Graduate Outcomes Survey

# Guidance for Institutions

# Introduction

The annual graduate outcomes survey for the 2025 graduates will take place in Q2 2026. Graduates are to be surveyed nine months after graduation. The survey responses are to be collected via the survey instrument, centrally defined by the HEA and locally managed by Institutions.

This document provides guidance on how to undertake the survey. Please review as there are some small changes in the survey in 2026.

# Survey timeframe

The annual graduate outcomes survey has one census date, 31 March of each year. The date chosen aims to provide a picture of graduate activity approximately nine months after completion of the graduate’s programme of study. The data file containing survey responses is to be uploaded to the HEA **strictly** by **the first Friday of September;** therefore**:**

* Each Institution should identify the most appropriate time period for contacting graduates
* Each Institution should ensure that a closing date for the survey is selected so that the survey can be reviewed internally in advance of the submission deadline
* The compilation of the dataset for return to the HEA might require input, scrutiny and / or sign-off from careers offices, IT / MIS offices, registrars, etc. within the HEI. Relevant staff should therefore be available from these areas at key points of the process.
* Completed questionnaires should be stored safely until the data needs to be returned to the HEA.

# Method of survey administration

The survey is undertaken by graduates answering a number of questions by way of a questionnaire. A centralised system using Banner self-service has been developed for institutes of technology and technological universities. However, an institution may use any system it feels most appropriate for administration of the survey.

In relation to the Banner system (IoTs and TUs), the survey should first be sent to all relevant graduates electronically and graduates should be able to log into the system using their login details and fill in the survey from there. The Institution can then follow up with graduates who have not responded. The results of the survey will be recorded in a file that can be downloaded from the HEA website. This file will be uploaded to the HEA by first Friday in September 2026.

Institutions should aim for a minimum 30% response rate to maximise representativeness, noting that most institutions achieve response rates of just over 50% and above. In order to improve response rates, Institutions may need to make follow-up phone calls to graduates who have not responded electronically. Therefore, the survey will also be carried out by Institution staff who fill in responses on behalf of the graduate.

# Cohort to be surveyed

Please see separate document (Cohort to be surveyed (2026)) for details on cohort to be surveyed.

# Occupations and Sectors

Please see separate document (Occupation and Sector Coding (2026)) for guidance on cohort to be surveyed.

# Items required for response

The code book sets out the fields that require response as part of a valid and complete return to the HEA.

Not all fields/responses are compulsory for return to the HEA. This means that the HEA will accept NULL/empty responses to a number of questions. Nevertheless, institutions should ensure that graduates are asked all questions. Null/empty responses are allowed in some cases to maximise the number of graduate records returned to the HEA.

Note however, that non-respondents must not be given the Principal Economic Status “Other Activity”. Similarly, where “Other” or “I don’t Know” is an optional response (e.g. Q2.E, Q.2L), this option should not be used as a placeholder for non-response to these particular questions. Non-responses should be left Null/empty.

If a graduate has indicated that their main activity is employment, and responses have been provided up to **Q.4.C**, this can be considered a complete response and can be returned to the HEA. If a graduate has indicated that their main activity is further study, and responses have been provided up to **Q.4.C**, this can be considered a complete response and can be returned to the HEA. If a graduate has indicated that their main activity is unemployment, and responses have been provided up to **Q.5A**, this can be considered a complete response and can be returned to the HEA. If a graduate has indicated that their main activity is Other, and responses have been provided up to **Q.5.B**, this can be considered a complete response and can be returned to the HEA.

PPSNs are a required item of response for every graduate in the survey where possible, noting that some graduates will not have a PPSN. This is in accordance with the HEA Act 2022 49(1a).

It is very important to note that the Graduate Outcomes Survey is a national survey, and questions should remain consistent between Institutions to ensure comparability at national level.

# Data Return Timeline

* The upload facility will be open well in advance of the final deadline and submissions can be made during the summer months:
* The data return file is to be uploaded to the HEA **strictly** by **the first Friday of September** each year. This is as set out in the Data Sharing Agreement between the HEA and your Institution. Failure to upload data by this point will be considered a late return
* A further fortnight will be given for the HEA audit and sign-off process. Data returns must be finalised by **the third Friday of September**.

Your responsibilities before and during the upload process is to ensure:

* Data and coding should be as accurate as possible before submission to the HEA and the upload facility should not be used as a means of returning incomplete data with multiple reloads required.
* Those responsible for managing the survey should ensure that relevant staff are available (e.g., not on leave) from these areas at key points of the process.

# Audit Process

On submission, the HEA will provide you with audit files to allow you to:

* To ensure the data you intended to submit to the HEA is what has been received.
* To ensure the data you have submitted to the HEA is correctly coded and is in line with expectations (based on your knowledge of your institution and graduates, and the previous year’s data return).
* To provide you with some useful summaries of the data, as submitted.

The HEA will also provide you with a summary Audit Report, highlighting key results and possible anomalies. Resubmissions/Reuploads of data may be required to correct any issues identified. Any resubmissions should be done with view to finalising the data by the **the third Friday of September.**

# Final Sign off

When the final submission has been made and no further changes are required or possible, the HEA will send you a final report (“Sign Off Sheet”) for the signature by the relevant officer on behalf of your Institution. By signing the cover sheet, your institution acknowledges that you have received and read the audit files and report, and you are satisfied that they accurately reflect your institution’s Graduate Survey Class of 2025 return. After sign-off, no further changes to this data will be possible. This final submission will be the dataset used to compile graduate outcomes data for national reporting and to contribute to institutional and system reporting.

# Retention of Data

The GOS data should be retained for a period of 12 months after its submission, provided the HEA have no queries on it.