



HOW GRADUATE DESTINATION DATA IS COLLECTED

The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, usually referred to as the DLHE survey, is the means by which UK universities collect information on the whereabouts of graduates who completed their courses during the previous academic year.

The data required and the processes used to collect this information are closely controlled by HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency).

Survey coverage

Nationality

- q All UK and EU nationals

Type of attendance

- q Full-time students
- q Part-time students
- q Distance learners

Type of qualification

- q All first degrees and first degree equivalent qualifications
- q All higher degrees
- q All postgraduate certificates and diplomas

Reference date

- q Approximately 6 months after graduation

HESA specify that we should obtain information from 80% of full-time UK leavers, 80% from Research Council-funded graduates, 70% of part-time UK leavers and 50% of EU leavers.

Collecting the data

The annual DLHE survey is comprised of two separate elements(see below for details). Each element consists of a postal questionnaire followed up by telephone and email surveying of non-respondents. An online version of the questionnaire is available for completion on the Careers Service website.

1st element (April) - those graduating between 1 August and 31 December

These graduates (mainly higher degree graduates and nurses) receive a postal question during the third week of April. Non-respondents are chased between mid-May and the end of June. Graduates must report on their situation on a fixed date usually around 15 April. Data from this survey is held over until the following March when it is combined with the results of the second survey for submission to HESA. This means that there is always a considerable time lapse between the collection of data from this group of students and its submission to HESA.

2nd element (November) - those graduating between 1 January and 31 July

These graduates (mainly first degree graduates) receive a postal questionnaire during the third week of November. Non-respondents are chased between December and mid-March. Graduates must report on their situation on a fixed date usually around 15 January.

Chasing of non-respondents

Around 25% of graduates will complete the postal questionnaire. To bring response rates up to the levels required by HESA, the Careers Service makes strenuous attempts to track down graduates including:

- Text message reminders linking to the online questionnaire
- Two major email chasing exercises again linking to the online questionnaire.
- Extensive telephone survey
- Check of University records to identify graduates who have re-registered for further study
- Liaison with academic departments

The largest response is achieved by telephone surveying. A team of student telephone interviewers are selected on the basis of relevant previous experience eg market research, customer service work. All students undergo training and are supervised by Careers Service staff. Calls are made between 5.30pm and 7.30pm on weekday evenings and some weekends. HESA require us to make a minimum three attempts at contacting graduates using all telephone numbers available to us. We use mobile and land numbers listed on the Student Record and use the Development and Alumni Relations Office's database to check for updated or additional information. We will also try numbers provided to us by third parties resident at the graduate's home address. It is not unusual for us to make three, six or nine telephone calls to reach graduates. Our attempts to reach graduates are as exhaustive as information and resources permit.

Sources of 2009/10 data

<i>Method</i>	<i>Number responding</i>	<i>%</i>
Postal questionnaire	1157	25.5
Telephone survey (graduate)	1725	38.0
Telephone survey (third party)	881	16.9
Electronic reply	604	13.3
Institutional records	202	4.5
Other	0	0.0
Explicit refusal	80	1.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>4535</i>	<i>100.0</i>

How departments can help

Organising the DLHE survey is a major undertaking and huge effort goes into ensuring that we obtain healthy response rates and accurate information. Changes introduced by HESA to ensure a greater consistency in the way in which information is gathered across the country and a higher level of accuracy limit Careers Services' capacity to involve academic departments in the collection of data. However, there are several ways in which departments can contribute to the data collection exercise.

- Reminding your students about the importance of checking and updating their Student Record before they finish their courses is much appreciated. We rely heavily on the contents of the Student Record for the postal address, telephone and email information used to make contact with recent graduates. Letting the Careers Service have information about any updated contact details you receive from your most recent cohort of leavers is also valuable.
- An email reminder sent by your department to coincide with the April and November surveys and stressing the importance of the survey to the department can be helpful in persuading

graduates to reply. Your Department's Careers Liaison Officer will be sent an email to alert them when the surveys are about to commence.

- Graduates who completed a first degree in your department and have proceeded to postgraduate study here frequently don't bother to return questionnaires. Reminding this group to complete a questionnaire is of great help to us.
- If you are still in contact with graduates, and particularly if you suspect that they have graduate level jobs or are registered on postgraduate courses at other institutions, then you may wish to remind these individuals of the importance to the Department of their participation in the survey. It's worth noting that subject league table placings produced in the media are based on the numbers of graduates in 'graduate' level destinations. By encouraging responses from individuals in these types of destination you can have a positive effect on your ranking.

Survey results

Once the data has passed two stringent validation tests it is submitted to HESA in March/April each year.

Sheffield data

Our analysis of the data commences once our submission has been accepted. Reports showing the results will be posted on GEMS (our interactive reporting system) in June following submission to HESA. The data presented is compliant with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and shows key elements from the survey (names are excluded). Data is presented in line with the data publication categories used by HESA when producing their statistical reports.

Departments who need access to this data before it is available on the Careers Service website should contact their Careers Adviser for further details. Please note that we will not have complete data until all data has been processed (mid/late-March).

National data

In May each year HESA commence analysis of all the DLHE data submitted by UK institutions. A press release is usually issued in July providing an initial statistical analysis of the return. In early July the Employment Performance Indicators are released. This is followed in September by the publication of complete national data in the HESA publication, 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education'.

After this date DLHE data is available for use by external organisations eg league table compilers, Unistats.

Response rates

Although we seek to reach the HESA target response rate, we have found, in common with many other universities, that it has become increasingly difficult in recent years to achieve these targets. There are a number of reasons for this (increasing reluctance of people to participate in surveys, reduction in number of people using land lines, short life span of mobile numbers/personal email addresses). However, it is important to note that while a healthy response rate is valuable in ensuring the viability of the data, it plays no part in the calculations made by the compilers of league tables. Their statistics are based solely on the number of graduates of 'known' destination.

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