

## International Student Tracking Study FAQs

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has asked i-graduate to carry out work looking at the geographic and occupational destinations of non-EU international students who graduate from UK higher education institutions (HEIs).

These FAQs are designed to help provide HEIs with answers to initial queries you may have regarding the International Student Tracking Study (ISTS), including details of what the project aims to achieve, when the study is due to take place, how we foresee the research process working, and information about how your institution can get involved.

### The consultation phase

During the consultation phase (December 2009 – February 2010) i-graduate conducted an in-depth consultation across the sector.

We received a very encouraging response with over 130 institutions providing input, and invaluable responses submitted from nearly 320 individuals across the UK HE sector.

Thank you to everybody who responded to the consultation phase of the project, which ran as a series of round table discussions and an online consultation survey. Your input and feedback have been critical in terms of informing the next stages of the project.

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### Who are i-graduate?

i-graduate are an independent benchmarking and research service. i-graduate deliver an advanced range of dedicated market research and consultancy services for the education sector, and have worked in partnership with over 500 organisations in 16 countries, including higher education institutions, other education providers and government departments.

i-graduate has undertaken an extensive amount of relevant research within the education sector. Since 2005, our team have taken feedback from more than 500,000 students and over 33,000 alumni through our International Student Barometer™ and Alumni Barometer™ initiatives, with responses from over 200 nationalities. For more information about i-graduate and our research services, please browse our website.

### What is the International Student Tracking Study?

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has asked i-graduate to carry out an International Student Tracking Study in partnership with UK HEIs, to look at the geographic and occupational destinations of non-EU international students after they have graduated. The International Student Tracking Study will provide a snapshot of what happens to non-EU international students after they graduate from UK HEIs and will also seek to identify an appropriate method for collecting this information from these graduates year-on-year.

### **Why is this study important?**

The increase in international (non-EU) student numbers over recent years is very much a success story. The contribution they make financially to the economy and more widely to society is well recognised.

There is, however, a gap in hard evidence about what they do after they have completed their studies which this research project is designed to address. Whilst there has been work on student motivations to study in the UK, one area about where there is only anecdotal evidence is whether some aspects of the immigration rules act as an incentive to study here. For example, does the ability to stay on under the Post Study Work arrangements increase the attractiveness of the UK as a study destination? No data currently exists on how many students take up the facility to stay on through Post Study Work, nor any information on students' views as to whether this affected their decision to come to the UK. We know that the market for international students is becoming more intense as other countries seek to expand their own activities in this area.

BIS is keen to understand better what motivates international students to come to the UK so that we can maintain and build on the success of the UK in attracting international students.

### **What are the overall aims of the project?**

The main aim of the International Student Tracking Study (ISTS) is to improve the sector's knowledge of what international students do after they complete their UK programmes; what affects their decision making, what their future intentions are towards the UK and what their experiences of studying in the UK were.

It will also seek to identify an appropriate method for collecting this information from international graduates year-on-year.

### **Is the ISTS an international version of the existing DLHE survey?**

Currently the national Destination of Leavers from Higher Education study run by HESA does not cover non-EU international leavers within the target population. The outcomes of the ISTS will be used to assess the *feasibility* of including international graduates in future iterations of the DLHE survey conducted by HESA, rather than being a fully developed international version of the existing DLHE survey.

i-graduate aim to replicate the processes used for the existing DLHE where possible to allow comparability of the data, but during this pilot stage it may not be feasible to fully replicate the DLHE study.

### **What stakeholder groups are involved in the project?**

In addition to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) who have commissioned the project, the Steering Group also includes representation from Universities UK, the UK Border Agency, Research Councils UK, and the Higher Education Statistics Agency, who will all provide input and guidance into the project development.

### **Which HEIs will be invited to participate?**

All Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom will be invited by i-graduate to participate in the ISTS in 2010. The Department and i-graduate are very keen to encourage all institutions to

participate, so that the information obtained can be used to build a picture across the UK and allow all HEIs to benchmark their position across the sector.

### Is participation compulsory?

Participation in the ISTS is not compulsory for HEIs in 2010 or 2011. However, we would encourage all HEIs to take part in the project, in order for the sector to build a national picture of the destinations of international leavers. If in future years the existing DLHE process is extended to include all graduates (domestic and international) then it will be useful for HEIs to have had previous experience of contacting and surveying their international leavers through participation in the ISTS and to have some information from the pilot wave to act as an initial benchmark.

### Which graduates will be invited to answer the survey in 2010?

Feedback to the consultation phase has indicated that 6 months after completion of studies may be too early to be a meaningful representation of graduate career outcomes.

BIS has agreed to fund a two cohort study at no additional cost to institutions, in order to gather both short term data which is comparable with the existing DLHE process, and a longer term picture regarding the career outcomes of non-EU. In April 2010, i-graduate will ask participating institutions to contact the following two cohorts of non-EU international graduates:

#### Early cohort

- Undergraduate students who completed their studies between January and June 2009
- Postgraduate students who completed their studies between August and December 2009

#### Later cohort

- Undergraduate students who completed their studies between January and June 2007
- Postgraduate students who completed their studies between August and December 2007

Participating institutions will need to ensure that email contact details for the two cohorts are in place ahead of the launch date in order for the survey to be launched.

### What is the intended timeframe for the ISTS in 2010?

i-graduate will invite HEIs to conduct the survey of non-EU international undergraduate and postgraduate leavers in 2010. The anticipated timeframes for this study are as follows:

Action	Timeframe
Consultation with UK HEIs	December 2009 – February 2010
Questionnaire development and liaison with HEIs	January – March 2010
Fieldwork – ISTS survey launched	April – May 2010
Analysis and report writing	May – June 2010
Reporting	Autumn 2010

### **What does the process involve for my institution?**

Feedback to the consultation phase has indicated that many institutions do not have the resource to undertake a full replica of the DLHE process for international graduates. Therefore, the survey will be launched by email only and institutions will not be asked to run postal or telephone surveys in the pilot year.

Participating institutions will receive an invitation email text containing an institution-specific hyperlink to the online survey. Participating institutions will need to send one invitation email and one reminder email to the two non-EU graduate cohorts. i-graduate will provide all tools to launch the survey including suggested email invitation text.

Through our comprehensive set of online survey software, i-graduate collects all survey responses. Data coding, cleaning, collation and analysis is conducted in-house by our experienced Analysis Team.

### **What information will be captured from international graduates?**

The ISTS questionnaire will capture the 'core' information from the existing DLHE questionnaire but also include a number of other areas of interest.

Topics covered by the ISTS questionnaire include: occupational type and industry, earnings; further study; location of graduate; factors influencing the decision to remain in the UK after graduation; experience of the visa system; expectations/intentions of future links with the UK and with the HEI; experience of study in the UK.

The questionnaire instrument has been agreed with BIS using feedback from the consultation phase.

### **Will the data gathered be available for my institution to analyse/use?**

HEIs will receive aggregated data from their own international graduate respondents and an aggregated comparator data set from other participating HEIs in the form of a comparative UK Index.

Respondents will also be asked if their response can be identified to them and passed back to the institution alongside their name and email address. HEIs will receive reporting of individual-by-individual records should the graduate agree to this information being passed back.

The ISTS will be run on the basis that no individual HEI's data or individual graduate can be identified in any reports published as a result of this study.

### **Will institutions have to pay to participate in the ISTS?**

There will be no registration cost to HEIs who wish to participate in the ISTS. Institutions will be invited to participate in the study and contact their international leavers to respond to the survey.

By taking part, HEIs will receive reporting both their own data set of international destination data, and aggregated data from other participating HEIs.

### **Will data from my institution's graduates be published?**

Data from individual HEIs will not be published by BIS, as the purpose of the study is to measure the level of non-EU graduate employment and information about that employment at a national level and reporting of the study will not be at an institutional level. However, BIS cannot guarantee that no individual institution data will enter the public domain as it is possible that institutions may be asked to disclose their individual data to outside interested parties via requests under the provisions of Freedom of Information Act.

### **Will the survey be translated into other languages?**

During this pilot phase of the International Student tracking Study i-graduate do not foresee the survey will be translated into any other language than English. Translation of the survey into other languages will be considered for future iterations of the project.

### **Will students who studied in different modes e.g. distance learners/franchise learners etc. be included?**

We welcome input from HEIs during the consultation phase regarding the possibility of including graduates who studied in different modes (e.g. franchise/distance learners) within the ISTS process. At the planning stage, we do not foresee such student groups being included in the process.

### **Will data from the ISTS be linked back to the HESA student record?**

i-graduate have investigated the feasibility of linking data to the HESA Student IDs in the 2010 pilot study. In order to ease the burden on HEIs, we have decided not to link to the HESA Student Record this year as the linking process is time consuming and costly. We appreciate this has certain limitations upon the data but within the questionnaire we will include demographic information to allow meaningful analysis. Respondents will be asked if their response can be identified to them and passed back to the institution alongside their name and email address.

### **My institution already conducts an international version of the DLHE process. Will this study duplicate/affect this work?**

The purpose of the ISTS study is to find a solution that works for all institutions and is relevant to international graduates, without duplicating or disregarding good work that is already being done.

If your HEI already survey your international leavers, we will seek to work closely with you, to draw on your experience. We would also be interested to know whether you are willing to share data from your institution, to inform the ISTS in return for aggregated reporting of the UK-wide results.

Should your institution already conduct an international version of the DLHE process with non-EU graduates at 6 months after study completion, there is the option to run the survey for the later cohort only. Please contact us to discuss this option.

### **Will the ISTS run again in 2011?**

i-graduate will invite HEIs to conduct the survey of non-EU international undergraduate & postgraduate leavers in 2011. The anticipated timeframes for this study are as follows:

Action	Timeframe
Fieldwork	January – April 2011
Phase 3 analysis	March – June 2011
Reporting to HEIs	Autumn 2011

### How can my institution participate in the ISTS?

Over the coming weeks, i-graduate will be making contact directly with all HEIs in the UK to ask you to participate in the ISTS. If you would like to register your interest in the meantime, please [register online](#).

### Contact us

If your question isn't answered here and you have a query about the ISTS, please contact:

Jess Davison ([jess.davison@i-graduate.org](mailto:jess.davison@i-graduate.org)) or Cathy Riley ([cathy.riley@i-graduate.org](mailto:cathy.riley@i-graduate.org)) and we will be happy to help answer your query.