

HEA Data Validity Analysis

Context

The HEA has reviewed the *Graduate Outcomes Survey* in 2024.

The review was based on the principles that graduate data should continue to:

- Reflect the higher education landscape, now and into the future. The higher education system continues to evolve and graduate tracking should be future proofed to meet the needs of all stakeholders.
- Be of the highest quality. Ireland should continue to lead internationally by expanding on a reliable and accurate evidence base for policy makers, HEIs, prospective students and other stakeholders.
- Be obtained as efficiently as possible. The methodology and operation of graduate surveying should be fit-for-purpose and efficient, enabling high value, well structure, timely and robust data to be collected.
- Be accessible and joined up. Those interested in graduate data should be enabled to obtain information that is freely available and easy to understand, taking account of the range of data sources within the higher education system.
- Support policy frameworks. Graduate survey data should support the higher education System Performance Framework and other national policy frameworks.

There were two main proposed aspects of the *Graduate Outcomes Survey* review:

1. Two data validity assessments (DVA) – HEA and CSO. This document will summarise the HEA DVA.
2. Consultative review and recommendations carried out by Crowe Consultancy.

HEA Data Validity Assessment

The HEA DVA included two assessments:

1. An assessment of the extent to which responses in *the Graduate Outcomes Survey* which relate to further study are correct.
2. Response persistence to the questions in the *Survey*. For example, a graduate could answer the first question but not answer another question in the *Survey*. This graduate would be categorized as a yes response; however, we would gather incomplete information from that graduate.

1. Further Study Analysis

Method:

This analysis matched two files:

File 1: A subset of *Graduate Outcomes Survey: Class of 2022*, surveyed sometime after March 2023. The subset relates to those who responded to the *Survey* to state that they were in further study in Ireland in a HEA institution.

File 2: Student Records System student records 2022/23. These represent enrolments in HEA HEIs in the academic year 2022/23 and represent those present after 1 March 2023.

File 1 and File 2 were matched across PPSN with the aim of matching those GOS graduates of 2022 who were in further study in HEA HEIs in 2022/23.

Then the declared HEI of further study in File 1 is compared with the actual HEI of enrolment in File 2.

Results:

Overall, **5,069** graduate respondents indicated that they were in further study in a named HEA institution.

Of those, **4,672** had matching records in that same named HEA institution. This is a match rate of **92.2%**. Therefore **7.8%** did not have a match in the same named HEA institution.

A further **38** graduates were found in different HEA HEIs i.e. not in the HEI named by the graduate. However, **29** of these gave the name of their original institution from the previous year, suggesting that the graduates have incorrectly responded with their original HEI, rather than their HEI of further study. This figure of 29 out of 38 represents **76.3%** of such responses, and **0.6%** of the total of 5,069.

A total of **359** of these graduates did not have a match in any HEA HEI. However, **292** of these graduates gave the name of their original institution from the previous year, suggesting that the graduates have incorrectly responded with their original HEI, rather than their HEI of further study. This figure of 292 out of 359 represents **81.3%** of such responses, and **5.8%** of the total of 5,069.

Further Study Match Profile	Total
Number of graduates indicating a given HEI as HEI of further study	5,069
Number of those graduates registered in that same HEI	4,672
<i>% matched</i>	92.2%
Number of those graduates registered in other HEA HEIs	38
<i>Of those registered in original HEI in the previous year</i>	29
Number of those graduates not registered in a HEA HEI	359
<i>Of those registered in original HEI in the previous year</i>	292

2. Response Persistence Analysis

Method:

This analysis selected all respondents from the *Graduate Outcomes Survey: Class of 2022* and calculated the follow-through of each respondent to all subsequent mandatory questions. The purpose of this analysis is to address whether graduates drop out of the *Survey* without completing all the required questions – and if so, this could indicate that the *Survey* is too long or that the questions are too complex. Free text questions (not mandatory) are not included in the figures here as graduates are not required to provide responses in order to continue with the *Survey*.

Results:

Each graduate who responded to the *Survey* and stated that their principal economic status was *Employment* received questions on employment. Those who stated that their principal economic status was *Further Study* received questions on further study. Those stating that they were *Unemployed or Doing Something Else* received questions on unemployment or other activities. All graduates received a final question on their experience of higher education. The tables below outline the average non-response rates across the relevant questions.

Therefore, these are the graduates who answered the very first question on their main economic destination and then who did not answer the subsequent questions.

The percentage of non-response rates are low across graduate types.

Median non-response rate across all HEIs	Total
Employment questions	2%
Further study questions	4%
Unemployed or other questions	2%
Experience of Higher Education question	10%

Median non-response rate by programme level	Total
Employment questions	
<i>Undergraduates</i>	1%
<i>Postgraduates</i>	2%
Further study questions	
<i>Undergraduates</i>	4%
<i>Postgraduates</i>	5%
Unemployed or other question	
<i>Undergraduates</i>	2%
<i>Postgraduates</i>	3%
Experience of Higher Education question	
<i>Undergraduates</i>	9%
<i>Postgraduates</i>	12%

Median non-response rate by mode of study	Total
Employment questions	
<i>Full-time</i>	2%
<i>Part-time</i>	2%
Further study questions	
<i>Full-time</i>	5%
<i>Part-time</i>	3%
Unemployed or other question	
<i>Full-time</i>	2%
<i>Part-time</i>	2%
Experience of Higher Education question	
<i>Full-time</i>	11%
<i>Part-time</i>	8%

All tables above demonstrate that the response persistence across HEI, mode of study and programme type is high with a higher non-response for the final reflective question in the Survey.

Conclusion

This portion of the Data Validity Assessment was carried out internally in HEA. The first aspect of this was an assessment of the extent to which responses in the *Graduate Outcomes Survey* which relate to further study are correct. The findings suggested that there was a high match rate between the HEI that responded as being currently enrolled in for their area of further study and their records on the Student Records System. The match rate was 92.2%. For the 7.8% of respondents whose response differed from their records they either gave the name of the HEI they graduated from (but were not enrolled there currently) or else were studying in a different HEI than then one they reported. This suggests that a rewording of the first question on main destination may be warranted to simplify it for the respondents.

The response persistence element of this internal Data Validity Assessment tells us that the continuation of respondents is very high across mode of study and programme type. There may be scope to add 3-5 questions to the *Survey* without reducing the response rates, however, this may be fewer if the questions are reflective in nature.

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