

HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT OUTCOMES AND DESTINATIONS: A REMIT FOR A FUNDAMENTAL REVIEW OF INFORMATION NEEDS

What information will we need to gather about post-study outcomes for those leaving higher education in future? How can we pursue new and more efficient ways of delivering better quality data for students and all those who support their studies? The graduate jobs market has changed substantially in the last 15 years: further change is inevitable, and its pace will be rapid. Universities have adapted to support students in meeting the challenges they face, with differentiated and increasingly sophisticated approaches. However, data collection on employment and other life outcomes following higher education has not changed substantially since 2002. All stakeholders will benefit from developing a plan to collect better data at lower cost.

Data on student and graduate employability and destinations of leavers from HE are now being scrutinised more closely by a wider range of users than in the past. Course-level information on graduate employment is now made available to applicants and their advisers, through Unistats. Many Higher Education providers use destinations measures as key performance indicators. Policymakers and sector bodies use destinations data as evidence to support policy on higher education, regional development and support for businesses¹. Recent government announcements clarify ambitions 'for more data to be made available'² to support student choice, curriculum design and quality assessment. Consideration of the data needed to support these aims, is therefore timely.

The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment (SBEE) Act permits the linking of HE student data to national tax and welfare records, for the purpose of educational evaluation. The data will enable 'a much richer ... understanding of social mobility', '[b]roaden the range of information available to parents and students' and enable government to 'distinguish universities that are delivering durable labour market outcomes and a strong enterprise ethos for their students.'³ The Act also aims to 'secure a comprehensive accountability system and better informed interventions and policies.' The implications of the Act must be understood and taken into account, alongside initiatives dependent upon it, such as the Future Earnings and Employment Record⁴ and the E-star award.⁵

Higher education providers currently obtain data on the destinations of all graduates six months after they leave university, through the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, the results of which are collected and published by HESA. Data has also been collected biennially on a sample of DLHE respondents, a further three years later, through HESA's centrally-co-ordinated Longitudinal DLHE survey. In addition, there are parallel surveys of new entrants to the teaching and medical professions, conducted by other national-level bodies.

HESA also collects data on graduate start-ups and collaboration between universities and businesses in the HE Business and Community Interaction survey. This data is supplemented by research projects undertaken by a range of government, higher education and other bodies with a public purpose.

¹ (Universities UK, 2010; HEFCE, 2011)

² (Johnson, 2015)

³ (BIS, 2014)

⁴ (Young, 2014. pp.8-9)

⁵ (*Ibid.* p.35)

Survey and data-gathering technology and capabilities have improved, and offer the prospect of making methodological improvements that will improve data quality, while reducing the substantial costs of data collection. We should also take this opportunity to tackle duplication (in particular workforce areas) which is costly and does not serve the interests of respondents.

Changing graduate employment prospects are an important aspect of 'significant changes to the shape and composition of the economy and labour market over the past quarter of a century'.⁶ Research indicates the development of an 'hourglass-shape' labour market⁷ where there is growth in high-skill and low-skill roles, while middle-level roles decline. While there is evidence of a growing disparity between the earnings of graduates in graduate and non-graduate jobs, the overall proportion of jobs requiring graduate skills has increased, as has the proportion of graduates in the labour market.⁸ Despite the decline in the relative wage advantage of graduates, 'a degree continues to confer a significant earnings advantage'.⁹ Studies show that graduates boost economic productivity to the extent that businesses will increase their demand for graduate skills, with two million more jobs requiring higher-level skills by 2022.¹⁰

The labour market is predicted to change further and faster. A recent government report identifies four potential future scenarios, each of which predicts increased labour market volatility.¹¹ The NUS also sees the present and future as characterised by anxiety around 'wider labour market challenges, education reform, the employability of young people, guidance and choices for education and careers'.¹² The Higher Education sector continues to adapt to the changing expectations and needs of students and society, for example by 'embedding enterprise into courses'¹³, partnering with business¹⁴ and creating innovative schemes aimed at boosting employability.¹⁵

At a time of change in employment patterns, we have an opportunity to improve efficiency and quality in the sourcing of information about destinations and outcomes from higher education, and an obligation to reflect on future needs for data. This review led by HESA will enable the collective approach necessary to identify and secure the widest range of benefits for data users.

QUESTIONS THIS REVIEW IS INTENDED TO ANSWER

HESA has identified a range of initial questions that should be answered by this review. Through debate and consultation, the review will construct a compelling business case for change.

- What data will be made accessible by the SBEE Act, and in what ways can they be used?
- Given the availability of SBEE Act data, what other requirements do we have for information about what happens to leavers from higher education?
- What student data might be required to contextualise destinations data? For instance, better data on placements or study patterns.

⁶ (Skills Commission, 2014)

⁷ (Hackett *et al.*, 2012)

⁸ (Green & Henseke, 2014. pp. 2, 31-32)

⁹ (Purcell, K., Elias, P., *et al.*, 2013. p.61)

¹⁰ (Universities UK, 2015. pp.5-6; Universities UK, 2014a. pp. 27-28)

¹¹ (UKCES, 2014)

¹² (NUS, 2015)

¹³ (Riordan, 2013)

¹⁴ (Lincoln, 2011; Universities UK, 2014b)

¹⁵ (Huddersfield, 2014; Maguire, 2014)

- What are our remaining needs for post-study survey information, if any?
- What methodological improvements can we make to reduce costs, and to improve consistency? Consideration should be given to the benefits of centralisation.
- How complete a picture should the data provide?
- When would data be most timely?
- How should data collection activities relate to HE providers' careers support for graduates?
- What specific measures do we wish to obtain from these data?
- What level of detail is required in order to make the data useful for analysis?

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