WORKING TOWARDS A NATIONAL RESEARCHER CAREER TRACKING SYSTEM

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RESEARCH FUTURES EVENT
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Recent study by EUA on the implementation of NFDE recommended that consideration be given to how a researcher career tracking system could be put in place in Ireland. The project has been identified by the Advisory Forum for the Framework as one of several priorities for action.

An informal working group was formed with representation from HEA/QQI, CSO, HEIs and RPOs, Funding agencies, Students

To develop a proposal for a national researcher career tracking project with a view to the proposal being developed further through tendered work. The aim of the project is to be a sustainable longitudinal study with the scope of the project directed towards the future specifically.
GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

- **Timescales and deliverables**

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- **Resources to initiate project:**

Existing initiatives; including CSO data and HEA’s Graduate Outcomes surveys.

HEA Student Records System as central database in Irish HE system.

Alumni/careers/registrar offices as key stakeholders for this project.
BACKGROUND

• Individual HEIs and other stakeholders (e.g. funders) including CSO undertake initiatives and surveys to capture longitudinal data relating to level 10 graduates
• However, there is no national, long-term career tracking system in place for the same graduates
• Need for further evidence supporting capture of ‘value-added’ dimension of a postgraduate research qualification across all disciplines
• Quantifying and elucidating this value-added dimension is important in attracting talent into research and for the system to collectively make the case for investment in research and innovation

Achieving a systematic approach for career tracking of researchers would involve building on the available data and moving beyond once-off surveys of cohorts to ongoing longitudinal collection of data on the roles, sectors and locations of postgraduates from the Irish system as their careers develop.
CONSULTATIONS

Graduate Outcomes Survey & Educational Longitudinal Database (Ireland)

University of Zurich (Switzerland)

National Academics Panel Study (Germany)

Human Resources in Research Flanders (Belgium)

PhD Career Survey (Belgium)

European Science Foundation
EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL DATABASE (CSO)

• Educational Longitudinal Database is a statistical framework for compilation and analysis of learner outcomes across a range of educational levels and programmes over many years.
• Data is gathered under section 30 of the Statistics Act, 1993, and adheres to GDPR regulations.
• ELD use an administrative approach which has both advantages and disadvantages to it

Advantages include:
• Negates the need for large population surveys
• Longitudinal capability vs single point in time
• Response rate as high as PPSN coverage (>90% for HEA graduates)
• Reduces potential for bias

Disadvantages included:
• Administrative data is not collected to measure graduate outcomes
• Coverage only extends to students in Irish institutions and who work in Ireland
• Difficult to identify where graduates live and work immediately after graduation
• Cannot address qualitative research questions
GRADUATE OUTCOMES SURVEY (HEA)

HEIs collect and distribute the data to the HEA. A number of safeguards are in place to ensure the survey adheres to GDPR requirements.

- Survey is voluntary
- Graduates are advised at registration that they will be contacted
- The HEA and each HEI have a data sharing agreement in place

CSO uses tax records and government-available data to assess their longitudinal data with no contact made directly with the graduates. Graduate Outcome surveys contact graduates after the 9-month period and gather more qualitative data than the CSO but no further contacts beyond this.

Challenges in following up with:

- Students who do not have a PPSN
- Students who do not reply to contact attempts and do not respond to the graduate outcome survey.
- Students who leave Ireland and/or change their number/email address.
INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Ownership / Management
• Federal Statistics Office
• Federal Ministry of Education and Research
• Regional Government
• Specialised Research Centre

Objectives
• Identifying career paths of doctoral candidates over a timespan of several years.
• Systematically collecting data as comprehensively as possible for HEIs, policy makers and researchers.
• Structure of doctorate programmes and the training provided
• Motivations for undertaking doctorate programmes and satisfaction with programmes and subsequent careers
• Skills developed during doctorate programmes, compared with the skills required in subsequent careers
• Mobility of doctorate holders between different employment sectors and different countries.

Outputs:
• Survey findings are used as an information tool for various institutions of higher education and as guidelines for educational and employment authorities and career counselling services.

Planning to amalgamate administrative survey and graduate survey
INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Target populations:
• People with a university degree who are gaining/have gained further qualifications for an academic career
• Doctorate holders who obtained their degree in the last five years

Questionnaire include following sections:
• General information on completed study course
  • Looked at extent of cooperation between other sectors (i.e., other universities, government, companies etc).
• Skills and competencies acquired
• Transition from higher education to next employment
• Employment situation and related career experience
• Further education and training
• Self-evaluation of current professional situation and career to date
• Intersectoral and geographical mobility
• Personal data and current living situation
• Module that can be modified and adjusted to specific topics
INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Methodology:
• Consent before participating (and for follow-up surveys)
• HEIs initiate contact with the graduates.
• From 10 minutes to 35 minutes to complete the survey – only a few questions are obligatory (limited personal data)
• Questions focus on the current status of the graduates' doctoral studies, career targets and life goals.
• Follow up survey questions are based on the current topics at the time
• Online questionnaires (unique or existing platforms), opportunity for adapting content to different degrees.
• Collect multiple addresses/contact points (e.g. current home address during studies, home address before studies, emergency address, private e-mail address, and e-mail address from the university)
• Regular reminders (e.g. 1- invitation letter, 2- reminder letter, 3- reminder letter; each by mail as well as by e-mail)
• Participation is voluntary

Response rates:

20%  23%  35%  60%
ENCOURAGING RESPONSE RATE

Having a coordinated approach to the survey, involving several institutions, could be a good approach and enabled the creation of visibility and momentum for the survey. Additional suggestions include:

1) Providing a good rationale for the survey
2) Including invitation message signed by the HEI representative
3) Prompting with up to 2-3 reminders
4) Emails may not be sufficient – phone, social media etc. to drive up response rate
5) Keeping the survey open for a period of up to 4 weeks (plus possibility to save details on form)
6) Clear indication of time commitment for completing the survey
7) Clear indication on the GDPR aspects
8) Easy point-of-contacts for (potential) respondents
9) Incentives?

People closest to respondents are crucial to motivate them to fill out survey.
REFLECTIONS

- **Diverse careers**: Careers can be paused, approach taken should appreciate diversity of career pathways
- **“Tracking”**: Importance of making graduates aware of “tracking” in advance of it taking place
- **Cohort size**: Diminishing participation over time means that number of participants in any one cohort may diminish with the progression of time
- **Resources**: Requires a lot of resources, including contact data, designated personnel at HEIs, designated career tracking team at “head office”
- **Stakeholder relations**: Strong communication plan and incentivizing participation
THANK YOU

Contact us on: swalshe@hea.ie