circulated to the group previously.

Questions and points for clarification were taken on a range of issues during the presentation.

1. **Centralisation – what could it mean?** (Paper 3)

Consideration of centralisation was in the original *Remit* for the Review. The consultation had not revealed consistent views on this matter, and HESA required the Strategic Group’s advice on how to proceed. DC presented a number of examples of “centralisation” in operation elsewhere in the sector (Paper 3) and asked the group to consider the questions posed.

A variety of discussions were captured in groups, and in the following plenary session, including the following points:

* Centralisation aids standardisation and ‘levels the playing field’ – could enable agreed approaches to when students are contacted, how and how often. In general, it was felt that centralised approaches will deliver more consistent data than is possible on a distributed basis.
* Centralisation will inspire confidence in own and others’ results.
* Ability for ‘add-ons’ from main survey provider is important as each provider has their own needs. For example, the OU currently contact graduates in a later follow-up activity and would find it useful to use a new survey provider for this. OU look at how study/career objectives change as this tends to be more remarkable than in other providers. It was noted that any appended questions can’t compromise the ‘core’ survey in terms of retaining *National Statistics* designation for NewDLHE.
* The group discussed how TEF makes the need for confidence in data quality stronger than ever.
* Third-party coding would remove perceptions of bias in SOC coding (e.g. areas with some “fuzzy” terminology where similar roles can end up coded as ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ SOC codes at different HE providers), but given the accumulated expertise in the sector, third-party coders must be held to a high standard.
* Governance of outsourcing is felt to be strong.
* Centralisation could offer better value per attempted/acquired response for most providers.
* Perceived as a more robust methodology for *National Statistics* designation
* Centralisation makes it easier to be responsive to changes, as a single provider can change more rapidly and cost-effectively than a sector-wide effort can be co-ordinated
* HE providerss need access to their own data to learn from their results.
* Current DLHE data collection fits within other HE provider process and it works well for many.
* What does centralisation do to “after-care” and HE providers maintaining relationships with graduates. Would HE providers feel removed from the process and not want to engage? The group questioned whether this was really a genuine reason to not want centralisation. Do they just want to get the contact details of their graduates? HE providers can get in contact with their leavers at other time points. Needing to do DLHE is a prompt to keep up to date with leavers.
* Would leavers answer more honestly to an independent caller (under a centralised system) than to a direct representative of the HE provider? There were arguments for and against.
* Some were concerned that third party (typically parental) response rates would fall if collection is centralised (giving information to someone perceived as a stranger, rather than the HE provider, might make respondents wary).
* Would overseas student data be affected (accuracy and contact with them) under a centralized process – some concerns, as this is currently a difficult group to survey (generally).
* An audit system could offer more flexibility than centralization, but conversely would create costs without extra value.
* Could there be fusion options? NewDLHE could work well under a similar framework to PRES/PTES, so could be run by HESA and administered through a survey provider.
* What influence would providers have over the process?
* Full centralisation or partial centralisation? The detailed characteristics will matter and it is important to recognize HE providers legitimate concerns.
* Use of a web-based data viewer service (updated every 5/6 mins) to monitor responses would be beneficial.
* Cost entailed if partial centralisation? Would project teams be designated for this? What efficiencies would HE providers make?
* Highly skilled telephone operative for surveying students could be more beneficial than casually-recruited staff (more detailed information gained) but it was important that interviewers had a good level of understanding – in some HE providers academic staff undertake the survey.
* SOC coding could be provided by an outsourced provider on a weekly/frequent basis rather than all-at-once. SOC coders should keep notes explaining decision making (good practice for audit). Some support would be required from universities or other subject experts to assure coding accuracy.
* Retain some audit facility for a centralised system – all users have an interest in data quality, and there would be interest in demonstrating that all HE providers have equal treatment.
* Personalised communication from provider to graduates to promote the survey would help uptake, and could be retained even in a centralised process.
* The method of collection doesn't matter to data users if it is robust and trusted.
* Procurement specialists must be involved in the development of any centralised system.
* Project teams – a project manager/nominated contact at an HE provider could potentially work with the outsourced company.
* Providing onwards careers advice – possibility of referrals to Careers Services from a survey contact.
* Reassuring HE providers that their concerns are being met is key to any centralised model.
* Regular access to granular data with dialogue on the data between HE providers and survey provider
* Centralisation would benefit from starting from “year zero” to minimise “legacy” issues.

Summarising the wide-ranging discussions, DC summarised the advice as being cautious support for centralisation, and to ask the Working Group to assist in developing a centralised model for the NewDLHE that addresses the practical concerns of HE providers, and took on-board the advice of the group.

1. **Timing** (Paper 4)

The Review has considered timescales for a survey or surveys, and this was a second area where the consultation responses were in many ways equivocal, and where HESA needed the advice of the Strategic Group. DC presented the options for timings set out in paper four, and asked the group to consider the questions posed, around number and timing of surveys. Points raised in discussions in groups and in the plenary session included the following:

* The group were generally in favour of pushing the survey out to the 12-18 months timeframe. Six months is considered too soon to make judgements about outcomes, especially when these may be judgements on providers.
* There were questions about whether HE providers or other users could contract for different survey points of interest to them. For example, the NHS need to know before 12/18 months that a graduate has not gone on to Nursing; other examples were offered relating to additional surveying (and additional survey questions) by HE providers. Is there a residual need for some form of six-month survey? Or do HE providers mainly need to intervene around this time point to retain contact with participants?
* Questions of whether there should be at least national level data at 2 points as there are likely to be marked differences between 12 and 36 months – inconclusive as while more data is seen as useful, it has to be paid for by someone.
* The ‘core’ survey needs to be a census and any later (or earlier) points can perhaps be a sample survey – but there is existing evidence of a need for some data beyond the main census survey (before and after, and with additional questions at the same time) and HESA should consider responding to this demand. There could be a range of surveys that providers can opt in to.
* Discussion around inevitable drop in response rates when moving to a later survey point. It was agreed that drop in response rates was the main risk to moving away from six months.
* Time points should be assessed to see if they’re working.
* Data retention (graduate contact details) is important and there will need to be appropriate processes in place to ensure drop-off is not too steep. Keeping contact details up to date if survey moved out could prove challenging. Will an 80% response rate targeted be maintained 12/15/18 months on – felt to be unlikely. However, HE providers have multiple other ways of keeping in contact with their graduates - DLHE is not the only way to retain good quality contact details.
* For the first year or two of NewDLHE, could we maintain the 6-month survey and use 12/18 months at the same time to ensure that the latter one works? Could there be an optional survey at six months, or a low-cost online-only survey? Asking about main activity only at 6 months could be an option. Or perhaps ask the graduate to give a fuller careers history later? Likewise, a follow-up census could potentially be managed as an email-only survey of the full population.
* Some support for a “point of exit” survey and another at around 15 months.
* Census *period* instead of census *date* might be advantageous.
* If moved from 6 months, then no real continuity with past – both an advantage and a disadvantage. Discussion of the pragmatic reasons why 6 months census date was originally established. There is no ‘best’ time to survey: the choice of any timescale has impacts both positive and negative.
* Cost an issue (multiple surveys) and there would have to be an appropriate financial model.
* Survey fatigue is an issue – there would need to be strong controls to prevent oversurveying if more than one survey point is used.
* NewDLHE implementation time frame – needs to be clarified, especially if a large procurement exercise is required.
* Smaller survey, with simpler response results, with extra questions optional/if necessary?
* More meaningful engagement would be made possible by surveying later - graduates who have not yet found a settled place within six months often will have by 12-18 months – there is therefore a higher likelihood of a productive engagement. If the graduate is surveyed sooner than the likely point at which sustained employment (or something else) has been obtained, there is a risk that they are made to feel like a failure, unfairly, when this may simply be the normal/expected pattern for their subject/location/etc.
* Care should be taken to establish a process for handling opt-outs, and ensuring the graduate’s wishes are respected.

Summarising the discussion, DC indicated that the task for the Working Group was to help address the issues involved in running a single census survey of all graduates at 12-18 months, and additionally, to consider developing a mechanism for handling additional sample or cohort surveying beyond a single census.

1. **Next steps**

DC requested permission to publish the notes from the group, and this was agreed.

DC informed the group that the working group would be meeting on 24/25 October, with the second consultation to be released before Christmas.