

The top left corner of the slide features a complex, abstract graphic composed of several thin, black, overlapping lines that form various geometric shapes, including triangles and polygons, creating a sense of movement and structure.

# WORKING TOWARDS A NATIONAL RESEARCH CAREER TRACKING SYSTEM

6 JULY 2023  
RESEARCH FUTURES EVENT  
DR MAYSOUN MUSTAFA, CTWG

# GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

## Guiding principles



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.

## Representation



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

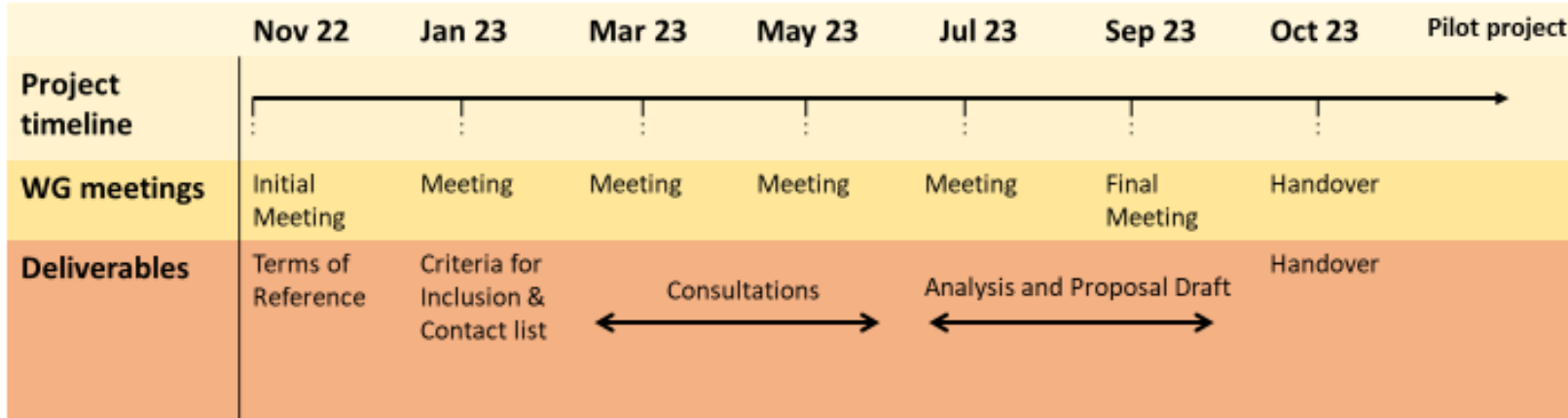
## Scope



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**



- **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*

*Data protection officer appointed for ensuring that personal data collection and processing was carried out according to EU and national legislation.*

*Survey allows identification of which questions are difficult and where respondents drop out*

## Response rates:

20%

23%

35%

60%

# ENCOURAGING RESPONSE RATE

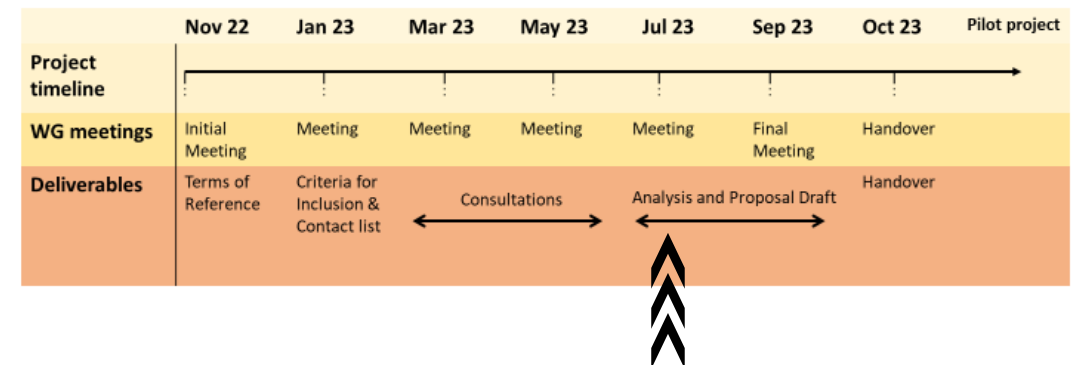
Having a coordinated approach to the survey, involving several institutions, could be a good approach and enabled the creation of visibility and momentum for the survey. Additional suggestions include:

- 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](mailto:swalshe@hea.ie)