

Graduate Outcomes Survey

Introduction – background information on graduate outcomes survey

Context

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, announced in 2011, sets out a package of reforms for the higher education system. The strategy proposes a range of changes to improve performance and accountability, with the aim of developing a more coherent system of higher education institutions to deliver on stated national priorities. In this regard, the government has set out a System Performance Framework which states the national priorities and objectives for the higher education system over the next number of years, and a high level indicator for the system in relation to higher education's contribution to meeting Ireland's capital needs is that the institutions and HEA report on trends in graduate employment rates.

The higher education system is also informed by the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. In this regard, a key policy priority for the HEA, and a goal of the National Access Plan, is the collection of data on graduate outcomes for students from the equity of access target groups. Furthermore, the government's Action Plan for Jobs requires that the HEA provides reliable and up-to-date information on the employability and skills of Ireland's most recent graduates. Complementary to the HEA's graduate outcomes survey, the HEA/QQI/Solas National Employers Survey provides valuable information on the view of employers of higher education outcomes.

A crucial element of delivering for these policy priorities is reflected in the development of a HEA Data Development and Knowledge Management Strategy. This strategy aims to minimise the bureaucratic burden and to maximise the strategic value of the evidence-base underpinning higher education policy and practice. Data on graduate outcomes is a key priority within this data strategy and significantly enhances the HEA's ability to meet System Performance Framework requirements.

Graduate Outcomes Survey

Since 2015, the HEA and higher education institutions have worked together on the development of a new graduate outcomes survey for higher education. The new survey includes the participation of all higher education institutions, and situates the survey data within a relational database that allows for greater data accuracy and linking of survey data across its systems. The first full implementation of the new graduate outcomes survey took

place in 2018 (survey of 2017 graduates), and the HEA and higher education institutions will continue to work together to improve and refine the survey instrument for the coming years.

The new survey and database provide the following:

- Data on graduate qualifications and employment both within Ireland and overseas
- Relevance of employment to area of study
- Data on graduate further study
- Data on graduate unemployment and unavailability for work
- Consistent data across institutions
- Graduate perceptions of the quality and relevance of their higher education experience

This information is of use to higher education institutions, government departments and state agencies, researchers, career guidance counsellors and teachers.