
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Jonathan Waller
Director of Data and Innovation
Higher Education Statistics Agency
(by email)

18 March 2021

Dear Jonathan

Higher Education Graduate Outcomes Data

As you are aware, we recently completed our review of the experimental [Higher Education Graduate Outcomes data](#) against the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The experimental Graduate Outcomes data replace the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) [Destination of Leavers in Higher Education \(DLHE\)](#) and aim to provide users with a better understanding of the outcomes and destinations of students from Higher Education. This review has been carried out to provide you with feedback as you seek to develop the statistics.

We found a range of positive features that demonstrate the trustworthiness, quality and value of the statistics:

- We welcome that you have worked closely with higher education institutions seeking their feedback on survey methodology, coding and other data quality issues
- The survey aims to address the gaps and needs in data and statistics around graduate outcomes. The survey statistics provide an insight into the diversity of graduate outcomes, capturing a wide range of career choices including non-traditional career paths such as setting up a business. It is also encouraging that these data feed into information for individuals making choices into their future study such as within the [DiscoverUni](#) website
- When developing the model used for the experimental statistics, HESA carried out two public consultations to collect extensive user feedback and views that informed the model. To ensure a range of input, HESA sought feedback from a large user network
- We recognise that you are doing extensive work to improve response rates bearing in mind that this is an ongoing issue for several large-scale surveys in the UK
- Through the Graduate Outcomes provider portal, HE providers are able to have near-real time access to dashboards containing their survey data. They are also able to be involved in the governance through the Graduate Outcomes steering group

- HESA has put a large amount of resource into launching the Graduate Outcomes brand and raising awareness of the survey itself, for example through e-learning to providers on creating their promotional strategies, and having a large presence on social media
- Your team has published various informative blogs, released to aid user understanding, for example around why Graduate Outcomes data cannot be compared with the previous DLHE statistics
- It is encouraging that there is work planned to assure and enrich the Graduate Outcomes survey data using two administrative sources: the Department for Education's Longitudinal Education Outcomes and HESA's Student records. However, we understand that there are no plans as yet to link with wider data sources from disciplines such as health or crime to potentially gain further insight into graduate outcomes in these areas. Promoting data linkage is a strategic priority for OSR and we would be willing to provide further support should you require it
- You have addressed issues around the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) coding of certain occupational groups within the sector and you continue to work closely on this with the ONS classifications teams

We identified some areas where improvements could be made to some aspects of the statistics, and in most areas you are already working towards these improvements:

- Currently, the pre-release access list consists of around 80 people. This list is unusually long and poses a risk to the trustworthiness of HESA statistics. If these statistics were to be put forward for formal assessment with a view to gaining National Statistics status, we would expect the list to be much shorter
- There is a range of documents and links available to users of the statistics, which can be difficult for users to navigate. We welcome that in future years you are looking to bring together all documentation into a single user guide, improving the accessibility to users
- The first Graduate Outcomes publication in June 2020 included only summary data followed by disaggregated data at a later date. We are pleased that you are considering combining these into a single output, which we consider will enhance accessibility and value.

We would like to thank you and your team for engaging with us effectively during this review. We appreciate that these statistics are currently experimental and were pleased to hear about some of the developments that you are undertaking, in particular a review of the entire Graduate Outcomes survey both internally with your steering group and with your statutory customers. With this in mind, we will continue to engage with you around undertaking a fuller assessment possibly in 2022/23.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead