SYNTHESIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Received in respect of a consultation on principles and future requirements for the UK's public interest data about graduates, in support of HESA's fundamental review of destinations and outcomes data for graduates from higher education.

OCTOBER 2016

#NEWDLHE

HESA

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PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION

On 11 May 2016, HESA launched a consultation to help determine what should replace the current DLHE (Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education) survey, as part of the fundamental review of destinations and outcomes data. The nine-week consultation was designed to gain feedback on high-level principles regarding what information needs to be gathered about post-study outcomes for those leaving higher education in future. It focused on four key themes:

- Future-proofing – a fundamental reconsideration of the kinds of data that will be required for the foreseeable future, taking into account a labour market that is changing at a structural level, and increasing demands for rich information about graduate outcomes.
- Efficiency – taking advantage of new capabilities to link data sources and use modern survey technology to increase value for money and reduce the cost of data acquisition.
- Fit for purpose – ensuring the data collection methodology allows the data to be used in new and emerging contexts, with confidence.
- Supporting legislation – taking into account the legal gateway opened by the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act, and supporting developing government purposes for destinations and outcomes data, across the UK.

Figure 1 Aims of HESA's review of graduate destinations and outcomes data.

Further detail about the consultation, including a copy of the consultation document, will be found at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/records/reviews/newdlhe/consultation

More information about the review overall is available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/records/reviews/newdlhe

APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

This document shares the outcomes of the consultation HESA conducted to determine the future for graduate destinations information. The consultation asked 128 questions in total, with a mixture of high-level and detailed questions. In order to keep this document short and readable, we concentrate on the outcomes for the high-level questions and main findings. HESA and the review groups will utilise the full range of material produced by the consultation, as well as other sources of information, and these will collectively inform the detailed design.

WHO RESPONDED?

HESA received 208 responses by the deadline. Of these, four were excluded from the analysis as we judged from their very incomplete state that they had been submitted in error. The remaining total of 204 responses are included in the analysis. We received a further two responses after the deadline. We have taken the views into account, but they do not appear in the quantitative analyses presented here.

Responses were received from a range of sources, with slightly less than two thirds received from HE providers, and more than a third comprising responses from student representative organisations, sector bodies, government bodies, employer groups, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Nine responses were received from private individuals.

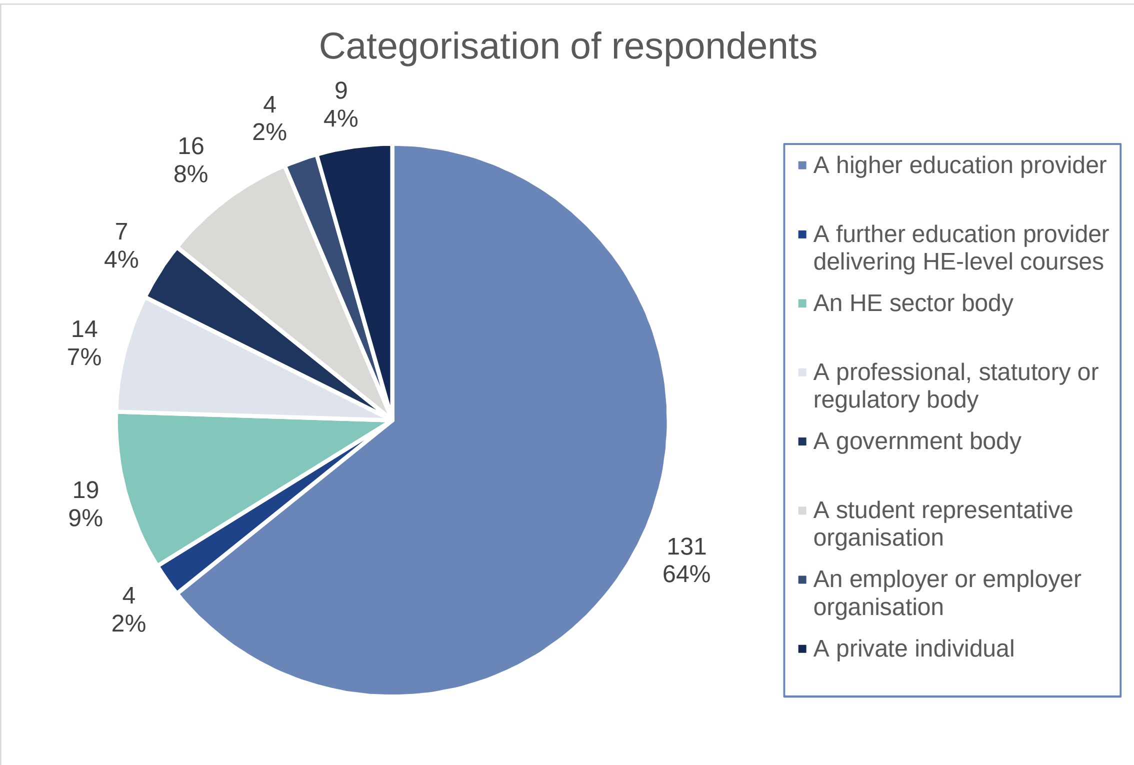

Figure 2 Respondents categorised according to answers to consultation question two.

Most respondents answered most questions in Section A, with questions suitable for quantitative analysis attracting more answers than the free-text questions.

DATA LINKING

The consultation asked high-level questions about how graduate destinations information should be collected, such as through linked tax, benefits and education data and/or a survey.

BACKGROUND

Data linking involves the bringing together of separate datasets using common identifiers or matching processes. One potential source of linked data is HMRC tax data and DWP benefit data, which is now available to the government for the purposes of education evaluation. However, there are other potential sources of linked data, too. For instance, the HESA Student record contains information about further study – enough to populate the basic, factual questions asked in the DLHE survey.

Three basic models to collecting graduate destinations data were identified:

- We could **rely entirely on linked data** to determine graduate outcomes. This would remove the need for a survey, and reduce costs, but we would miss out on a substantial amount of valued information, like location, industry, job title, type of work and reasons for taking the job. We would need to negotiate an appropriate level of access for legitimate education evaluation purposes in the HE sector, but would have no contextualising data sources for the period following study.
- We could choose not to utilise linked data, and **continue** collecting data (including salary) by consent **as at present**. This would ensure that the HE sector continues to have access to its own source of graduate information. However, since the government has already indicated that it will utilise linked data, this strategy would likely prove expensive and we would run the risk of similar but not directly comparable data sources on salary existing in the public domain.
- We could take **a mixed approach**, collecting data from the best available data sources, whether surveys of graduates like DLHE or national datasets, and merge them to produce a composite source of information. Collaboration between government and the HE sector would be required to deliver a dataset (and appropriate arrangements for access) that meets the wide range of education evaluation purposes that both government and HE providers routinely undertake. This would likely give the best value for money and explanatory power of the available approaches.

SHOULD WE UTILISE LINKED DATA?

In answer to question six (“Do you agree that linked data can provide a critical part of the data product?”) there were 193 responses, of which 181 (94%) answered “yes” and 12 (6%) answered “no”.

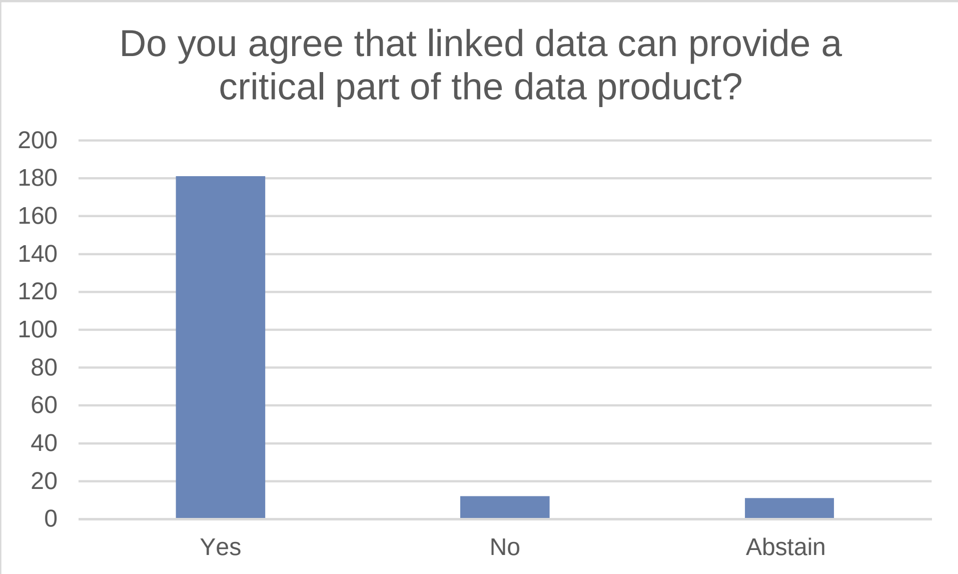

Figure 3 Count of responses to question six.

Of the HE providers who responded, all but two answered this question. 121 answered "yes" and eight answered "no". All FE college and employer group responses were in favour of data linking, and within the large majority of government bodies, HE sector bodies and PSRBs that chose to answer this question, there was also unanimous support.

Among student representative organisations there was a high level of support with 12 out of 16 responses (75%) supportive, three against and one abstention. Among individual respondents, seven answered "yes", one answered "no" and one abstained.

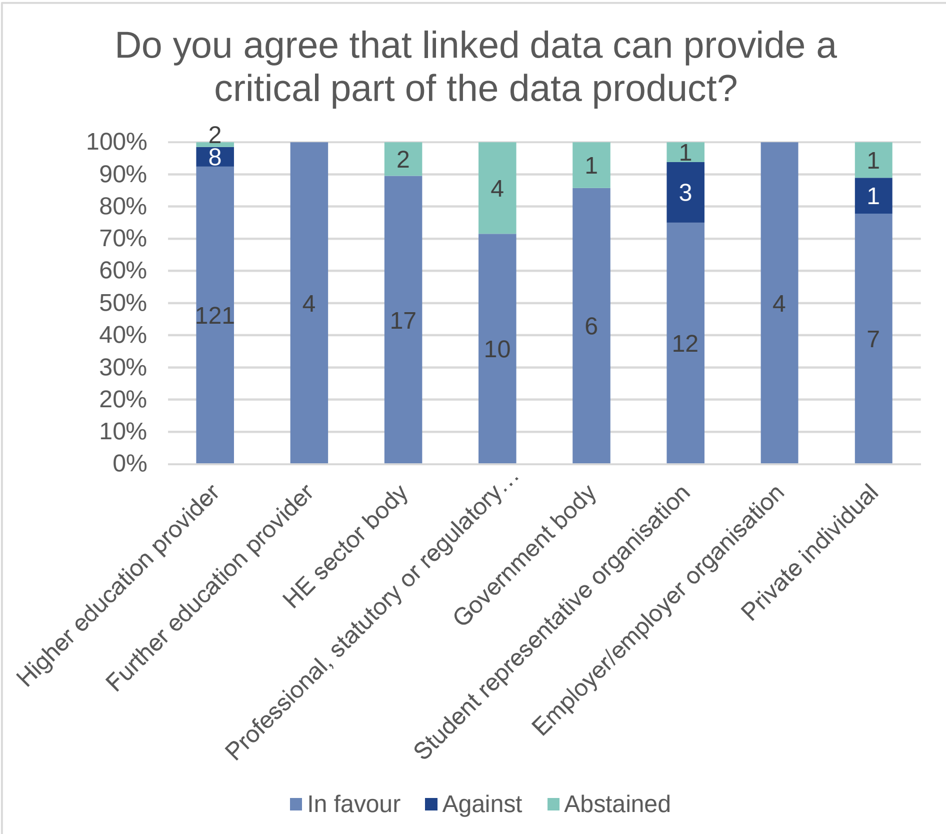

Figure 4 Responses to question six, by responses to question two.

In analysing the free text responses, we discovered a surprising similarity between the views and tone of the negative and positive responses. In both cases, linked data was seen as cost-effective and robust, and the need to handle issues of privacy appropriately was highlighted. The difference seemed mainly to centre on the interpretation of the “criticality” of data linking, with many of the negative responses indicating that linked tax data was insufficient on its own (a view echoed by most of the positive responses) and should be contextualised with other data.

It is therefore reasonable to characterise approval of data linking as being very high. A very large majority of respondents are in favour of this technology being utilised, and opposition to linking is not concentrated in any particular group. This opinion is corroborated by the answer to question 27 (“your level of support for the outline proposal to derive basic further study information from linked education data sources”) which reveals that the majority of respondents declare “high” or “very high” support.

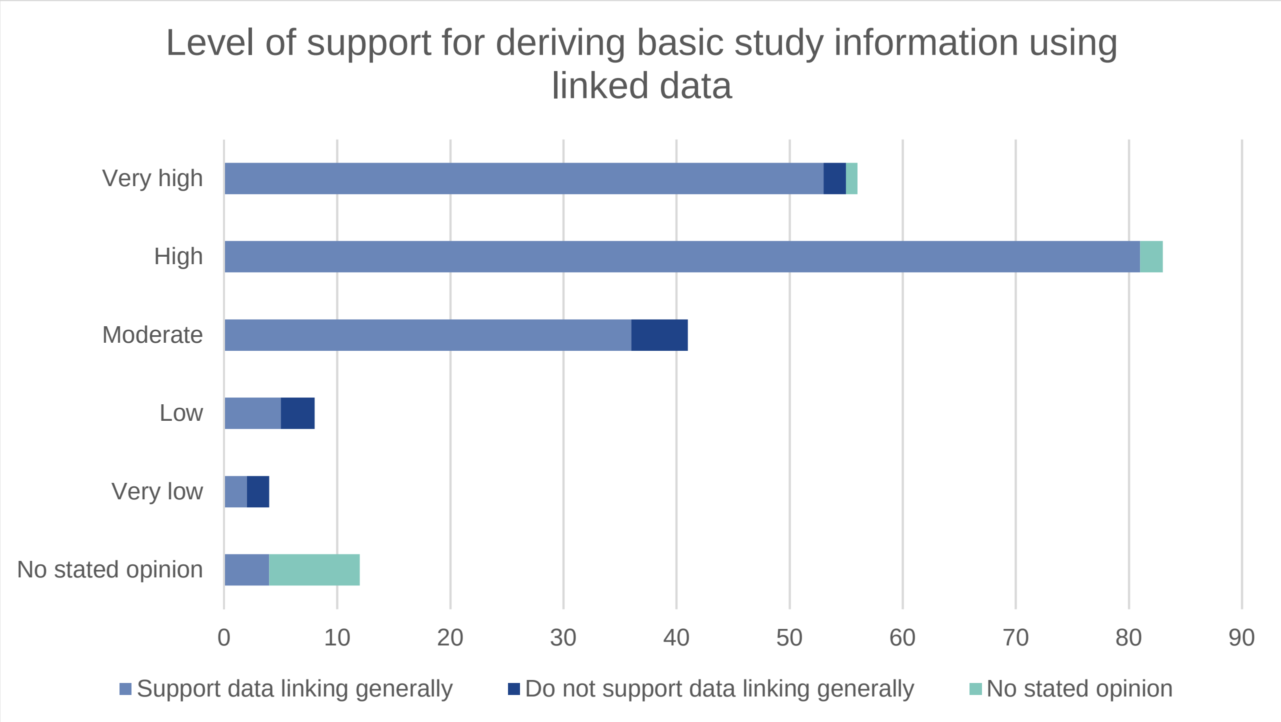

Figure 5 Responses to question 27, by responses to question six.

SHOULD LINKED DATA BE CONTEXTUALISED WITH A SURVEY?

We wanted to discover if respondents believed that data linking alone could be sufficient to meet the requirements of users, or if it required contextualisation with other data from a survey. Respondents to consultation question seven (“Do we need a survey?”) were very consistently in favour of a survey, with 193 in favour, and two against. This overwhelmingly consistent result demonstrates a clear mandate for the review to deliver a survey that will offer a highly credible source of information on graduate outcomes, which can sit naturally alongside information obtained from linked data sources. A strong steer from the HE sector was that consideration should be given to how data is presented in public sources to ensure salary and survey data contextualise each other in a complementary and informative way.

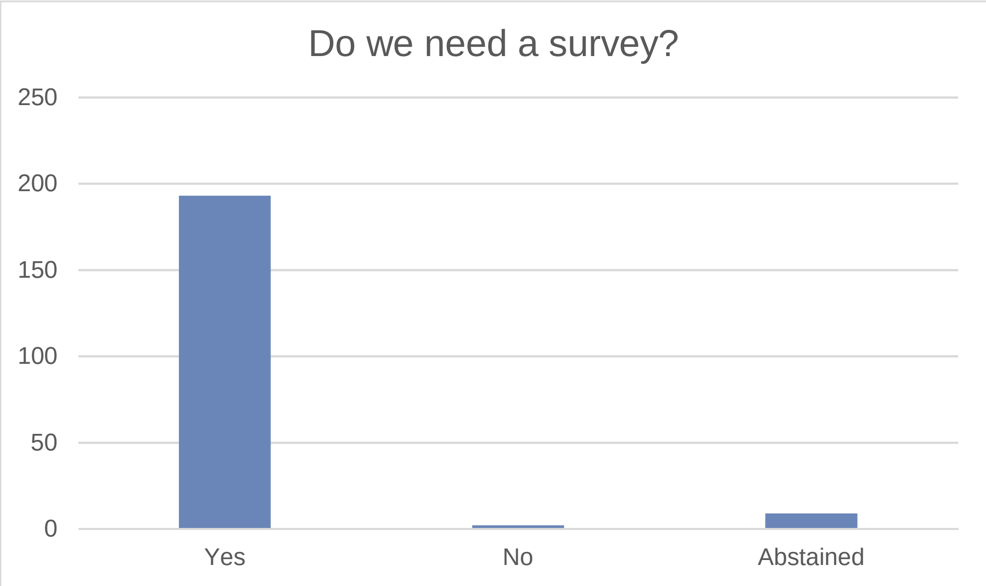

Figure 6 Count of responses to question seven.

UNIVERSALITY OF A SURVEY

We indicated in the consultation document that there are a wide range of possibilities for conducting a survey or surveys, depending on the intended uses for the data. We asked, in question eight, “Does a survey need to be universal (a census of graduates)?”. Again, this question was answered with a highly consistent positive response, with 180 in favour and 16 against.

Reasons for favouring a census survey centred on issues of usability and granularity of the data, down to course or programme level, and the desirability of obtaining data not only for its statistical significance, but also to develop detailed knowledge about interactions with industry, or to gather information for marketing purposes.

Among those against a census, some responses from HE providers indicated that they were not in favour of a census covering all groups (for example, part-time students and EU nationals) and responses from some national organisations indicated that their own uses for the data could be served by a (still large) sample survey, more akin to the longitudinal DLHE survey.

Overall, there was a very substantial majority in favour of a survey of all graduates.

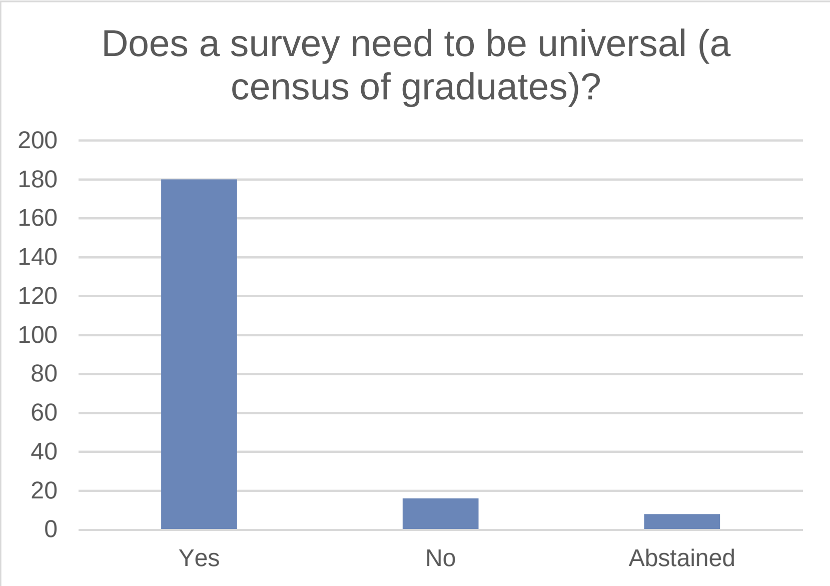

Figure 7 Count of responses to question eight.

FREE-TEXT RESPONSES

The answers we received to questions six, seven and eight give a very clear steer for the review. Among all respondents, there is an exceptionally clear preference for linked tax, benefits and education data to be used in the replacement for DLHE, and for this to be supplemented with a universal survey of graduates. We analysed the free-text responses to question nine, "Further comments", in order to shed light on the quantitative responses.

One surprising finding was that similar issues were raised by respondents, notwithstanding whether they were generally in favour or against the propositions in questions six, seven and eight. Many respondents highlighted their support for a mixed-approach, arguing that outcomes from higher education cannot be reduced to a salary. The main matters raised can be summarised as follows:

- **Limitations of linked data**, such as HMRC data not covering those graduates domiciled outside the UK, limited data on graduate start-up companies and the early stages of self-employment, limited geographical and regional information, and so on. In a similar way, many respondents noted that DWP unemployment data would not necessarily capture those graduates who are unemployed but not claiming benefits. Likewise, linked education data may not cover professional courses or those delivered by an employer.
- The **need for salary data to be contextualised** in a variety of ways, including: geographically, by subject, by the type of job being done, and by a range of other responses and personal characteristics. Widening participation was frequently cited as a positive effort that could be frustrated if not taken into account in analyses of the success or otherwise of certain earnings outcomes. Responses from HE providers in general saw factors other than earnings as being more important and valuable data, and a multitude of responses made a stout defence of the need for granular individual information on role, duties, contract, and employer. One respondent neatly captured the mood by writing:

> *"It would be more appropriate for the linked data to be seen as a supplement to the survey, not the other way around".*

- The **integration of data capture with student "after-care"** activity, and the necessity of HE providers continuing to contact graduates personally.
- The need for **clarity** around how personal data will be used, to ensure that the survey continues to enjoy widespread support and consent of graduates (raised by 16 respondents).
- The need for **HE providers to retain access** to individualised salary data in a timely way, and through a clearly governed process, was a recurring theme.
- The issue of **coverage** and response rates (raised by 27 respondents). Some preferred a wider coverage of all leavers from HE, while others argued for differential approaches to be taken for EU nationals or those working overseas.

DATA REQUIREMENTS

The consultation asked questions about the type of graduate destinations information which should be collected, including maintaining existing question sets, and considering additional measures of graduate outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Current data collection in the DLHE and Longitudinal DLHE gathers information on these main areas:

- Types of activity: employment, study, travelling, etc. (all, and the most important one).
- Employment (including the job title, duties, salary, employer and location, motivations and how the role was obtained). The Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) of the employer and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) of the role are both derived from this section.
- Further study (what is being studied, where and how funded).
- Graduates working in regulated professions (for linking purposes).
- The HE experience and preparedness for future activity.

WHAT DATA SHOULD BE COLLECTED?

We sought feedback on maintaining a number of key areas, and considering additional sample areas. Respondents to consultation question ten ("Do you agree with the high-level scope of topics?") were strongly in favour of the high-level scope of topics proposed, with 183 in favour, and 10 against.

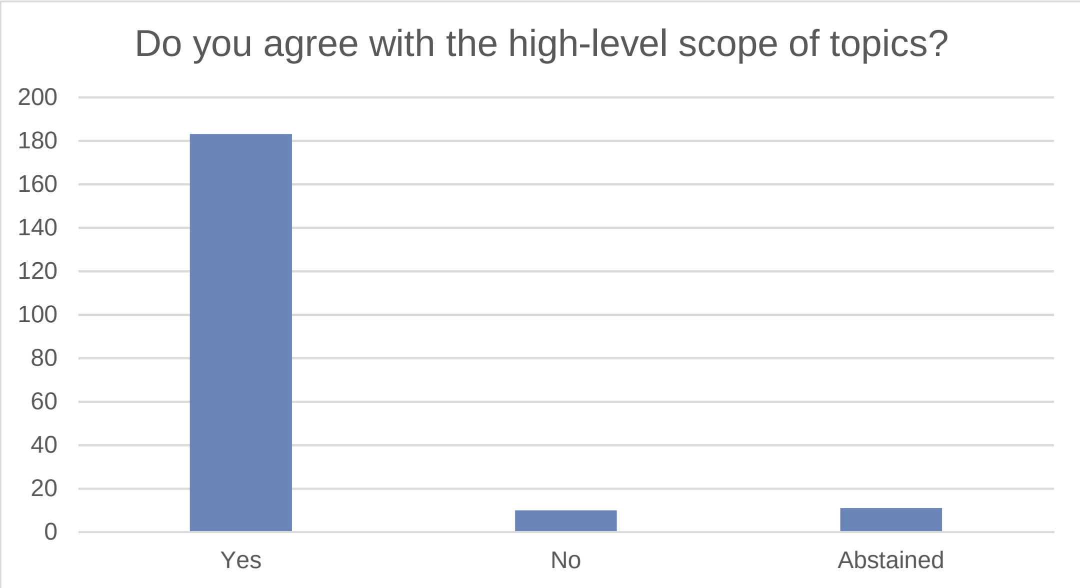

Figure 8 Count of responses to question ten.

We also presented some initial work on potential new measures for graduate outcomes, and asked if we should be seeking a new measure to complement the SOC code. In question 11, we asked: “Do you agree with the principle that it is desirable to find appropriate additional ways of measuring graduate outcomes?”. We again found broad agreement with this principle, with 183 respondents answering “yes”, 12 answering “no” and nine abstaining.

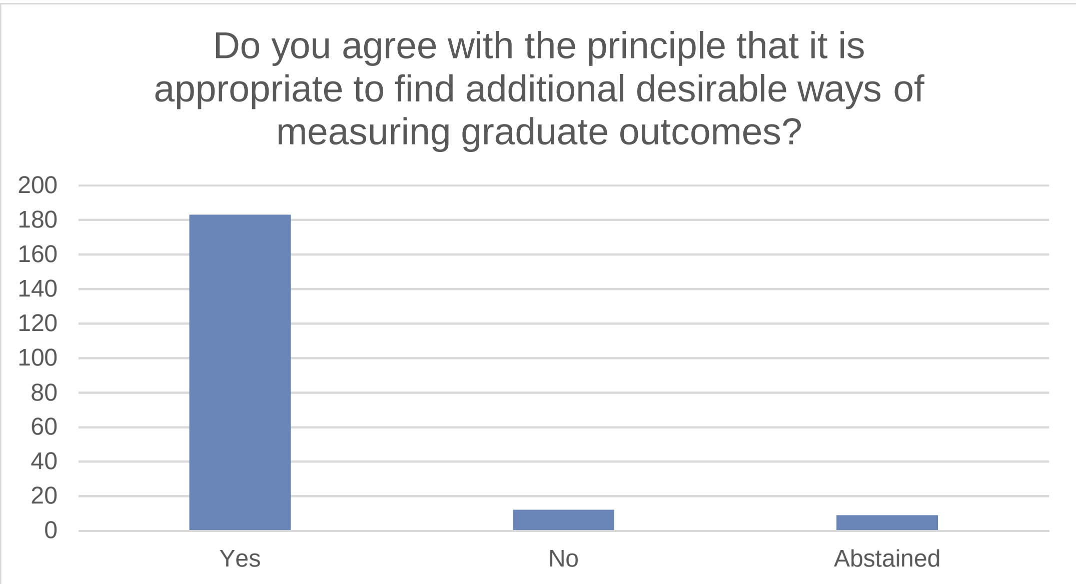

Figure 9 Count of responses to question 11.

ALTERNATIVE OUTCOME MEASURES

The review has initially explored feasible additional mechanisms for capturing different types of self-evaluations of outcomes from HE, in ways that are amenable to quantitative analysis. These include:

- **The application of a skills framework** – this could help us understand the extent to which graduates are deploying learned skills at work (or whatever path they are following), and would add the voice of graduates to the debate about the skills (or perhaps attributes or competencies) required for graduates to thrive. This would also contribute a significant source of information to debate and research about the skills requirements of jobs and employers.
- **The use of a widely-adopted subjective wellbeing framework** – this would help us understand and demonstrate the extent to which HE has a positive impact on attitudes, sense of worthwhileness and satisfaction with life, comparable to other segments of the population. We might also look at other related areas, such as social and cultural capital; autonomy; self-actualisation or resilience.
- **The Net Promoter score** – which measures loyalty, and so offers a proxy for satisfaction as well as having predictive power around the potential for growth. We are all familiar with being asked this question ("would you recommend…") in market research contexts. It is an approach commonly used in commercial benchmarking, and is starting to be used in HE.
- **A link back to previous surveys or activity** – which could offer the chance to observe change in self-perceptions, goals, capabilities or attitudes over time, measured in consistent ways.
- **A new self-evaluative question** seeking to measure outcomes from the graduate's viewpoint and according to their own success criteria.
- **Something else…** We want to understand the types of information that would be most meaningful to you – please tell us about what you see as important.

Questions 10 and 11 were accompanied by free text responses in questions 12 ("Is there anything we have missed?") and 13 ("Further comments"). Evaluating the responses to these questions together, a number of common themes emerged, around SOC codes and various comments on reliability of the different measures we posited.

Responses received to question 12 proposed considering the following additional measures:

- Understanding a graduate's perception of the value of their degree, or return on investment
- Identifying the link between degree subject and job taken
- More information about work experience
- Aspirations and whether these have been met by course/provider
- Job satisfaction or whether a graduate is in a 'positive destination'
- More information on start-ups, business incubation and internships/preparedness for entrepreneurship
- Consistent terminology with TEF 2's 'highly skilled employment' measures
- Expand skills to include attributes, experience, behaviours

- Social responsibility.

These measures will be considered further by the review groups.

A large number of respondents commented on the use of SOC codes for Standard Occupational Classifications of jobs, which HE providers or their agents derive from the answers to certain questions in the DLHE. The outcome gives a measure of the role that is often used as a proxy for success in obtaining a ‘graduate’ job. Responses to question 13 generally supported expanding the measures of graduate destinations beyond SOC codes and salary. Some respondents expressed a desire for SOC to be updated in line with the changes in the graduate labour market. Another theme was the importance of using the student voice in order to articulate what success is to a graduate. Some concerns were expressed at measures which are outside of a provider’s control, such as subjective wellbeing, being used to compare between providers. Respondents also questioned whether adding-in more qualitative measures should be aligned with a later survey point, to allow graduates time for reflection on their experience.

In general, comments welcomed a move away from complete reliance on the “problematic” “proxy” of SOC and salary as common determinants of success, seeing an additional measure or measures as a “welcome” “bonus”. In a few cases, respondents felt that SOC was “outdated” or even “not fit for purpose” and argued that the coding frame (and underlying evidence base) requires refreshing. As an example of this, graduates who are training at degree-level for specific roles (such as Veterinary Nursing in SOC major group six, or a range of entry-level roles in the NGO sector) can hardly be deemed unsuccessful for having achieved their intended employment outcome. Other comments indicated that SOC was often relevant to neither graduates working overseas, nor to graduates building “portfolio careers” in the UK. However, and despite criticisms, SOC clearly remains useful for continuity with previous data and in its own right, and should be retained.

Dissatisfaction with SOC did not translate into explicit approval of particular alternative proposals we had put forward. In some cases these were considered “to be ambiguous or semi-subjective in nature”. Concerns were also expressed about increasing the overall length of the survey. Responses indicated a variety of attitudes supporting or rejecting particular proposed measures, but with no clear overall pattern.

We looked in detail at answers to questions in Section B to deepen our understanding of the comments made in response to questions 12 and 13. Questions 32-45 all cover the various “straw man” proposals identified in the consultation document (see box on “Alternative outcome measures”, above). The majority of respondents answered these questions, so the responses can be seen as representative.

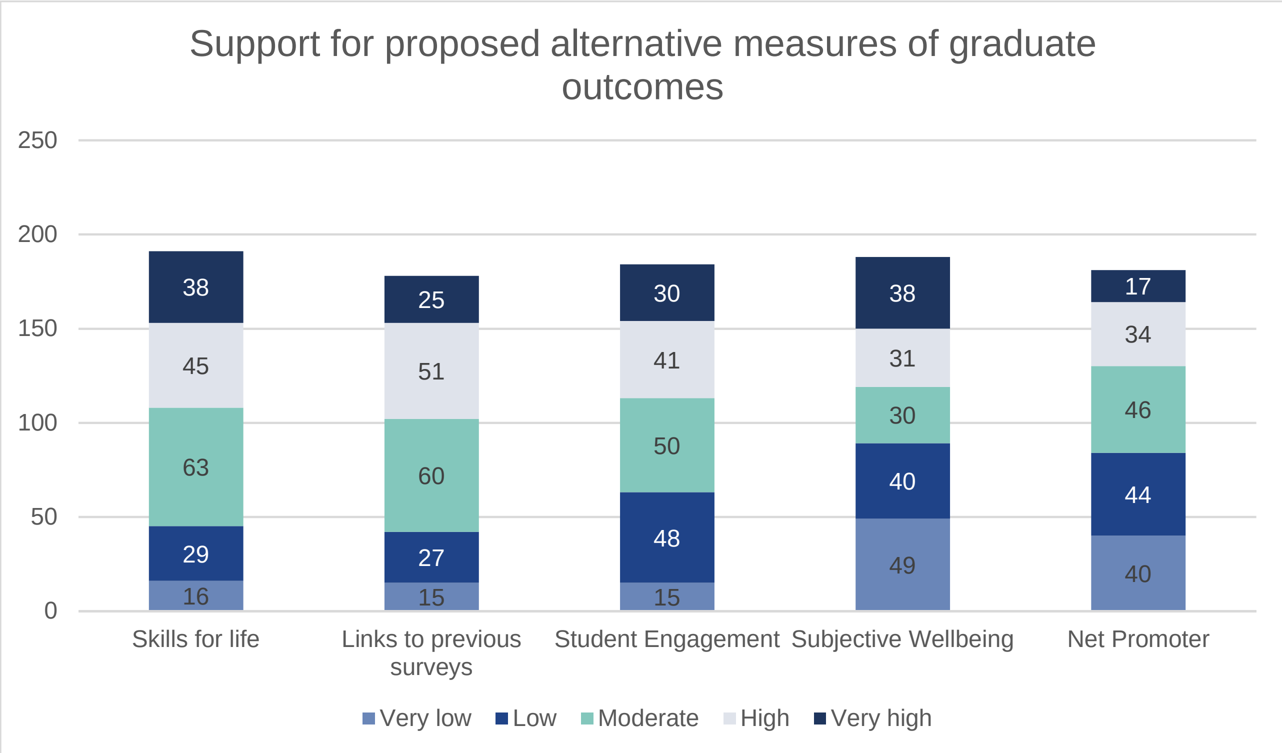

Figure 10 Responses to questions 32, 34, 38, 40 and 42, showing support for the "straw man" proposals in the consultation document.

The highest level of approval was for a skills-based approach, and the lowest was for Net Promoter. The highest level of disapproval was for the Subjective Wellbeing questions, and the lowest level of disapproval was for an approach which links back to previous surveys.

No proposal gained more than 41% overall ”high” or ”very high” approval, nor more than 47% overall “low” or “very low” approval. The modal response was ”moderate” approval.

We cannot draw any strong support for any particular direction for development from the quantitative responses alone, but we can make some observations:

- The high level of engagement with these questions and the spread of responses offers a great deal of useful feedback – given the novelty and similar territory of these proposals, it may be possible to compose a novel measure that commands broad support.
- Preferences are evident. When “moderate” support is taken into account, there is a much clearer preference for a skills-led approach (say) than for subjective wellbeing.
- Free text responses seem to indicate that in particular cases the stated level of approval is predicated on conditions. Once these underlying conditions have been taken into account, the views of respondents (and perhaps the best direction for developing this element of a DLHE replacement) may become clearer.

We also looked at responses to question 45, which asked respondents to: “Please share any suggestions or comments you wish to make about alternative measures of outcomes”. We are currently looking at the responses to the free-text questions accompanying the “straw man” proposals (questions 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41, 44 and 45) in detail, so this section should be understood as a preliminary analysis only.

Feedback around the ***Engagement*** option indicated that respondents thought that this approach does help us understand employment measures better, but that a post-graduation survey was possibly not the optimal place to collect this information, and that other earlier surveys like the National Student Survey (NSS) and UK Engagement Survey (UKES) offered a better mechanism.

Feedback on the ***Net Promoter Score*** indicated that while the measure has some solid support, others saw it as too 'blunt' an instrument or too subjective for this purpose. Some comments indicated that it was important to understand the graduate's reasons for their response, and advocated a free-text follow-up question.

A focus on ***Subjective Wellbeing*** (SWB) was widely recognised as a helpful part of student support, and interventions aimed at promoting it were felt to be valuable to students. However, some significant reservations were expressed about the extent to which measuring SWB was legitimate, noting that:

- There is no usable source showing SWB on entry, so progression could not be demonstrated
- That much of SWB is either beyond the power of an HE provider to influence or the effect of the HE experience is difficult to disaggregate from other factors
- The measure could be considered overly subjective, and
- SWB outcomes are not necessarily targeted by all HE providers.

When considering the use of a ***skills framework*** for judging outcomes, the majority of comments indicated that skills were an important outcome from HE. However, there were some reservations about the comparability of self-reflection by graduates – any framework would need careful design and testing. Other comments centred on the need for a set of questions rather than a single question, and that the results might be particularly useful for understanding the outcomes from non-vocational subjects.

We presented another option of linking explicitly back to other surveys, and taking a lead from some of the measures used in, for example, the NSS. Overall, comments were negative, with a focus on the different purposes that discrete surveys serve, and concern about the burdens and limitations involved in maintaining alignment between different surveys. Some respondents noted that HEFCE's Learning Gain pilots were a helpful development in this space, and that measures from that activity might prove beneficial in time.

In the general comments (question 45) we also learned that there is interest in developing a measure of 'Social Capital gain', as well as in a self-evaluation of progress. Other ideas include a reflection on the extent to which HE has helped or influenced the graduate's journey, career satisfaction, and a focus on employability or skill development. Caution was urged over implementing changes that will increase the length of the survey considerably, and the consequent expense this would entail.

GRADUATE ENTERPRISE

The consultation asked respondents to consider the inclusion of information about graduate enterprise in the replacement to DLHE. This is an area where linked data is unlikely to assist our understanding, as early-stage graduate entrepreneurs may not be represented (or fully represented) in either tax or welfare records, for a variety of legitimate and predictable reasons.

The support for capturing this information in a future survey was high, with 92% of respondents giving between moderate and very high support. The review groups will investigate what level of detail should be collected on graduate enterprise.

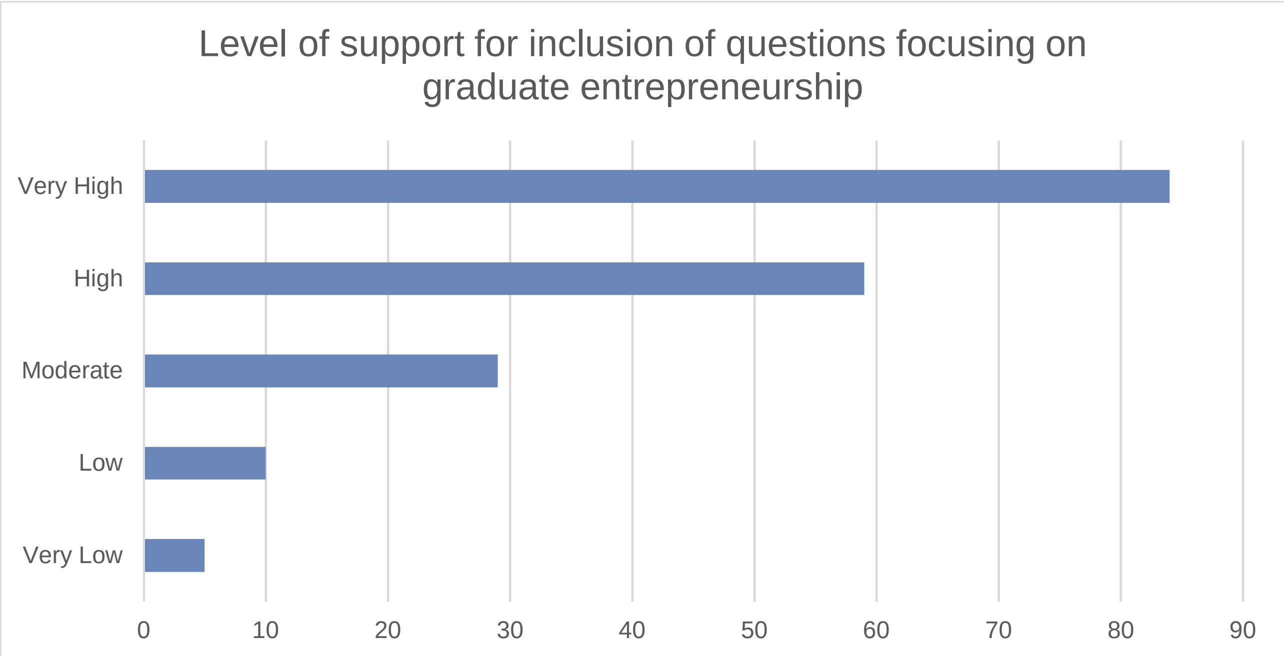

Figure 11 Count of responses to question 46.

Responses received under the further comments section of graduate enterprise mainly stated how beneficial this information would be for understanding start-up or self-employment trends and identified this as an increasingly important destination post-graduation. Respondents highlighted the importance of having clear terminology on graduate enterprise that graduates will recognise.

PLACEMENTS AND OTHER WORK-BASED LEARNING

Some information on placements is captured through the current DLHE survey. However, the consultation asked respondents to consider capturing more detailed information on work-based learning (including placements), to satisfy data users requirements.

The consultation distinguished between work-based learning and work-related learning. Work-based learning was defined as any learning that is part of a course of study and which takes place in an employment context, although feedback was sought on this definition. Question 88 asked respondents to indicate their level of support for capturing more detail on work-based learning.

Responses indicated a high level of support for inclusion of information on work-based learning, with 86% of those who responded showing between moderate and very high support.

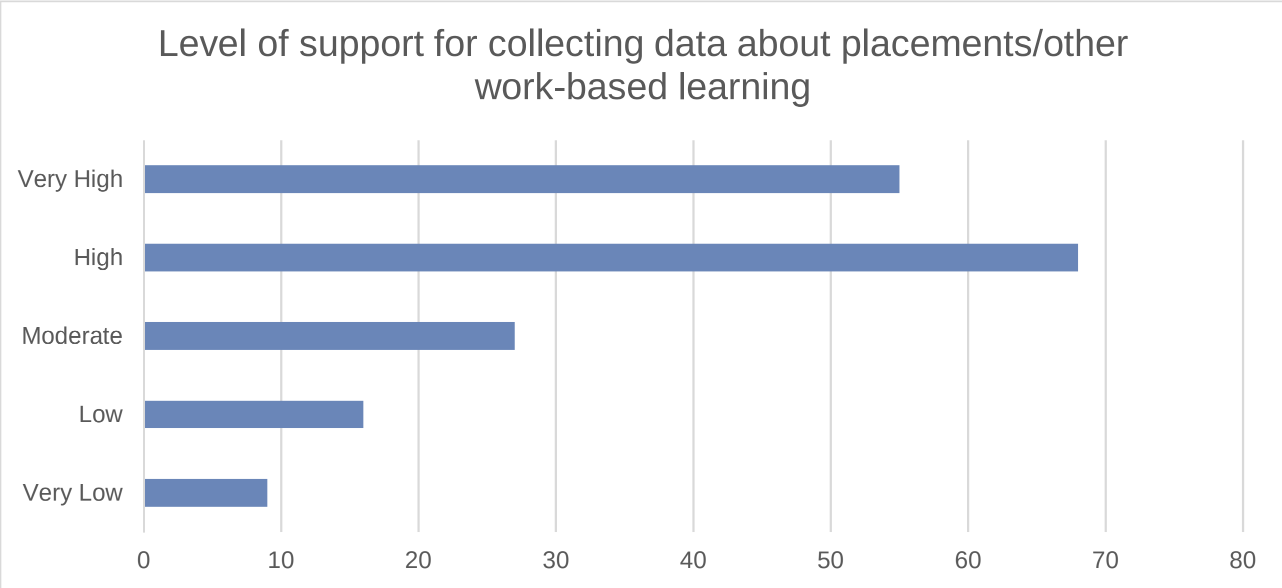

Figure 12 Count of responses to question 88.

Respondents were asked to highlight any areas which should fall under work-based learning and any which should not be included. Respondents wanted the detail of work-based learning activity to be collected, including whether it is paid and employer details. Enterprise and volunteering activities were also identified, as well as mentoring students. Respondents also suggested that non-credit-bearing activity should be excluded from work-based learning.

Work-related learning was defined as a wider range of educational experiences than work-based learning, including guest-industry lectures, work shadowing or employer/industrial visits. The proposal to capture this information also received high levels of support, albeit lower than the proposal on work-based learning. 72% of those who responded gave between moderate and very high levels of support to the inclusion of work-related learning.

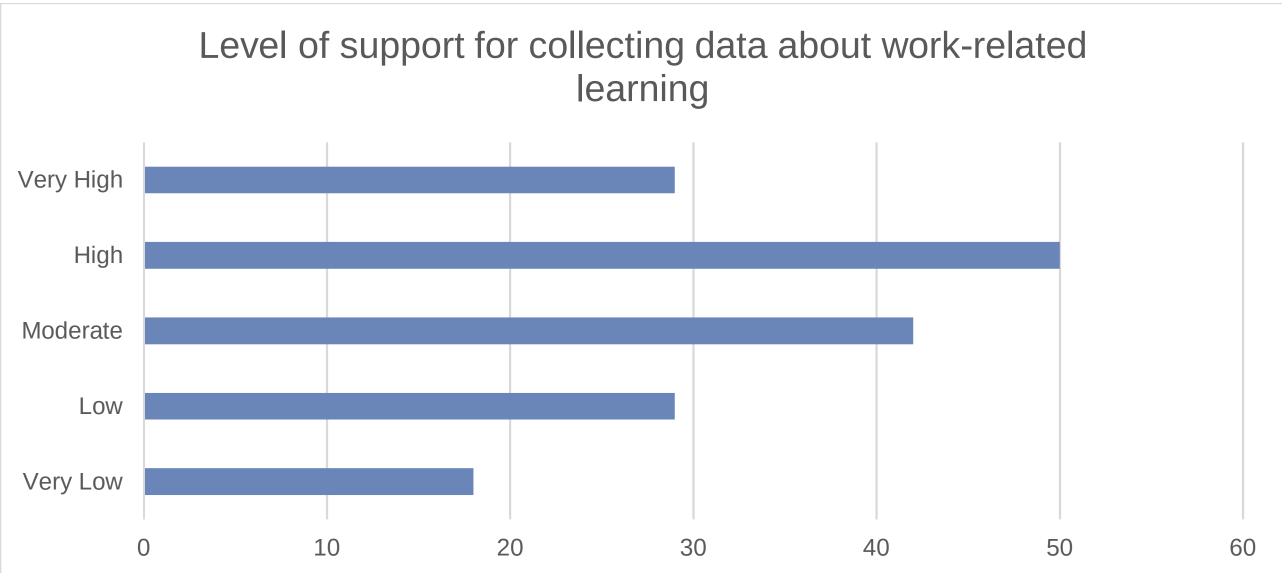

Figure 13 Count of responses to question 92.

As with work-based learning, respondents were asked to consider any areas that should be included (question 94) or excluded (question 95) under work-related learning. These questions received a low level of response, but some themes were still evident. Respondents indicated that work-related learning should include links to learning gain and information on the type of work-related learning that was being captured. Respondents indicated that any information on non-credit-bearing work-related learning should be excluded.

The full detail of responses on placements and work-based learning will be examined by the review groups.

HOW SHOULD DATA COLLECTION RELATE TO POST-GRADUATION PATHWAYS?

The consultation asked respondents to consider the timing at which graduates should be surveyed, and whether a single or multiple survey points are more appropriate.

BACKGROUND

Current national data collection takes place at six months after finishing a course, which captures first destinations for all students (the DLHE survey). A stratified sample of students is then surveyed at 36 months (the Longitudinal DLHE). The current six-month timing of the DLHE survey reflects both the interest in the first destinations of students, and a practical compromise between timescale and the availability of sufficient accurate contact details for graduates.

The initial work of the review has also revealed a strong and growing appetite for longitudinal data, or rich data only available from a longer timescale than six months. Evidence from the current Longitudinal DLHE shows that we can expect to gather a more in-depth set of data on employment and further study destinations if the timescale for the survey were to be changed to a later point following the end of studies. We also asked questions about using various sample survey methods, and whether these were useful, and we were grateful for the many considered responses on this. Alongside the clear preference for a later census survey, we gathered a range of information about other requirements, which were neither universal in scope, nor on the same 12-18 month timeline.

A related question is the level of complete survey responses that will be required for particular end uses. For instance, one HE provider choosing to benchmark employment rates of initial teacher training graduates across the HE sector may be satisfied with extrapolating from responses from 50% of the target population (adjusting for bias), whereas another HE provider that seeks to understand variations in employment outcomes for students on its portfolio of business studies courses, will require responses from perhaps 75% or 80% of the target population for the data to be usable at course-level.

SURVEY TIMING

We asked respondents to consider whether one survey point was still appropriate for the replacement to DLHE. The majority of responses received to question 14 (“Do you think a single survey point can work?”) were in favour of a single survey point. 189 responses were received, of which 122 answered “yes” and 67 answered “no”.

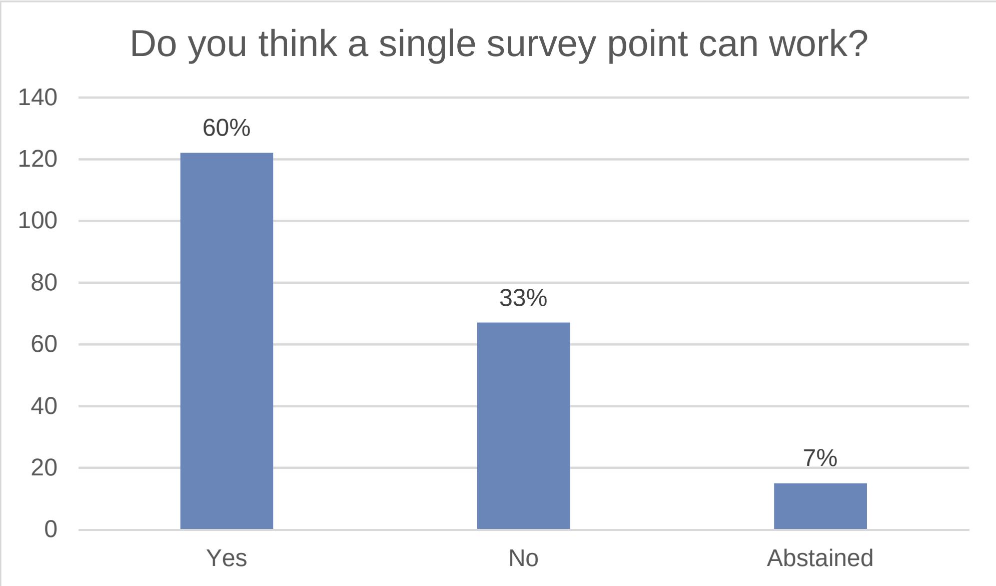

Figure 14 Count of responses to question 14.

Of the HE providers who responded, all but four responded to this question, and the majority were in favour of a single survey point (92 answered "yes" and 35 answered "no"). FE providers, HE sector bodies, and student representative organisations were split fairly evenly in favour and against a single survey point. PSRBs, private individuals and employer groups were generally against a single survey point.

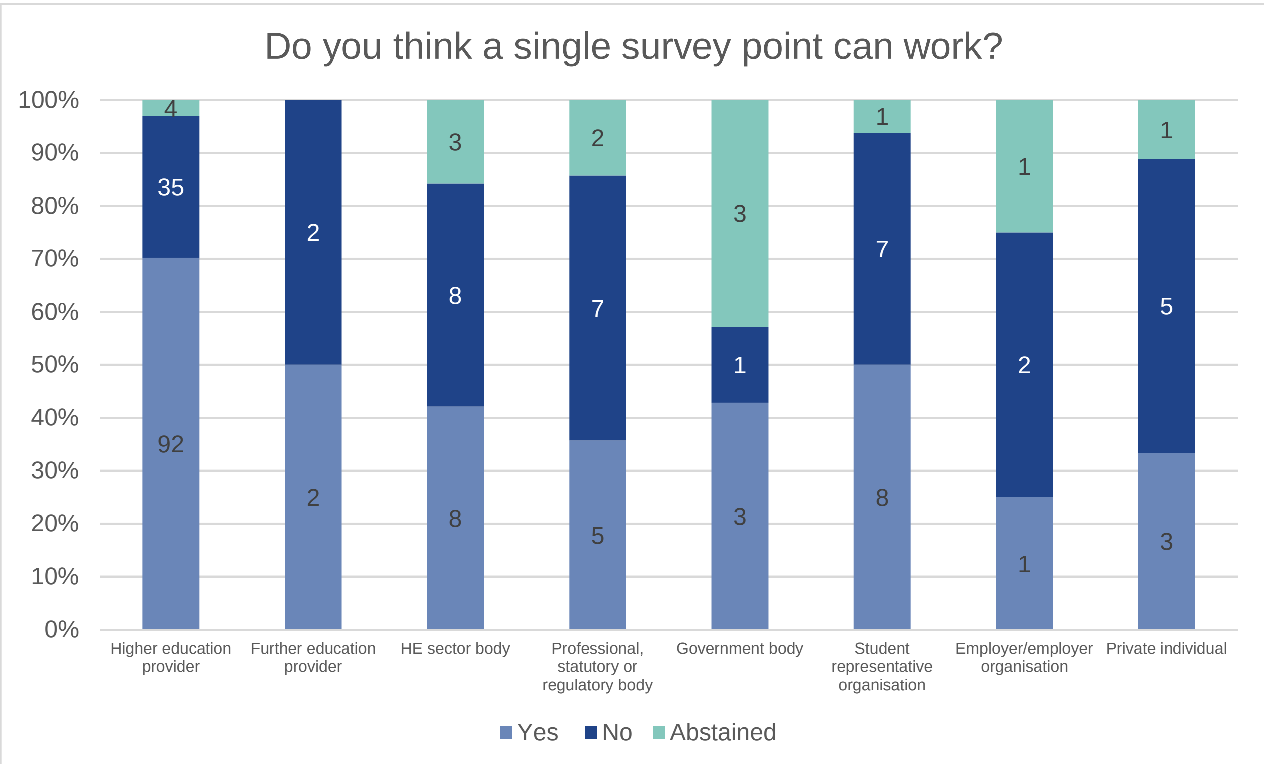

Figure 15 Responses to question fourteen, by response to question two.

We asked respondents to choose from a selection of dates which would be the best timing for a single survey point. The strongest preference was for a 12-month survey point, with 65 responses, followed by 18 months with 45 responses. Respondents also nominated a range of other survey points. While no overall clear preference emerges, there is a clear majority in favour of a longer gap following leaving HE than the current six-month period, with 12 and 18 months the overall favourites.

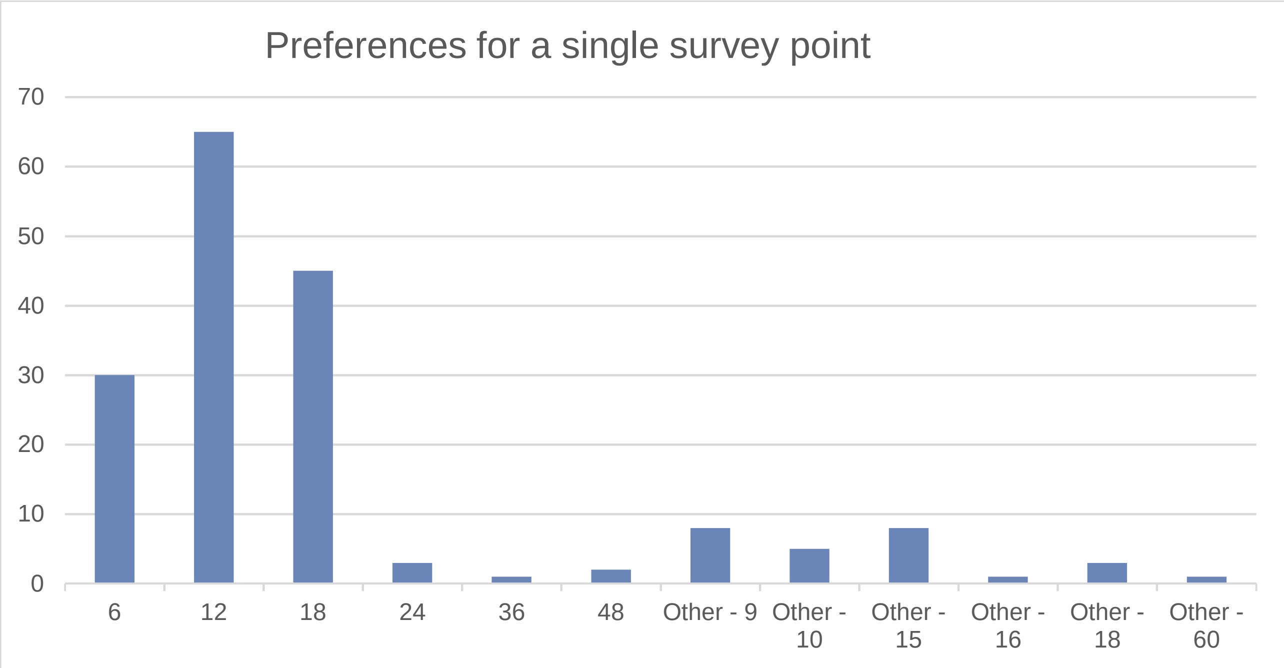

Figure 16 Count of responses to question 15.

Responses were more mixed for those who chose multiple survey points, with 6 months, 12 months, and 36 months being the most popular timings.

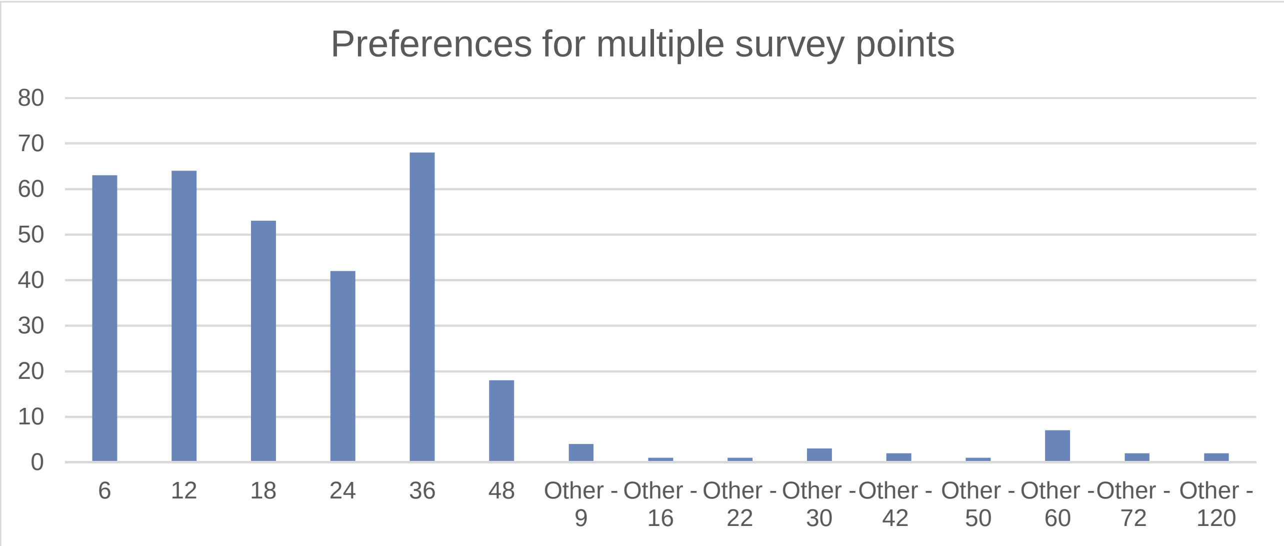

Figure 17 Count of responses to question 16.

While the majority of respondents are in favour of a single survey point, the free-text answers did not provide many reasons for choosing a single survey point. However, respondents did express concerns about multiple survey points, particularly that graduates may become oversurveyed, causing survey fatigue and drop-outs. Concerns were raised that if multiple surveys were used, there was potential to survey graduates more than once in short succession if they had gone on to further study.

However, respondents in favour of multiple survey points noted a number of benefits, including that careers develop at different paces in different sectors, and multiple survey points could allow tracking different cohorts at different times. Another benefit is it would allow for tracking career trajectories over time and better capture portfolio careers. Similarly, one HE provider expressed the benefit of having evidence of how quickly students of different subjects move into long term careers.

Respondents also expressed some practical benefits of using multiple survey points. One of these was that it would allow for graduate contact details to be updated, potentially leading to higher response rates over time. Respondents also highlighted that multiple surveys may help cope with smaller sample sizes.

Respondents set out their arguments for the different timings as summarised below:

- For those whose preference was maintaining **six-month** survey timing, the majority of respondents focused on the response rates that can be achieved at this stage, and that these are unlikely to be maintained at a later period. The majority of respondents also highlighted that the six-month timing allows prospective students or final year students access to recent information about graduate employment. Some HE providers emphasised that outcomes at six months are more likely to be related to a graduate's university experience than subsequent life experience. Other arguments posed were that it allows for understanding of how quickly graduates get into graduate level jobs or further study, and that this timing avoids confusion if graduates have gone onto further study.
- Reasons posed by those who would prefer a survey around **nine to ten months** post-graduation, were that it maintains the relationship between graduates and their HE provider, and that it allows for rapid evaluation of outcomes.
- The clear theme of those whose preference was a **12 months** survey timing was the balance that this offers between maintaining high response rates and allowing graduates time to settle into a career path. Many respondents stated that they believed graduates would be in more settled employment than at six months. One practical concern with twelve months was that this would mean the survey would fall in the summer period, which may add difficulties to data collection.
- Respondents who would prefer a survey at around **18 months** post-graduation believe this would allow graduates to enter more genuine career destinations, rather than short-term employment. Similarly, it was expressed that this would allow graduates more time to enter the labour market.
- At **24 months**, the main benefit stated was the richer data possible at this stage. It was also highlighted that this timeframe would allow for more information about start-ups, which may not be captured at an earlier stage.

- Benefits of a survey at **36 months** were focused on the time this would allow graduates to establish their career paths and that it would demonstrate a wider employment picture than an earlier survey date.
- One of the key arguments for moving to a **48 months** survey timing was that this allows for graduates to evaluate the impact of higher education dispassionately, which they may not be so able to do at an earlier stage.

PRESENTATION AND FINANCING

One of the review's motivations is to improve the value for money of data collection. Respondents were asked to consider the related issue of centralisation of the survey process.

BACKGROUND

One method for increasing efficiency of the DLHE would be to benefit from the economies of scale available through centralising the survey. Centralisation also increases the consistency of the data, by ensuring an identical set of quality assurance processes are applied during initial gathering of the data, as well as during the national collection. All users and suppliers of data benefit from improvements to the assurance processes. The review is also considering whether a change to the presentation of the survey from a distributed method to a centralised method (either through a national contract, or an agency) would serve to increase trust in and reliance on destinations and outcomes data.

Data derived from DLHE is now used in a range of public information products, including league tables and Unistats. We therefore wish to investigate perceptions of the objectivity of the data, in order to ensure continued trust in its reliability. We intend to ensure that the methodology applied to any future data collection remains appropriately aligned with the intended uses of the data, in line with the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Given the requirement for data to stand alongside HMRC/DWP data, we believe National Statistics designation is required, to ensure the data is appropriately "kitemarked".

Arguments in favour of retaining a distributed approach include the alignment of graduate support activities with data collection; the longstanding interest that HE providers have had in gathering this data; and the flexibility to apply the methodology in ways suitable for the profile and expectations of the survey population.

Arguments in favour of a centralised approach include an improved consistency in application of the methodology for data collection and post-collection coding of data;[1] the potential for reduced

[1] AUTOMATED SOC CODING
We asked respondents to consider any drawbacks which may be associated with centralising and/or automating SOC coding, and the weighting they should be given. Respondents who were in favour of overall centralisation expressed that there should be some form of human interaction with an automated SOC system, to check the quality of the data and that those doing this checking should be trained in the graduate labour market in order to pick up nuances. They also suggested that a wider spread of fields, such as salary and nature of employer, should be used to assign SOC codes. Some concerns were expressed that quality may drop as, in the existing CASCOT system, the first choice of SOC code is often inaccurate. One respondent suggested issues with automation were overcome by prompting graduates for more information during the survey completion. Respondents generally agreed that automating would enable consistency.

costs through efficiencies and national procurement; enhanced independence of the data gathering process; enhanced perceptions of the integrity of the data; reduced costs of audit; reduced operational burdens; and decoupling data collection from graduate support processes.

It is also possible that a centralised approach to SOC coding (see footnote 1) could be adopted, while retaining a distributed approach to surveying.

CENTRALISATION

We wanted to find out the proportion of respondents who were already outsourcing their DLHE collection.

In question 18 we asked if HE providers currently outsource the DLHE data collection process? Of the 145 non-blank responses we received to this question, a little under a quarter currently outsource, with 95 responding “no” and 32 responding “yes”. Similarly only a small number (5) used to outsource but have returned to in-house collection.

Respondents who were against overall centralisation expressed more concern about the data quality of automated SOC coding.

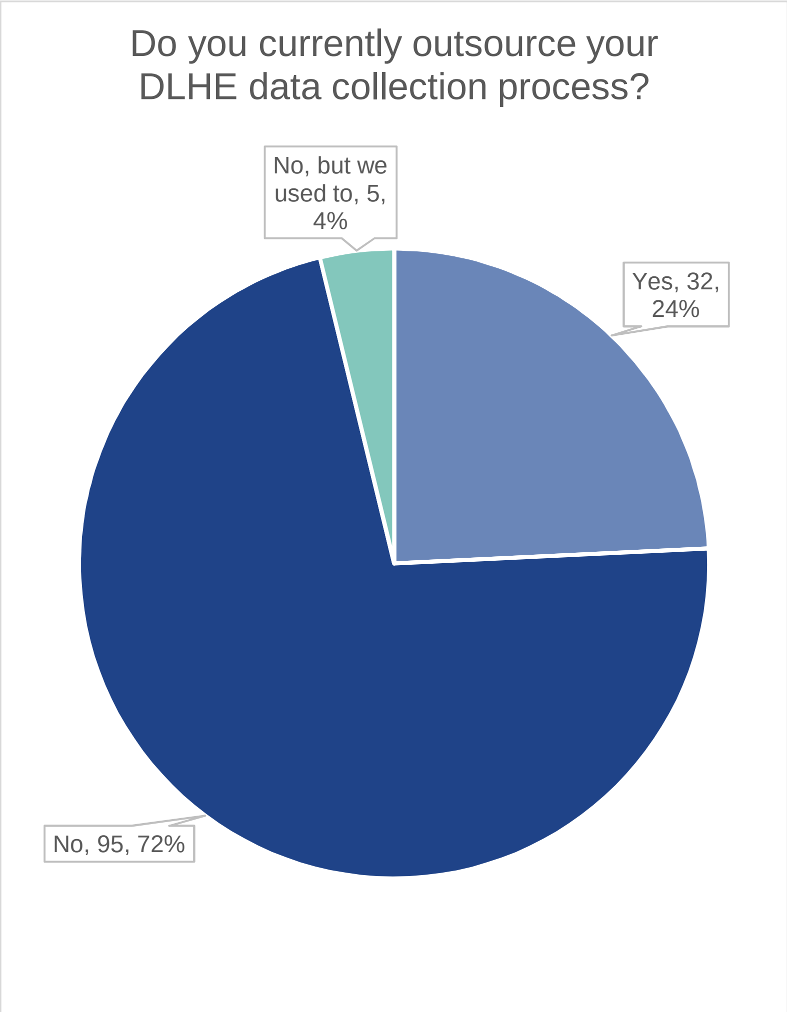

Figure 18 Responses categorised according to answers to question 18.

We also sought respondents' feedback on whether a central survey could provide more robust results. Although there was a slight majority in favour of centralisation overall, respondents were clearly divided, with 88 responding "yes", 81 responding "no", and 35 abstaining.

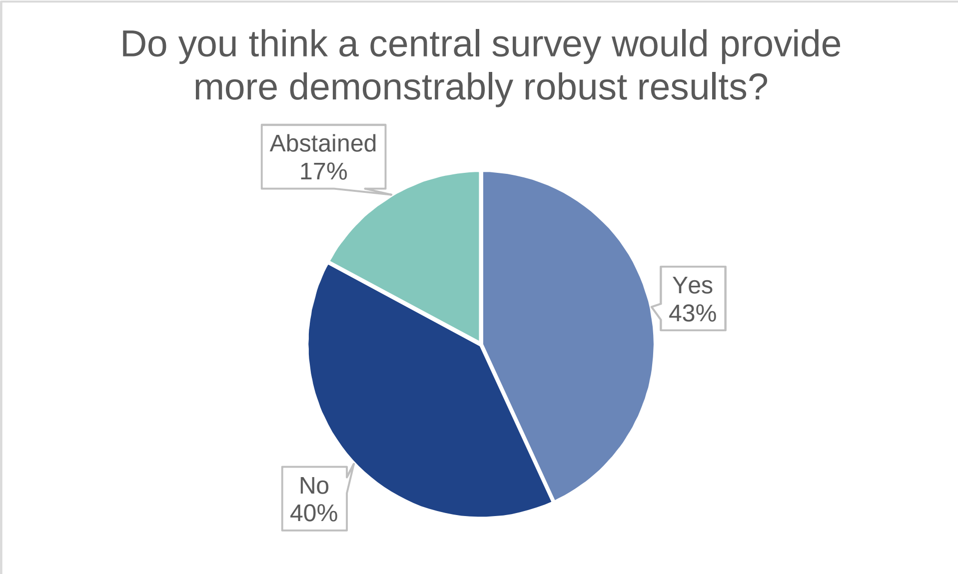

Figure 19 Responses categorised according to answers to question 19.

We broke down the responses by the type of organisation responding, to better understand the distinctions between responses. In general, HE providers were moderately more likely to be against centralisation with 72 against and 55 in favour. HE sector bodies, PSRBs and government bodies were most likely to abstain, however those who did respond were in favour of centralisation. FE colleges, student representatives, employer bodies and private individuals were more likely to be in favour of centralisation.

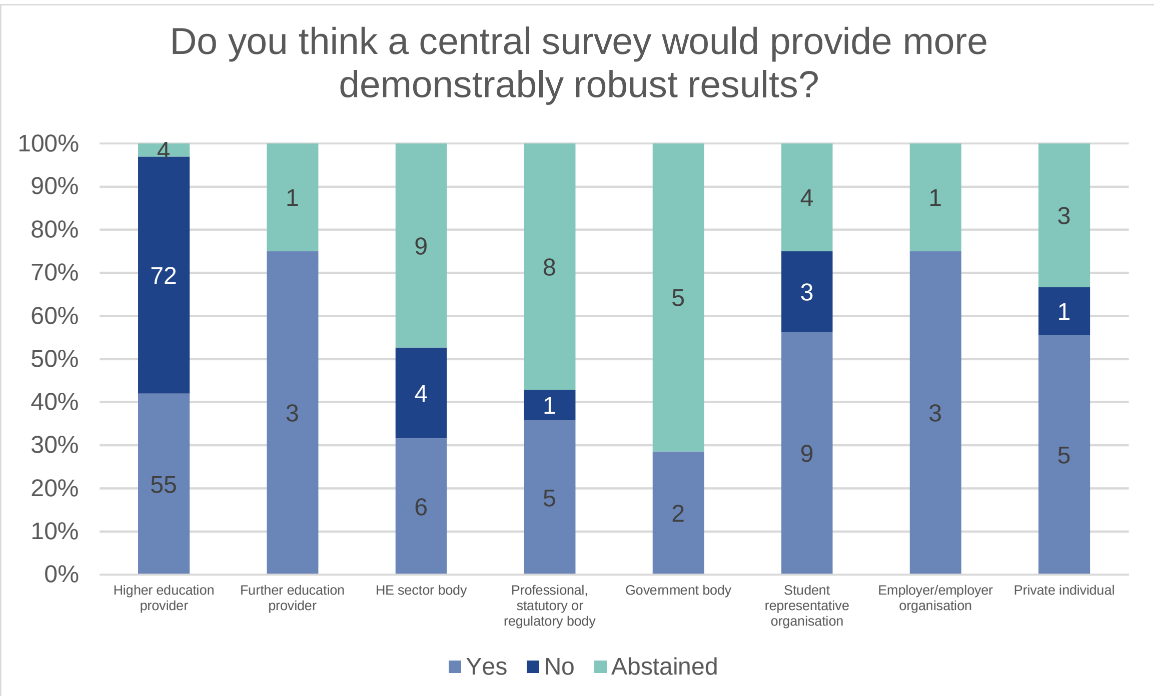

Figure 20 Responses to question 19, by responses to question six.

We asked respondents to express any concerns they would have about a central survey; these were focused in the following areas:

- Response rates may drop – this was the primary concern raised
- Centralisation might favour certain types of providers
- Graduates may not trust a third-party data collector with sensitive personal data
- Providers currently use the DLHE collection period to pass on additional information to their graduates, e.g. careers or alumni contact. This is unlikely to be possible through a centralised survey and might lead to them having to recontact graduates.
- The access that HE providers currently have to the data being lost
- Information about the graduate which is gained from others across the HE provider, such as academics/tutors, will be lost
- A third party will not have the expert knowledge of the providers
- The potential cost implications of centralisation (raised by HE providers)
- Data quality may be impacted by a third party supplier collection
- A third party system would need to be operated under a single provider for consistency.

The review groups will be investigating if there are methods to address these concerns. Other respondents also highlighted benefits of centralisation, including improved consistency across the sector and avoiding factors capable of introducing bias in the data collection.

It is clear from these results that no solution will wholly satisfy all respondents. We will be considering a suitable response to this part of the consultation, and intend to produce a design that offers the best balance of outcomes for the HE sector, and takes in to account the many viewpoints expressed.

EFFICIENCY AND VALUE FOR MONEY

One of the key aims of the destinations and outcomes review is improving efficiency in the data collection. In order to contextualise the answers provided elsewhere in the consultation, respondents were asked to consider the balance that should be struck between reducing costs and securing increased value from a survey. The majority of responses fell on the side of maximising value over minimising costs, although these were balanced around seven or eight on the scale.

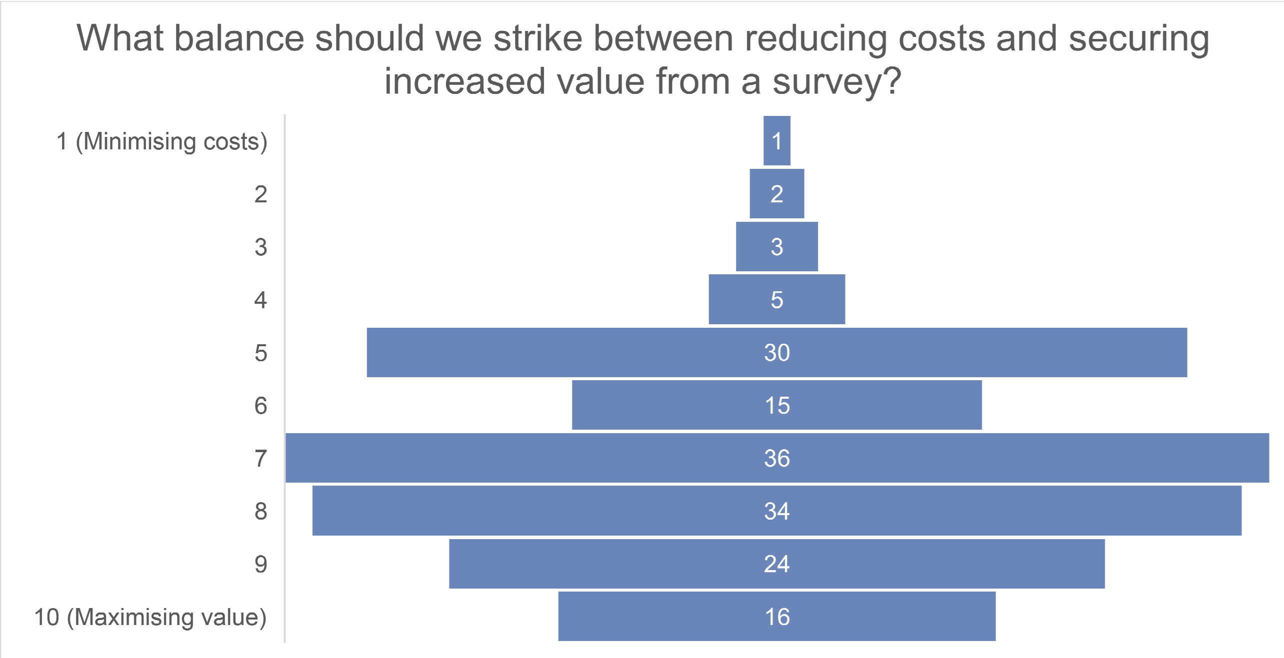

Figure 21 Count of responses to question 106.

The responses to this question will be used by the review groups in creating the replacement model.

COSTS OF THE CURRENT DLHE SURVEY

The overall national cost of running the DLHE survey in 2013/14 was in excess of £5.5 million. We asked HE providers to cost their DLHE activity, and 114 kindly did so (this sample is about three quarters of the total constituency). We extrapolated from the costings in the sample to the whole of the HESA constituency who submitted DLHE data to HESA for 2013/14. We did this by multiplying the number of actual survey responses achieved by the HE providers for which we did not have costings, by the mean cost of achieving a response in the sample (£11.28). This national figure *excludes* data for the following:

- Alternative Providers that have subscribed to HESA more recently than 2013/14
- Higher education that takes place in further education organisations
- Central costs incurred by HESA (other than fixed database costs) and other organisations.

Today's total national figure will be somewhat higher as a result – likely in excess of £8m.

We also wanted to understand the cost of acquisition for an individual response. We took the costings provided to us in question 108, adjusted the figure for any fixed database charges we were aware of, and divided this amount by the number of actual responses achieved. In this way, we obtained a range of figures for the cost of acquisition for an individual response from a graduate, which ranged from £2.40 per head to £80.65.

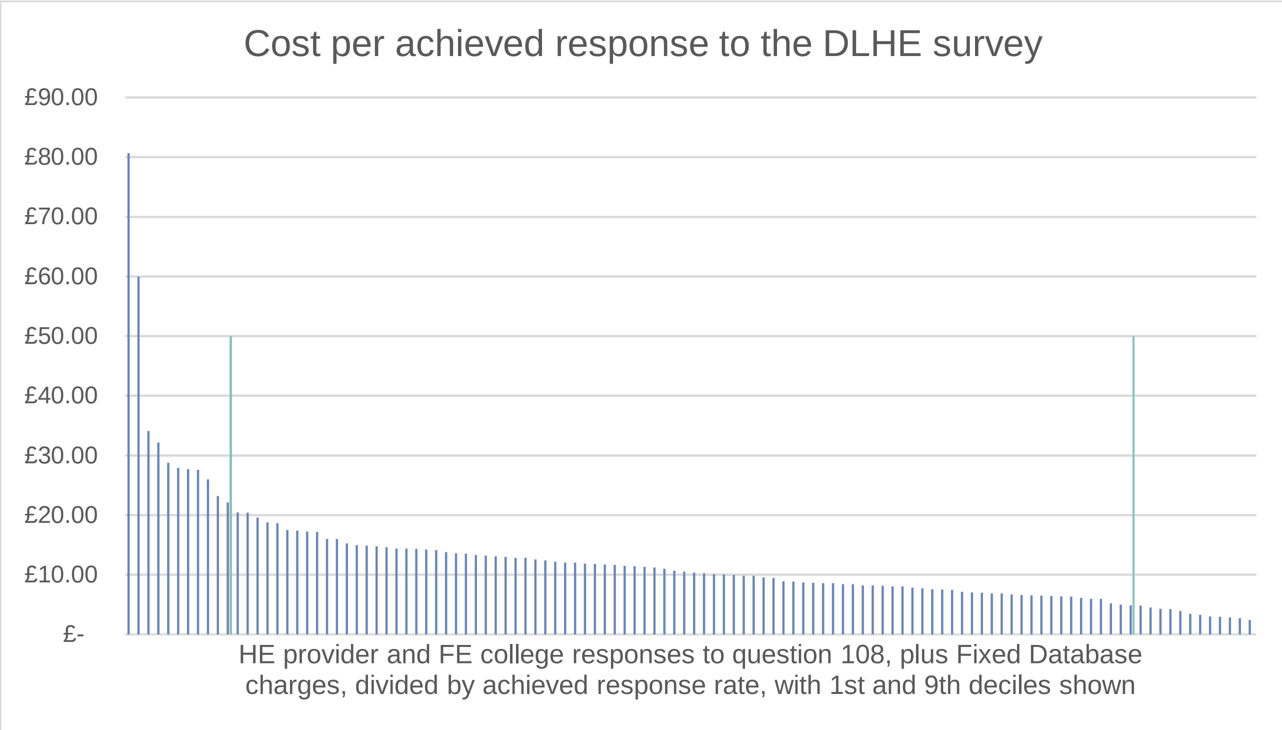

Figure 22 Analysis based on question 108 showing the unit cost of acquiring a response, by HE provider.

The median cost per response was £10.44, and one standard deviation based on the sample available to us is £10.13.

We were interested to find out whether and to what extent the method of acquiring a response influences the unit cost of acquisition. To do this we placed each HE provider in a decile based on the unit cost of acquiring a response to the DLHE, with the 1st decile being the lowest cost and the 10th decile being the highest cost. We found that as the unit cost of acquisition rises, the likelihood of a response being acquired by telephone rises, while the likelihood of the response being acquired through an online method declines slightly. We have placed trendlines on Figure 25 to indicate the relationship between method and cost.

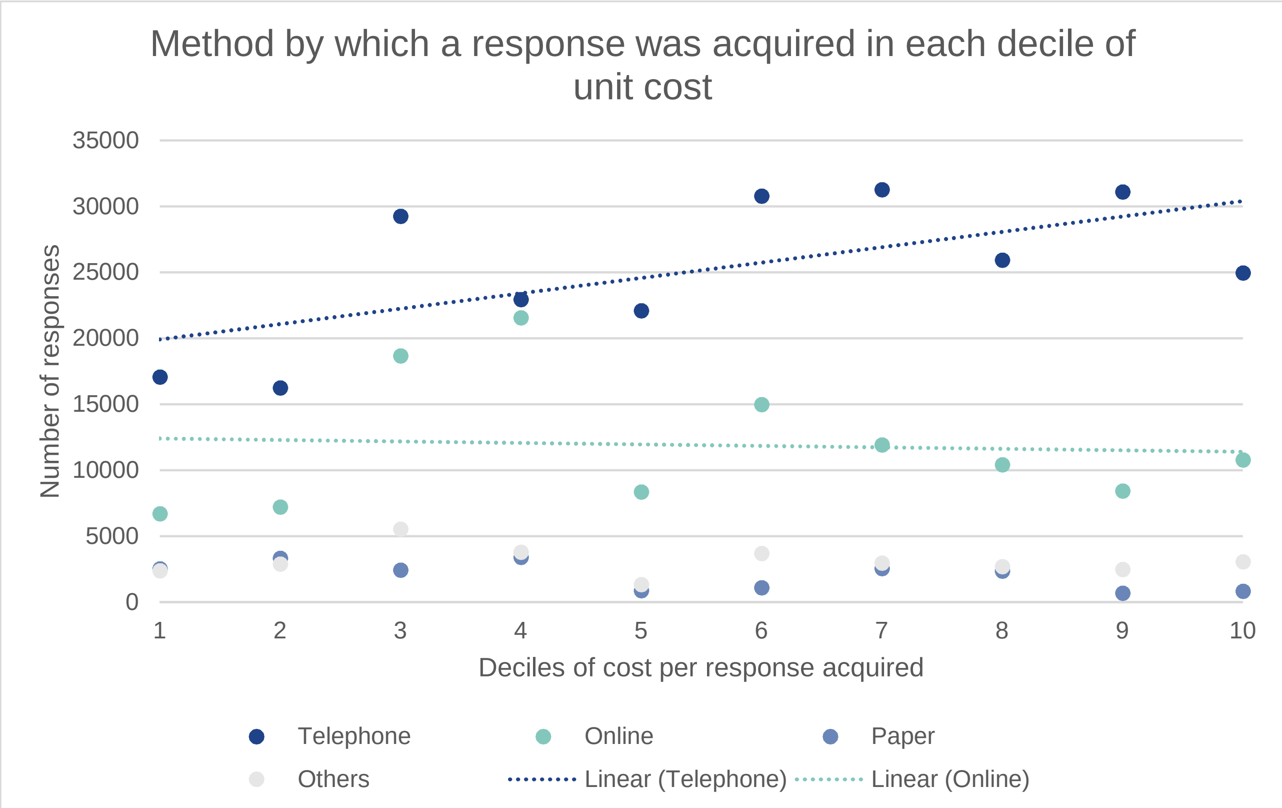

Figure 23 Analysis showing how usage of different methods for acquiring responses to the DLHE varies with the cost per unit.

Although the correlation is not strong (there are other factors at play) there appears to be a financial benefit to increasing the take-up of online surveying for DLHE, as a replacement for telephone surveying.

In addition, we looked at the relationship between response rates and unit costs of data acquisition, to see if response rates were damaged by very low unit costs. We found no statistical correlation between these factors, although there is a possible effect at the extremes, as the values for the 1st and 10th deciles show (see Figure 24).

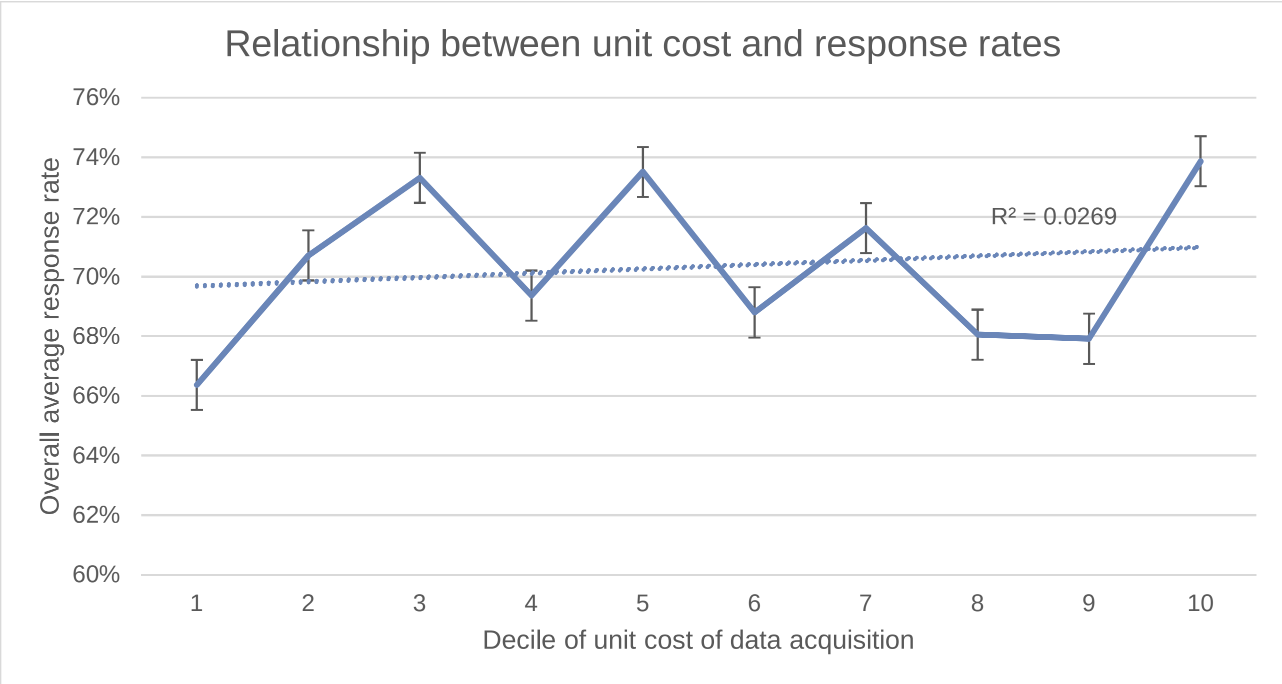

Figure 24 Examination showing there is no relationship between response rates and unit costs.

We also looked at outsourcing behaviour as a potential driver for suppressing or increasing unit costs. We found no relationship, as Figure 25 shows.

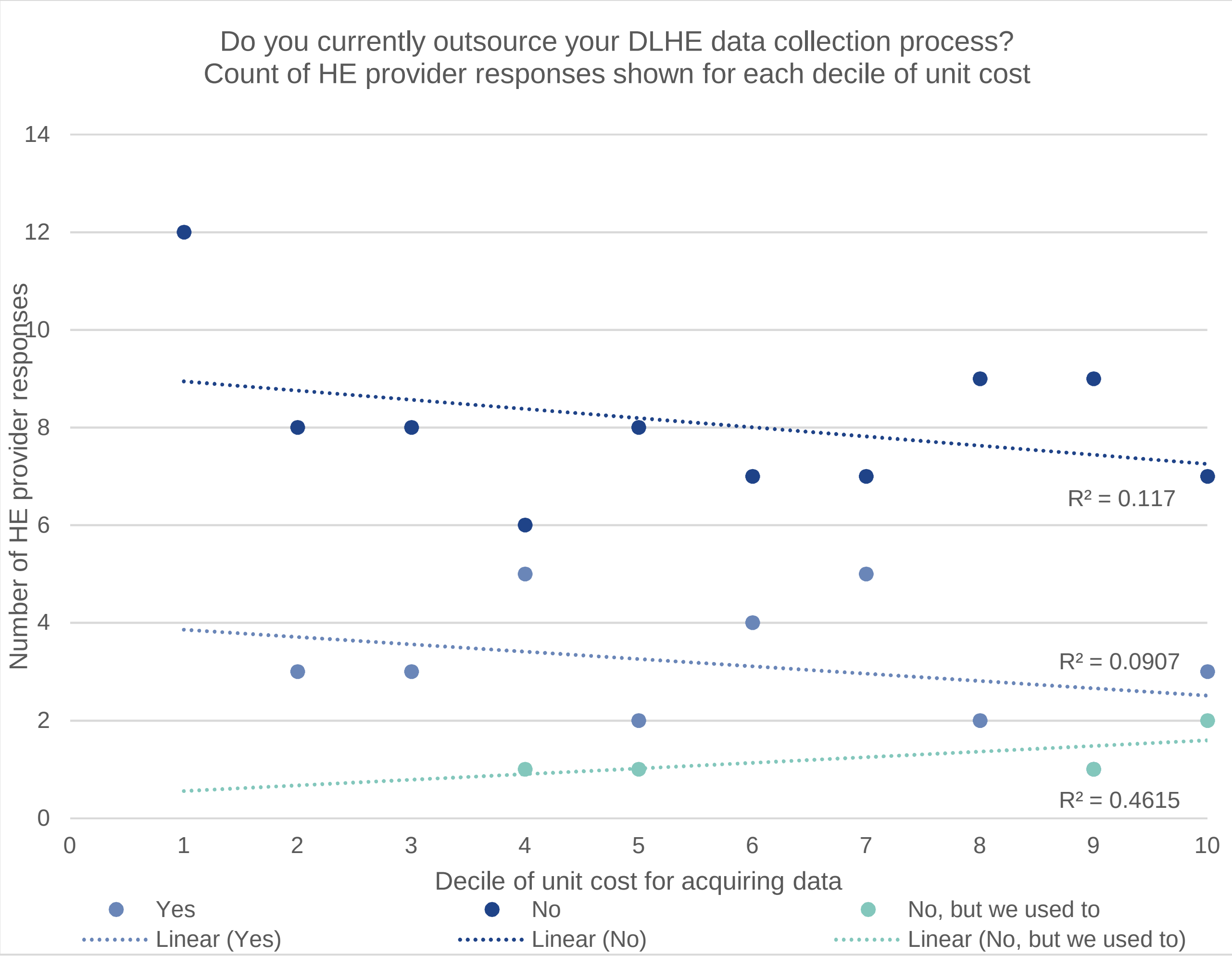

Figure 25 There is no relationship between outsourcing and cost of acquisition.

Further analysis could be done to improve our understanding of the relationship between method and cost, including looking at the extent to which data is fully or only partially present, and giving a precise figure for the difference in cost of acquisition between online and telephone methods.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The consultation has provided a rich source of information for the review to consider. Further analysis is being conducted on the detailed responses to questions in Section B of the original survey, and these will be utilised and followed-up in the next phase of work. There is too much detail to include here.

The consultation analysis will be utilised alongside other sources of information to inform the next phase of work. This will involve the development of a proposed model or models for a replacement for DLHE, and an outline implementation plan and schedule. We aim to complete this work later this year, and there will be further dialogue and consultation as we progress this work.

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