Higher Education Longitudinal Education Outcomes Experimental Statistics

Survey response

June 2017

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Introduction

1. The Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data uses information from HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions to provide a uniquely powerful insight into the employment outcomes of university graduates in Great Britain. Although information already exists about graduate employment outcomes, the advantage of linking data from existing administrative sources is that it allows us to understand the destinations of graduates without imposing any additional data collection burdens on universities, employers or members of the public. Compared to existing sources of graduate outcomes data, it is also based on a considerably larger sample, does not rely on survey methodology, and can track outcomes across time to a greater extent than is currently possible.

2. The initial publication of experimental statistics in August 2016[1] provided graduate employment and earnings outcomes 1, 3, 5 and 10 years after graduation. The subsequent release in December 2016[2] provided graduate employment and earnings outcomes broken down by student characteristics (e.g. ethnicity and prior attainment) and subject studied. Employment outcomes were also provided for each individual institution and earnings outcomes were provided for those studying law within individual institutions.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/graduate-outcomes-longitudinal-education-outcomes-leo-data
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/graduate-outcomes-by-degree-subject-and-university

Summary of responses received and the government's response

3. In line with best practice, the Department for Education (DfE) has and continues to seek user views on the usefulness, format and methodology of LEO data releases. As such, DfE carried out a survey alongside the release on 1st December 2016. Responses are set out in this document, which the department will consider as it continues to develop LEO and moves towards a regular pattern of statistical releases covering graduate outcomes. Final decisions regarding the content of official statistics publications lie with the Chief Statistician of the relevant department operating independently of Ministers.

4. The survey was launched by Department for Education (DfE) on 1st December 2016 and closed on the 27th January 2017.

5. The survey sought views primarily from the higher education sector on the tables published in the December release and how they could be most useful for people choosing higher education courses. They also sought to build understanding and confidence in the robustness of the data and explore its wider operational use by institutions. The responses from the survey will help inform our subsequent data releases.

6. There were 27 written responses to the online survey. A list of contributors is included in Annex A.

Headline views on Longitudinal Education Outcomes Data

Characteristics

7. The 1st December 2016 statistical release broke down outcomes by gender, ethnicity, age, prior attainment and region. The majority of respondents (81%) found that the break down by these characteristics useful or very useful.

8. Consideration of graduate characteristics has particular value when exploring aspects of widening access and participation and respondents felt further breakdowns of part-time and full-time students would be helpful. Respondents also requested data to be broken down further to include data on disability, socio economic status and more detailed geographical data.

9. These suggestions will feed into our decisions on what breakdowns to include going forward.

Prior attainment

10. Graduates were grouped into four prior attainment bands for this release. This was to ensure a reasonable number of graduates fell into each category. The majority of respondents found this option was the most useful as having a small number of bands made the categories easy for different audiences to understand and succeeded in setting out the different levels of prior attainment. It was felt further breakdowns would unnecessarily complicate the data.

11. The December 2016 release took the graduates' best three A levels into consideration when placing them into one of the four prior attainment groups. Respondents expressed mixed views on whether this was the best method for defining prior attainment.

12. Reasons given in support of this definition included that offers from Higher Education Providers were generally based on the students' top three A levels so this approach ensured consistency. However, a common theme from a number of respondents was that they would prefer other level 3 qualifications to be included when looking at prior attainment, as many students now take alternative qualifications particularly part-time and/or mature students.

13. We are aware that the higher education sector has a diverse mix of students. For the cohort analysed in the December publication (those graduating in 2008/09), other level 3 qualifications made up a small proportion of the qualifications taken. However, as noted above, there has been an increase in the take-up of other qualifications and we will look at how we take this into consideration when categorising prior attainment in future publications.

14. In extending the prior attainment bandings to include other approved level 3 qualifications (e.g. BTECs), we asked if there was a preference for separating graduates into different bands depending on what type of qualification their point scores are based on. The majority of respondents wanted this; however, others felt it would be useful to test the impact of other level 3 qualifications, particularly against the other characteristics, to consider the effect before committing to separating out the different qualifications.

Subject splits

15. In the December 2016 publication, the subject breakdowns were based on JACS subject areas. We separated Economics from the other Social Sciences and asked if there were any other subject areas that would be useful to split from their broader JACS subject categories. The responses to this question were quite mixed; some respondents viewed the range of subjects within a JACS category as

problematic, but others felt having a large number of further breakdowns could make the data difficult to use.

16. A number of respondents made suggestions for specific subjects that it would be useful to separate from the top-level JACS category. As a result, our June 2017 publication will split out the following: Psychology from Biological Sciences; English from (other) Languages and Nursing from Subjects Allied to Medicine. These subjects were split out as they had sufficiently different earnings outcomes from the main JACS category and also had a large number of graduates, meaning these further breakdowns would not lead to a substantial increase in data being suppressed to protect confidentiality.

Subject within institution

17. The 1st December 2016 higher education LEO statistical release shows employment and earnings outcomes for graduates who studied law at each higher education institution that offers the subject. The majority, 75%, of respondents found the earnings and employment outcomes for law graduates very or quite useful.

18. The subject level data was considered to be useful and an improvement on institution level only data as it allows comparisons to be made between subjects at different institutions. Respondents felt the ability to assess and compare institutions at a course or subject level is important to informing students' choice. Some respondents felt it would be beneficial to benchmark the data to ensure that an institution's performance is judged relative to other institutions operating in a similar context.

19. In order to help users identify institutions operating in a similar context, our June publication will provide data on the characteristics of the students graduating (average A level prior attainment for each university and proportion in POLAR quintile 1). This contextual data is of most use where universities have a large proportion of students covered by these measures. We are continuing to investigate how best to compare employment and earnings outcomes for universities that have a low proportion of students covered by the contextual data (mainly universities with a high proportion of mature students).

Contextualisation of LEO data

20. The survey asked for suggestions of additional data which would be useful for LEO to sit alongside.

21. The response to the questions prompted a large number of suggestions. Generally, respondents felt that including information from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was important. There was also a number of suggestions for including regional information on salary differences, the average graduate salary along with regional labour market characteristics and sector benchmarking as a means of contextualising the employment and wage data.

22. The capture and inclusion of self-employment data was seen as crucial for particular sectors, such as creative industries, to reflect the working patterns of the industry.

23. Respondents thought it would be useful to measure career progression, particularly for mature students, to show the benefit of the degree undertaken. This would be measured by comparing the difference in salary before and after taking a degree.

24. Overall, the LEO data was seen as being useful to prospective students in helping them to decide which university to apply to, along with course information and entry requirements. Respondents felt graduate employability and prospects are key factors which students take into account when considering courses and LEO data complements the six-month employment and salary data collected in the DLHE currently. By being able to provide data over a much longer period, LEO will be particularly helpful in showing the long-term earnings of different career routes.

25. In response to the comments received, we have changed the graduating cohorts included in the June publication so all employment outcomes use data for the 2014/15 tax year (the only year for which we have data on self-employment). We will continue to work with HMRC and DWP to extend the LEO data to include earnings from self-employment.

Usefulness of LEO data

26. A large majority of respondents thought the LEO data would be useful to their organisation.

27. Careers advisors were seen by the majority of respondents as having a substantial role in communicating LEO data and the context of it. Some respondents commented that care was needed in how the LEO data was used in careers data as it provides information on outcomes a number of years after graduation and may not therefore reflect current career paths.

Further analysis

28. There were a number of suggestions for further analysis of LEO data including: widening participation; POLAR and more detailed breakdowns of geographical regions for employment data as well as further breakdowns by subject.

29. Some respondents thought it would be helpful to provide further data to allow comparisons of outcomes between UK nationals, EU and non-EU graduates; part-time and full-time students as well as traditional routes and the new degree apprenticeships.

30. Some respondents felt the employment outcomes breakdowns could be further enhanced with Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Standard Occupational Codes (SOC), which would give greater detail on employment outcomes. Building on this, they thought it would be helpful to capture the type of occupation graduates were in, and this should go beyond graduate's outcomes to include highly skilled employment. Other responses suggested trying to capture the number of jobs graduates had and comparing salaries between SMEs and larger companies.

31. We are currently working with DWP to investigate whether SOC code can be added to the LEO employment data. This will enable more detailed analysis of the type of occupations graduates enter, although we recognise that we will still be unable to distinguish the specific role that the graduate is carrying out.

32. Some respondents also felt that the category of 'Activity not captured', which covers a number of activities such as career breaks, working abroad and self-employment, could benefit from greater analysis In particular, whether and why variation might be seen between different institutions and courses to increase the understanding of different graduate career paths.

Comments on the outcome measures used

33. One respondent thought it would be useful to show the mean average, alongside the range and median, of wages to show the distribution of graduate outcomes.

34. Three respondents felt the definition of sustained employment as having "an employment record for one day or more in at least five out of six months between October and March in the tax year of interest" was a very low threshold for 'sustained' employment.

35. We have kept the sustained employment definition unchanged as it is consistent with that used in other sectors (e.g. KS5 destinations measures and the outcome based success measures published for further education colleges). Previous surveys have indicated that it is useful to compare employment outcomes for different educational routes. In addition, there is no consensus on a suitable alternative measure.

36. One respondent argued that the large variations in outcomes and earnings by subject and characteristics should be measured against benchmarks rather than raw measures. They feared the data would offer a perverse incentive to avoid recruiting groups with characteristics that are associated with lower employment rates.

37. As mentioned in paragraph 19 we have provided contextual data to aid comparison between similar institutions. DfE has also commissioned research which will use LEO data to look at graduate outcomes after controlling for the different characteristics of graduates.

Other General comments

38. One respondent was concerned that the 'Apprenticeship Outcomes Data'[3], which was also published in December 2016, used different groups of students and time frames from the LEO data and this was not properly understood. This led to direct and misleading comparisons between the two datasets. It was recommended that future publications of both sets of data should take this into account when presenting their respective data sets.

39. Three respondents highlighted that LEO uses data from previous students and so gives an indication of how providers performed in the past but not how they are currently performing. There was a concern that historic data could give a misleading impression of salaries and opportunities of particular subjects, which could have changed.

40. In its experimental form, the data is released as spreadsheets and a summary publication. Respondents felt that there would be value, particularly for students, in looking at other ways to make this data available e.g. through information tools so that institutions and third parties could analyse and query more fully. Some respondents thought it would be useful if the LEO data was published on the Unistats website as students and careers advisors are familiar with it.

41. In our June publication, we have also published the data as a csv file; this will enable users to easily import the data into a wide range of programmes. There are plans to include LEO data in Unistats.

42. Respondents were supportive of the open data approach so that third party commercial and charitable organisations who provide information for students can

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577363/average_earnings_post_apprenticeship.pdf

present the data in different ways to target certain groups. One respondent suggested aligning publication dates and the structure of the data with the DLHE release, which would enable third parties to combine analysis of both datasets more efficiently.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded to the survey

- St Mary's University
- Moorlands College
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- New College Durham
- Higher Education Policy Institute
- The Royal Northern College of Music
- London School of Management Education
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
- Arts University Bournemouth
- Guild HE
- Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service
- University of Bristol
- University of East London
- Coventry University
- University of Leeds
- Birmingham City University
- Universities UK
- The University of Manchester
- Nottingham Trent University
- The Open University
- Which?
- Canterbury Christ Church University
- Loughborough University
- Royal Holloway, University of London

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