# review of graduate destinations and outcomes data – working group 4

## 24October 2016 11:00 – 25 october 2016 14:30

## HESA OFFICES, 95 the promenade, cheltenham, gl50 1hz

**Present:**

Charlie Ball Prospects

Matthew Bollington Department for Education

Heather Burton Queens University Belfast

Terry Dray Liverpool John Moores University/AGCAS

Rosa Fernandez National Centre for University and Business

Anita Jackson University of Kent/HESPA

Nicola Kivlichan Edinburgh Napier University

Adam Leach National Centre for Teaching and Learning

Michael MacNeill Department for Education (Northern Ireland)

Richard Puttock Higher Education Funding Council for England

Thomas Speller Health Education England

Kate Watson Department for Education

Andrew Whitmore University of Manchester/AGCAS

Chris Williams Welsh Government

Mike Wilson Bangor University

**In Attendance:**

Gaby Atfield Warwick Institute for Employment Research

Rachel Moreton CFE Research

**Apologies:**

Hannah Falvey Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

David Hutton BIMM

Kenny Wilson Scottish Government

Paul Youngson University of Huddersfield

1. **Welcome and introductions**

PC welcomed members of the working group to the meeting for the destinations and outcomes review.

DC introduced the purpose of the day (on both days) to update the group on activity so far, what had been discussed with the strategic group, and to gain their advice and response to areas of the consultation when outcomes were unclear, inconsistent, and complex. Expanding on the strategic group meeting, key areas covered consisted of centralisation, survey timescales, skills, entrepreneurship, placements, work-based learning & work-related learning, and alternative measures.

1. **Updates from research projects**

DC 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.

a) Richer information on student views (Paper 1)

GA 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.

b) 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. **Update from HESA on consultation outcomes, and advice received from the Strategic Group**

In line with the strategic group meeting, DC presented a brief overview of the main findings from the consultation responses and outcomes. A copy of the draft synthesis of consultation responses had been circulated to the group previously.

Advice from the strategic group meeting was relayed back to the working group regarding the areas covered that day regarding centralisation and survey timescales.

Centralisation:  
Summarizing the wide-ranging discussions regarding centralisation, DC outlined 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 both the review groups.

Timescales:  
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. **Update on work undertaken since Strategic Group**

Since the strategic group meeting, work was undertaken to create a draft survey (using BOS system) for members of the working group to interact with, test its robustness and provide feedback to gain insight on areas that were successful and areas that needed improvement.

1. **Draft Survey Design**

A laptop was provided on each table for the groups to trial the survey using the BOS system to gain feedback on the structure, feel and context of the survey from a user’s point of view.

Feedback from the group was mainly positive and key points were pointed out for inclusion or that needed to be improved or revised for it to work in the survey:

* On-track question works for lots of circumstances
* Need consistent ways of distinguishing between employment categories
* Better question wording required for those who were freelance/self-employed (What does company do? Not easy for freelancers)
* Should the entrepreneur section be asked of freelancers?
* What has happened during period since graduation?
* 2nd Qualification, further study, timescales – how to avoid confusion
* Intensity = how many jobs? What do you spend most time doing?
* Salary data (optional bank?)
* Structure = Is the activity question too big? Could a longer tree be produced but not lose up-front value of core questions?

Outcome of discussion:

DC took feedback on board and noted that points raised will be worked upon and used when improving the design of survey questions and routing when it comes to finalising the design.

1. **Skills**

DC raised the issue around support for the development of a measure of attribute or skills usage outside of a direct employment context and how outcomes from the consultation showed that the sector favoured the implementation of this question set.

Overall feedback from the group highlighted that although it would be beneficial for it to be included in the survey, there are issues around how it would be used and implemented. Issues that arose were that a set of skills/attributes questions may provide HEP’s to use this as a tool to “sell” HE to prospective students, and that employers views needed but may not necessarily be well-sighted.

It was also pointed out about how this would be short on practicalities and that skills aren’t necessarily attained at university (could be either before or after university) as well as the fact that an individual might not actually possess a certain skill but must use it to access a certain job/field.

Outcome of discussion:

DC suggested that although this was a positive set of questions that would improve the survey, it would however require further thinking in regards to its implementation in regards to the issues raised above as it would be unwise to include it in the survey when the practicalities haven’t been ironed out.

1. **Entrepreneurship**

DC discussed the overwhelming support (in the consultation) for the inclusion of questions focusing on graduate entrepreneurship and how collecting this information would prove beneficial to data collection of graduates who go into self-employment/starting-up own business.

When relayed back to the group for discussion, it was agreed that although it is a small total of individuals (16,027 answered self-employed, 4.3% of total) it in an important one to collect and gathering lots of information such as company info, website/social media details and source of funding would be very beneficial. It was also brought up that this would only be required to be completed by those graduates who selected their main activity as self-employed/start-up business as asking this question to everyone would be unnecessary.

Outcome of discussion:

DC suggested that the inclusion of this was paramount and that question routing would remove the issue of asking the question to anyone outside the “entrepreneurial bracket” i.e. not self-employed or business start-up. It was also noted that an alternative “reasons for taking the job” question might be added to accommodate for entrepreneurs. Although there was the suggestion of an optional bank for this set of questioning, DC concluded that because there was a strong mandate for its inclusion that making this an obligatory routed field would be best.

1. **Placements, work-based learning and work-related learning**

DC raised the subject of placements, work-based learning (WBL), and work-related learning (WRL) and how the collection of this data is well supported (from the consultation) but that clear definitions between the three and how they are incorporated need to be clear.

Feedback and discussions from the group raised several points regarding the three areas and they can be implemented. It was suggested that placements and WBL were the two key areas that were a necessity for information to be required, whereas WRL was viewed as an optional because the difficulty of its definition (Regulated profession? School based? Voluntary?). It was also agreed that placements & WBL required a set definition/s and a firming-up of existing good practice (getting professional bodies on board), as well as validating ownership/resourcing of the data. Maintaining the collection of information about non-study related work/WBL through the survey was agreed to be carried on, but regarding the inclusion of apprenticeships (higher/degree apprentices), it was noted that collecting this through the student record (during uni) and linking the data is a more robust way of gathering this as opposed to 14 months after graduating.

Outcome of discussion:

DC noted that cementing a firm set of definitions for placement and WBL would be a good start and then implementing and capturing this through the student record and linking it to the DLHE would be the best course of action for attaining best quality/real time data.

1. **Alternative measures of graduate outcomes**

DC raised the issues of alternative measures and asked the group to consider the five areas raised in the consultation – skills for life, links to previous surveys, student engagement, subjective well-being, net promoter – and if it was practical that they could work in the survey and get strong responses/results.

The outcome of the groups discussion yielded several concerns regarding the inclusion of these areas both mandatory and optionally. Skills for life was viewed as a non-useful inclusion as difficulty attaining this was apparent for skills because it can’t be defined as the individual knowing they have that skill or are just using it at the time. Links to other surveys and student engagement were both seen as fields that may be useful, but again justification of having a mandate for these in the survey wasn’t forthcoming as data linking and the NSS survey is already out there/on the agenda (student engagement) and links to other surveys was assessed as not required. Subjective well-being was the most supported of the five as it could provide information on student welfare, how HE impacts a student’s life (outside education), meeting a student’s expectation of the HE experience, and showing that University is more than just about jobs. However as this can be a sensitive area for graduates, an optional bank as opposed to a mandatory one would seem more appropriate. In regards to net promoter, it was one that could be an optional bank as well if needed as not all institutions would require this information as some use it more than others so this would be an unnecessary mandatory question.

Outcome of discussion:

DC summarised from the feedback made that net promoter and subjective well-being were the only two measures that there was a mandate to take forward and consider implementing into the survey. However this would require going away and assessing how this can be successfully integrated into the survey.

1. **Methodologies – Centralisation**

DC brought the discussion to the topic of centralisation of the survey methodology, and informed the group of the strategic group’s support for this. However there was a mixed feeling from the working group in regards to moving forward and how much centralising will impact the sector and progress the collection of data for the better.

The outcome from group discussions ranged from strong support for centralisation to strong disagreement with centralisation, with many different reasons being aired as to why or why not centralisation should be implemented and if an audit process would be another option.

The group expressed reasons for centralisation as:

* System in its current format would not pass NatStats requirements (change needed)
* Allows for provider branding, connection, feedback loop, follow-up
* Equity of service for all HEP’s
* Options for HE providers to retain access to real-time data
* Fairness across the board (no bias/game playing)
* Assurance over coding process
* Audit route strict and higher costs
* What happens if a HE provider were to fails audit? (if everyone passes is system flawed?)
* Value for money)

The group expressed reasons against centralisation as:

* Contact details remain open for gaming
* Response rates may fall
* Impact on HE staff (loss of jobs)

Outcome of discussion:

DC summarised all the points made for and against centralisation and noted that these points would need to be thoroughly assessed and dissected to establish the best course of action moving forward. Several factors were apparent that were necessary for either route was not losing the current functionality of the survey and what it is aiming to collect about graduates. Making sure that the survey doesn’t become a faceless system and interaction between the surveyor and graduate is to a standard where response rates are maintained or even increased. DC stated that whichever method is chosen, it is vital that it stands up to pass NatStats classification as their audits have changed so DLHE needs to respond to this and be fit for purpose and future proof to be able to continue.

1. **Methodologies - Timing**

DC brought up the final agenda point of the meeting with regards to timescales of the survey and how results from the consultation outlined a need to move away from 6 months and land in and around the 12-18-month bracket.

There was a unanimous verdict that the survey timing needed to be moved to collect a more realistic and improved set of data from graduates as well as covering different leavers dates i.e. undergrad, post-grad, alterative provider. A strong suggestion was a 15-month survey with multiple survey points (3) within that to collect the range of leavers – April (Jan grads), October (summer grads) and January (September grads). Several other points were raised around capturing regulated professions to provide an early snapshot, the delivery of end data (when is it wanted by?) HMRC constraints and a LEO link (availability of salary data), and different users of the data (value of HE) which would need to be considered before setting a timeframe for the survey.

Outcome of discussion:

DC summarised the points and concluded that a survey point in between 12-18 months would be the most credible option, with a 15-month mark be touted as the most viable option. However, DC noted that this would need to be looked at further in regards to LEO data and the impact of the release of salary information could have on the timing of the survey and when it will be conducted.

**12. Any other business**

There was no other business. DC thanked the working group for their involvement in the process.