

DLHE survey of 2016-17 leavers (Tranche one: April 2017; Tranche two: January 2018)

Guidance for Further Education Colleges (FECs)

This document provides practical guidance on how to undertake the survey and how to achieve accurate responses from leavers.

1. Background

The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) record collects information about the activities of leavers roughly six months after they completed their HE qualification. DLHE is undertaken on an annual basis through surveys and a data collection process.

2. When is the DLHE survey undertaken?

DLHE consists of two survey periods relating to two different census dates – the first one in April and the second in January. The two census dates reflect the two main course completion times for students; those who complete their courses between 1 August and 31 December will be surveyed the following April, whereas those who finish between 1 January and 31 July will be surveyed the following January. Therefore the whole survey spans two reporting periods. The dates chosen are nominal and aim to provide a picture of graduate activity approximately six months after completion.

Although there are two data capture dates, there is only one data collection, the return date for which is **30 March**. Therefore the completed questionnaires must be stored safely until the data needs to be returned to HEFCE in March.

There is a contact period for each survey which sets out when colleges are permitted to contact leavers. The contact period for the April survey normally runs for 10 weeks and consists mainly of leavers who studied at postgraduate level. For the April survey the field work commences on the census date and closes in June. The questions are in the past tense for these leavers as they will receive their questionnaire on or after the census date.

The contact period for the January survey lasts longer as this captures responses from mainly undergraduates so is normally the largest population. The contact period starts in November ahead of the census date and so the questions are in future tense. This is because many leavers return to their family home for the Christmas holiday period so it is an ideal opportunity to contact them at what may be the last known address provided by them. The contact period runs through to the beginning of March.

The data for both surveys is returned to HEFCE once a year by the end of March.

3. Support for running the survey

Colleges have to option to contract with our preferred supplier i-graduate to run the survey on their behalf. The advantages of this are that i-graduate will take responsibility for collecting and returning the DLHE survey data to HEFCE; it reduces the risk of failing to reach the target response rate or of having problems submitting data; it also allows colleges to appoint an external contractor without the costs or requirements of running a separate procurement exercise.

4. How is the DLHE survey undertaken?

The survey is undertaken by HE leavers answering a number of questions by way of a questionnaire. The methods in which the responses to the questionnaire can be obtained are:

- Standard questionnaire
- Telephone survey: HE leaver
- Telephone survey: third party
- Electronic reply (email or web)
- HE provider's student record
- HE provider third party.

Further education colleges (FECs) can use as many of these methods of contact as they wish in order to achieve the highest number of responses possible. It is expected that should initial contact fail to result in a response from the HE leaver that the provider carries out further contact in which it is suggested that an alternative method is used. For example, a HE provider might wish to start with telephoning and then send a link to the online version to all those who they have not been able to contact by telephone. If continued attempts to contact the HE leaver directly fail to result in a response HE providers may use their own student record (system) or staff member (HE provider third party) to obtain a response.

4.1 Method 1 - locally hosted online survey

Colleges may host their own version of the questionnaire on their website. However, colleges must ensure that the content reflects that of the HESA questionnaire and should not add any questions to, or change, the questionnaire in any way. Student status valid entry code 04 'Electronic reply (email/web)' should be used in such cases – see the [HESA guide](#).

4.2 Method 2 - emailing a PDF version of the questionnaire

A PDF version of the questionnaire is available in both English and Welsh and can be downloaded from the 'Questionnaires' section of the [HESA guide](#). Colleges can email this version of the questionnaire to leavers to print, complete, sign, date and return to their college.

4.3 Method 3 - sending a printed questionnaire by post

Whilst considered one of the least successful methods, colleges can send a printed questionnaire to leavers for whom they have a postal address, as long as the college ensures that pre-paid postage is provided and data protection is followed. Information about the survey, communicated in a covering letter (see 4.7), should always be included in the envelope. To reduce burden and environmental impact, colleges should encourage students to conduct the survey online or via telephone as a first preference. We would discourage colleges from using this method due to its diminishing success rates and the requirement to follow up with the leaver any ineligible and incomplete responses.

4.4 Method 4 - telephone surveying

Colleges can choose how they record telephone responses, whether this means using the PDF questionnaire or typing the response into a database, spreadsheet or online survey if using one. The caller first needs to explain that:

- they are phoning on behalf of the college to find out if the former student has found employment and/or further study following completion of their course
- information is used both to advise current students about opportunities and also to feed into a national statistical survey conducted each year to see what happens to students upon leaving higher education
- the information on this form will be used by the college and coded information will be sent to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Further details and contact information are supplied as part of the covering letter (see 4.7)
- they may, if consent is given, be contacted again in the future as part of a follow-up survey. This survey will be conducted by a third party and so their details may be passed on to this third party
- they need to find out what the former student was doing on the census date.

There are questions designated 'Required for valid response' in the [HESA guide](#) which must be answered in order for a response to be counted; however, colleges should make every effort to ensure that all relevant questions are answered.

The caller should indicate on the questionnaire the dates when attempts to contact the leaver by phone were made and the source of the data. Code 02 should be ticked if the caller is speaking to the leaver, code 03 if talking to a third party and code 07 if the caller finds out that the leaver is deceased. Code 06 is also included in the box so that colleges can record if the response was from its own student record if they wish.

Some guidance, [Good practice when conducting telephone surveys \(PDF\)](#), has been produced in order to help colleges get the most from leavers for the DLHE survey.

Colleges' own or sponsored questions may be used when speaking with a leaver on the telephone but it is important to obtain the best possible response to the survey and to meet the response rate targets. The sponsored questions should be asked at the end of the call, after colleges have ensured that they have obtained sufficient information (at least supplying answers to questions designated 'Required for valid response' in the [HESA guide](#)) to provide a valid DLHE return.

4.4.1 Speaking to a third party on the telephone

It is best to obtain the response directly from the leaver. Responses can be obtained from someone other than the leaver, as long as they are sufficiently well informed. The contact must be able to:

- supply answers to all questions designated 'To be asked of third party' in the [HESA guide](#)) AND
- be confident that it relates to the leaver's position on the census date.

However, care must be taken when obtaining information from such third parties, in particular consideration of data protection rules.

It is acknowledged that third party response is a valuable method of obtaining data about leavers and can boost responses, but it should always be a 'last resort'. This is because the aim is to obtain as much information as possible from a reliable source i.e. the leaver themselves. A third party will not be able to answer all of the questions reliably which is why a reduced set of questions is identified.

4.5 Method 5 - direct contact with a leaver

If the college has direct contact with the leaver during the field work period, for example they visit the careers office or attend a graduation ceremony, the leaver can be handed a questionnaire to complete. A copy of the covering letter **must** be handed out with the questionnaire (see 4.7).

4.6 Method 6 - obtaining information from other informed sources

Information obtained from other informed sources, including academic departments, Student record systems or employers, is also acceptable as a method of data capture. However the contact must be able to meet the requirements set out in 4.4.1. Information from other informed sources should only be used where the college has tried to make contact with the student directly, using a number of the methods of contact available, but without success.

4.7 Information that should be supplied when contacting all leavers by any method

HESA has produced the text of the covering letters and emails that should accompany **all** versions of the questionnaire and provides instructions on how to use them. These can be downloaded from the 'Text for covering letters and emails' section of the [HESA guide](#). The text of the letters and emails should not be changed apart from where it is indicated either in italics or where there is an instruction. Colleges should particularly note the instruction to insert their own data protection collection notice.

Colleges can add to the introductory text in order to address particular groups of leavers. For example, for students who have continued to study at the college the following text may be used:

We are asking everyone, even those who have continued to study at the college, what they will be doing on [census date], so that the information is comparable.

Colleges can include other items in the DLHE survey mailing, whether by post or email, for example information about colleges' graduate services or other surveys. However colleges should be conscious of the need to obtain the best possible response to the survey and at least to meet the response rate targets.

4.8 Repeated contact of leavers

Specifically for the January survey (only), colleges that make contact with a leaver via telephone before the census date should record the activities as confirmed by the leaver and no further contact should be made. This includes where the leaver confirms themselves to be unemployed and in this situation colleges should not offer to re-contact or make re-contact on or after the census date. In the case that a leaver confirms they do not know what they will be doing on the January census date then colleges are permitted to make further contact (either on or after the census date). It is courteous to ensure that the leaver is content to be re-contacted after the census date and is best practice to offer careers services if appropriate.

If a leaver confirms prior to the census date that they will be unemployed on the census date then they should not be re-contacted nor should they be encouraged to say instead that they do not yet know what they will be doing. This will ensure that the information collected by telephone is consistent with that received from those responding via the other survey methods (electronic and direct).

5. Multiple responses

If more than one response is received colleges should submit the latest or most complete version of a questionnaire. This only relates to instances where a second response is received unsolicited. Colleges should not actively seek further responses once a response is received.

6. Explicit refusals

An explicit refusal is where a leaver sends back the questionnaire marking it as a refusal or emails, writes or states on the phone that they do not wish to be included in the survey. Colleges may experience telephone hang-ups and should use their professional judgement to decide whether this is an explicit refusal (or technical call failure). A leaver who does not respond in any way, or is not contactable, should not have a DLHE record returned and is not regarded as having explicitly refused. Leavers with DLHE records identified as STATUS = 08 'Reply received explicitly refusing to provide information' will be counted towards a college's response rate. HEFCE monitor the percentage of colleges' explicit refusals and will query this if it reaches over 5%. To limit the number of explicit refusals colleges should consider student engagement in their final year and promotional activities.

7. Response rates

In order to provide best possible statistics about the sector, colleges are required to meet specific target response rates for the DLHE survey. All colleges are expected to meet, or exceed, these thresholds and HEFCE carries out extensive data quality checks to monitor both short- and long-term success with this regard. The target response rates are:

- 80% for UK-domiciled (i.e. home) leavers who previously studied full-time
- 70% for UK-domiciled leavers who studied part-time
- 80% for Research Council-funded students
- 50% for all other EU students
- 20% for non-EU international HE leavers (it is compulsory to survey all non-EU international HE leavers electronically).

The response rates for the DLHE survey are set to ensure that detailed data can be published and that the results of the survey genuinely reflect the outcomes for students leaving colleges. Therefore, while response rates are set at the college level, colleges should seek to ensure that as far as possible the target threshold is met for all courses, and also that response rates are uniform across all student and course characteristics. In particular, specific groups of students should only be targeted for additional follow-up where response rates in previous years have been significantly lower than the college average. Colleges must ensure that a record is returned for every HE leaver where it has sufficient information to be able to make a valid return.

8. Survey accessibility

Leavers with visual impairments, hearing impairments or other disabilities that may restrict them from completing the questionnaire should be contacted in the most suitable way, i.e. a large print version should be provided or priority telephone contact made.

9. Audit trail, record keeping and monitoring

All data capture methods used must result in a robust audit trail. This will consist of one of the following:

9.1 Online questionnaire (locally-hosted version): evidence demonstrating that the questionnaire was completed and dated by the leaver. This might, for example, mean that the college's system is set up in such a way that a read-only copy of the data keyed by the leavers is retained.

9.2 Questionnaire (printed and PDF versions): evidence comprising the completed questionnaire, signed and dated by the leaver himself or herself.

9.3 Telephone survey: the person conducting the telephone survey should sign and date the 'Your signature' box and 'Date' box.

9.4 Other informed source: procedural evidence to demonstrate that the data meets the requirements set out in paragraph 4.3.

10. Keeping DLHE data

The data should be kept only as long as is necessary. If the purpose is research then data may be kept for a long time. The completed questionnaires need not be kept beyond the time that an audit might be carried out. Colleges should therefore keep either a hard copy or electronic version of the questionnaire for each individual leaver for three years after the data is returned to HEFCE. There is no need to anonymise the data. However, the data should not be used in a way that will affect the individual concerned.

11. Data protection

11.1 What to do before and during the DLHE surveys

Before the survey colleges should:

- update each student's contact details
- let all students know that the DLHE survey will be happening and give them an opportunity to withdraw from it, for example by providing the HEFCE student collection notice (see 11.2).

During the survey colleges should:

- use accurate contact details
- use only the contact details provided by the leaver (except where given by a third party, when the details should be used as described below)
- take notice of any objections the leaver has to being contacted
- either not collect, or delete, information from any leaver who does not wish their destinations data to be held by the college.

When collecting data from a third party the interviewer should be aware that:

- they should ask the third party to inform the data subject that data has been collected. The interviewer should also indicate that they can contact the college for more information or with any concerns they might have

- if the third party gives an interviewer a contact telephone number for the leaver, this may be used, providing the interviewer states where the number has come from and gives the leaver an opportunity to object to the call at the beginning of the conversation. The telephone number may only be recorded for future contact purposes outside DLHE if the leaver gives their permission.

Objections to being contacted or providing data can be given at any time before the data is returned to HEFCE. Such objections must always be recorded.

11.2 Standard text, collection notices and informing students

In order for processing to be fair, data subjects should be informed about the uses made of data. A collection notice is a piece of text which fulfils these criteria.

11.2.1 Student collection notice

The fair processing notice given to learners prior to submission of the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) states that the information provided by learners may be shared with other organisations (including HEFCE) for purposes of administration, the provision of career and other guidance and statistical and research purposes, relating to education or training. This allows for the conduct of follow-up surveys. It is relatively common for learners to indicate that they do not wish to participate in any survey activity.

Where learners have indicated to the college that they do not wish to be contacted by the college in the future, colleges should ask learners, prior to them leaving, if they are willing to participate *specifically* in the DLHE survey.

11.2.2 DLHE covering letter and email

The covering letter and email for the DLHE survey

- tells the leaver that they will be contacted again if they don't reply
- informs the leaver that data may be collected from a third party if they can't be contacted themselves
- gives the leaver an opportunity to refuse to give data or be contacted again.

11.2.3 DLHE collection notice provided by HEFCE

This should be included at the bottom of the covering letter or email, and describes the uses made of the data by HEFCE and other bodies. It is provided in a separate document.

11.2.4 DLHE collection notice to be written by colleges

Space has been allowed within the covering letter for each college to include their own collection notice text about the use they make of the data. HEFCE strongly recommends that each college composes suitable wording for and includes its own collection notice in the covering letter, in order to protect the college's legal position.

11.2.5 Further information about informing students

Colleges cannot guarantee leavers read the covering letter and collection notices, but this is not necessarily a problem. The Data Protection Act 1998 says that information concerning what happens to personal data must be made available to the individuals concerned. Organisations must make every reasonable effort to provide this, but not so

that it is disproportionate to the purposes for which the data is collected. Therefore, if colleges follow the above procedures, there should be no further need for concern.

11.3 Further information about data protection issues

Students can obtain further information on data protection issues from HEFCE by sending an email to DLHE@hefce.ac.uk.

12. Who to contact

If you have any queries about DLHE methodology, please contact DLHE@hefce.ac.uk.