

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

NewDLHE: The future of graduate outcomes data

Alex Rowley April 2017

SURVEY DESIGN FOR THE NEW MODEL OF COLLECTING GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA

MillionPlus welcomes the inclusion of measures regarding the meaningfulness and importance of degree content, higher level skills and the place of a job within a graduate's career plan. This will go some way to progress and broaden the judgement of graduate destinations beyond salary.

MillionPlus have previously made the case that success is defined in many ways, and for some students acquiring skills, confidence and new knowledge is as important as gaining a particular level of employment. The inclusion of 'graduate voice' measures is a step towards a more holistic look at the graduate workforce and the longer-term benefits of going to university, hence our position that surveying graduates at least 18 months after graduation would acknowledge the evolving nature of graduate employment patterns.

Equally, we welcome the inclusion of measures looking at enterprise and self-employment to further understanding of graduate pathways in an economy with increasingly flexible work patterns and draw attention to the many graduates who, often building on support from their university, start their own businesses or develop professional portfolios. These measures are likely to take better account of employment routes into some sectors such as those associated with the creative and digital industries.

PRACTICALITIES AND MANAGEMENT OF THE NEW MODEL OF COLLECTING GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA (METHODOLOGY, GOVERNANCE, LINKED DATA AND DATA OUTPUTS)?

As stated in our previous submission, MillionPlus would prefer graduates to be surveyed at least 18 months after graduation. This is likely to better reflect the evolution of graduate career patterns, the wider variety of work-routes pursued by graduates in the 21st century labour market and sectors with high instances of internships. However, MillionPlus recognises that the proposal to survey graduates 15 month after completing their studies, particularly when combined with the measures looking at portfolio building, experimentation and business start-ups is an improvement on the current situation where graduates are surveyed 6 months after completing their course. However, we are disappointed that no additional measures have been proposed to address the influences on graduate employment of local employment patterns and regional economic outlooks.

In our view, the proposed 70 per cent response rate requirement appears ambitious when compared to the current response rate recorded for DLHE Longitudinal which stands at circa 27 per cent. While we recognise that sufficient detail is necessary for onward use of the data at course level, MillionPlus would expect response rates to be monitored and appropriate action taken if response rates vary significantly from the 70 per cent requirement. As highlighted in the consultation's supporting documents, increased awareness will be necessary to ensure that the 70 per cent response rate is achieved. MillionPlus therefore welcomes the proposal for a national communications plan to support universities' own efforts in this area. Universities have developed sophisticated alumni engagement strategies but additional support will be required to ensure that the resource impact on universities of the NewDLHE is minimised.

MillionPlus considers that the move to four surveys a year is a positive development which will take better account of the multiple entry points and graduations which have long been promoted and supported by modern universities. In addition, we welcome the proposal to make available live data throughout the year. This will provide universities with greater intelligence to respond to any issues arising in both surveying graduates and in survey outcomes.

MillionPlus has previously set out a number of reservations about the use of salary data as a measure and determinant of graduate success. While we recognise that the introduction of graduate voice and entrepreneurship measures are helpful, we remain concerned that no measure within the survey addresses the issue raised by the Institute of Fiscal Studies and other research that 'socio-economic' background is highly influential in determining graduate destination and employment prospects.

Moreover, the use of the current Standard Occupational Classification groups, and general approach to defining what a 'graduate job' is, is outdated and creates misperceptions about graduate success. Employers make decisions about what attributes are necessary for the jobs in their businesses, and it is they who decide that a particular role is a 'graduate job'. Equally, graduates decide whether a role is suitable for their career path (as acknowledged by the inclusion of 'graduate voice' measures). We welcome the fact that HESA intends to take into account. We expect the ONS's review of SOC groups to have important implications for many occupations that are at present not viewed as graduate level but are increasingly becoming graduate occupations.

FINANCIAL PLAN FOR THE MODEL OF COLLECTING GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA

MillionPlus welcomes the proposal for a centralised system given that it will reduce the resource implications for universities. We regard the proposed structuring of fees into three tiers as sensible in that it will allow universities to choose a survey package that suits their needs.

MillionPlus believes that a review mechanism should be built into the system to address any disparities that may emerge in respect of the quality, robustness and outcomes of the different tiers. Bearing in mind that the NewDLHE has been proposed as a key metric in informing the Teaching Excellence Framework, the link between NewDLHE outcomes and NewDLHE fee tiers should be kept under review. There is a risk that the quality of data potentially delivered by higher fee tiers impacts positively on universities' TEF ratings. It is therefore imperative that financial factors associated with surveying graduates do not have undue effect on overall and subject level TEF ratings.

In addition, MillionPlus supports the fee structure being subject to regular review to reflect changes in both institution size and complexity, and the shape and structure of the wider sector. A university delivering courses in direct response to government initiatives should not be penalised through higher fees linked to any resulting complexity of provision. There is considerable potential for change in the shape and structure of the higher education sector, for example in regards to the stated government aim of encouraging new providers with different student profiles entering the higher education sector. Regular reviews would allow the fee structure to reflect any potential changes to the higher education sector.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR OUR NEW MODEL OF COLLECTING GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA

The publication of the NewDLHE output will occur around the same time as is proposed for subject-level TEF. NewDLHE outcomes will be used as a metric in TEF and will potentially have implications for TEF ratings.

This will be amplified at subject-level due to the smaller cohorts and close relationship of some degree courses to certain occupations, such as those within Subjects Allied to Medicine and healthcare occupations. MillionPlus would urge close consideration of the robustness of data and impact of NewDLHE outcomes in regard to their subsequent use. We would recommend undertaking an evaluation of the impact and knock-on effects of NewDLHE outcomes and the way NewDLHE outcomes are presented and perceived on TEF ratings.

NewDLHE, TEF, REF and other institution-wide projects are often the responsibility of the same senior team. HESA should take into account the resource implications for universities of checking and submitting data in this wider, and constantly evolving, landscape. Timing such submission deadlines to avoid other deadlines would go some way to avoiding unnecessary pressures on verification and submission of information.