

Higher Education Institutions Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins – Readership survey September 2019

This report summarises the views expressed in response to a survey of readers of the Department for the Economy’s Higher Education Institutions Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins and their associated web documents, conducted in September 2019.

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Background

Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education) within the Department for the Economy (DfE) is responsible for the collection, quality assurance, analysis and publication of statistics on enrolments and qualifications gained at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), focusing particularly on Northern Ireland (NI) HEIs and NI domiciled students at UK HEIs.

The Branch produces annual statistical bulletins providing information on enrolments of and qualifications gained by NI students at UK HEIs and all students at NI HEIs. In addition to the bulletins themselves, several associated web documents are published, including detailed Excel tables and infographics. All of these can be found at the links below.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-enrolments>

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-qualifications>

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice](#) for Statistics.

We conducted the readership survey to allow us to understand the needs of users and to give them an opportunity to help shape future content.

Respondent Profile

Surveys issued: **47**

Fully completed responses: **22**

Incomplete responses: **2** (both answered Q1 only)

Response rate (fully completed responses only): **47%**

Details

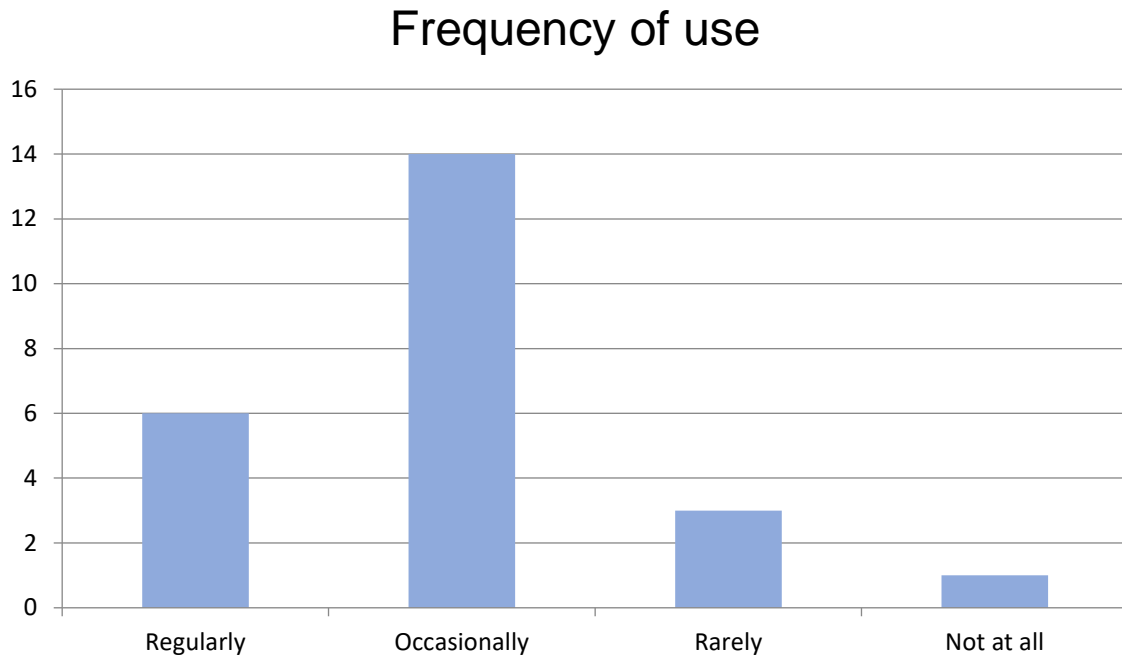
The readership survey was launched through SurveyMonkey on 10th September 2019 and ended on 25th September 2019. It was sent to 47 people on our mailing list, which is based on customers who had submitted a query on HEI statistics over the previous two years; of these, 23 were external users.

Respondents were asked 7 questions (see Annex A), which focused on the key uses of the statistics, the elements used most often and suggestions for improvements. In addition, users were consulted on a proposed change to the format of the bulletins.

In total, 24 people responded to the survey, consisting of 13 internal and 11 external users. As 2 of these responses were incomplete (see Q1 below), the 'fully completed' response rate was 47%.

Q1. Frequency of Use

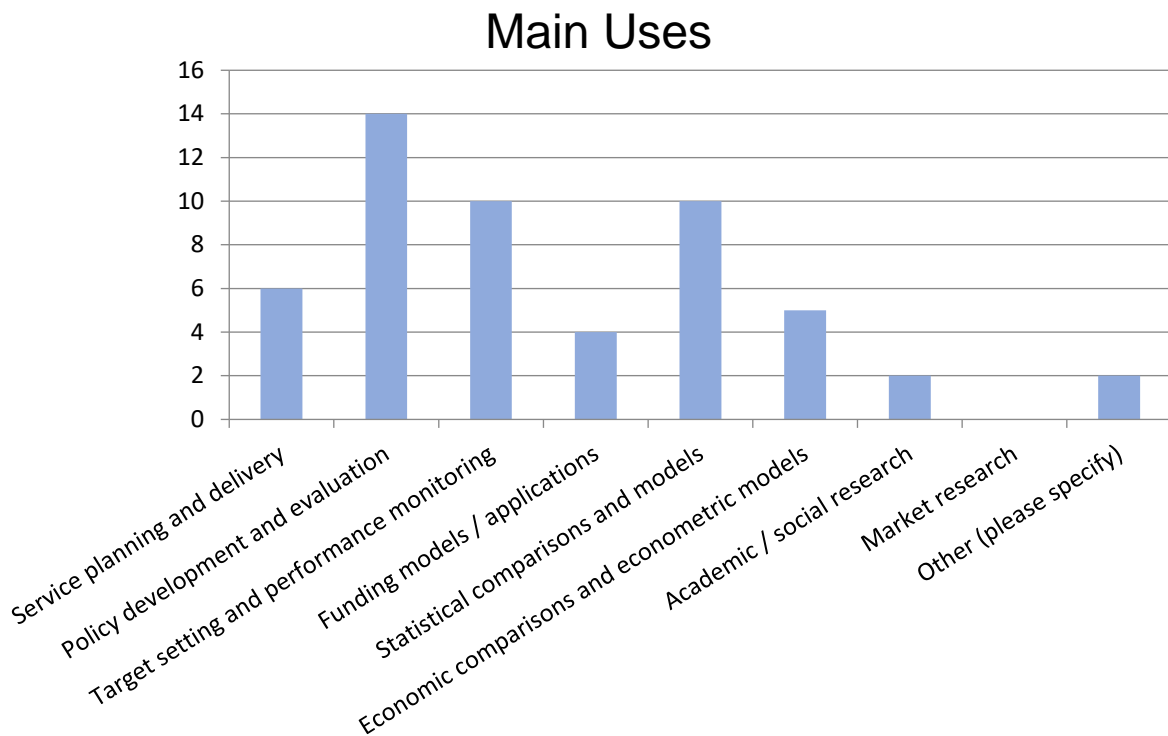
- The majority of respondents indicated that they use these statistics ‘Occasionally’ (14), followed by those who use them ‘Regularly’ (6).



- If a person responded ‘Not at all’, they were taken straight to the final question, which asked whether they would like to be retained on the mailing list. One person gave a ‘Not at all’ response, while one additional person skipped the rest of the questions. Therefore, the summaries of responses to the remaining questions will be based on the 22 people who answered these.

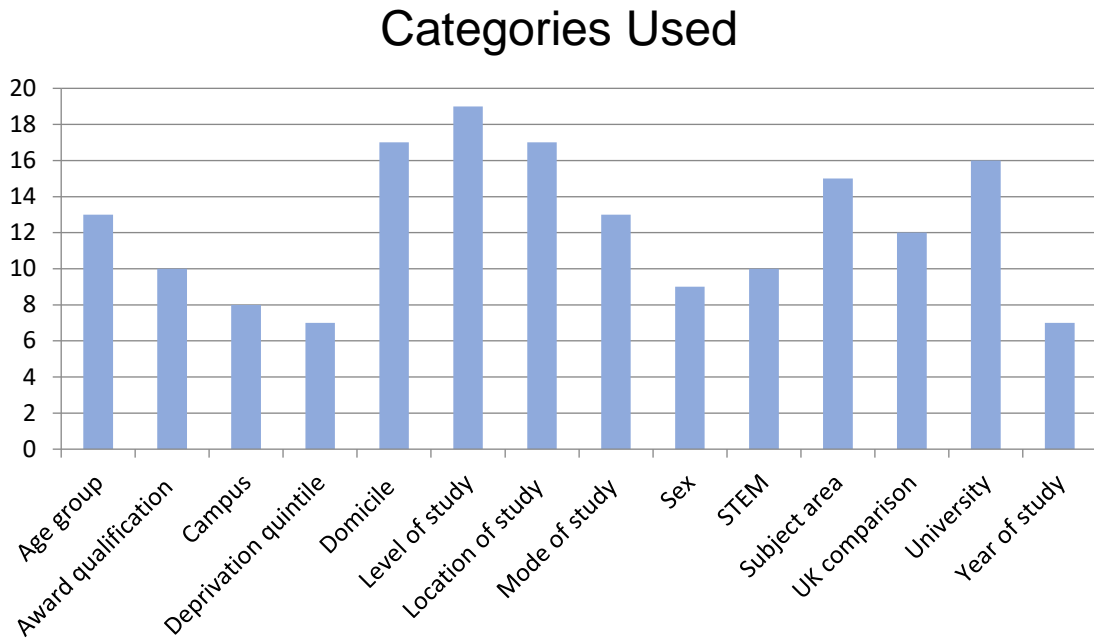
Q2. Main Uses of the Statistics

- In order to tell us more about the profile of users, respondents were asked about their main uses of the statistics.
- The most popular options were 'Policy development and evaluation' (14), 'Target setting and performance monitoring' (10) and 'Statistical comparison and models' (10). No one selected 'Market Research'.
- Of the 2 respondents who chose 'Other', one had used the statistics in the delivery of training to professionals and the parents of children and young people with autism, while the other had used them for community planning.
- Together, these findings suggest that both internal and external users are using these statistics for practical purposes and to inform decision making.



Q.3 Categories Used

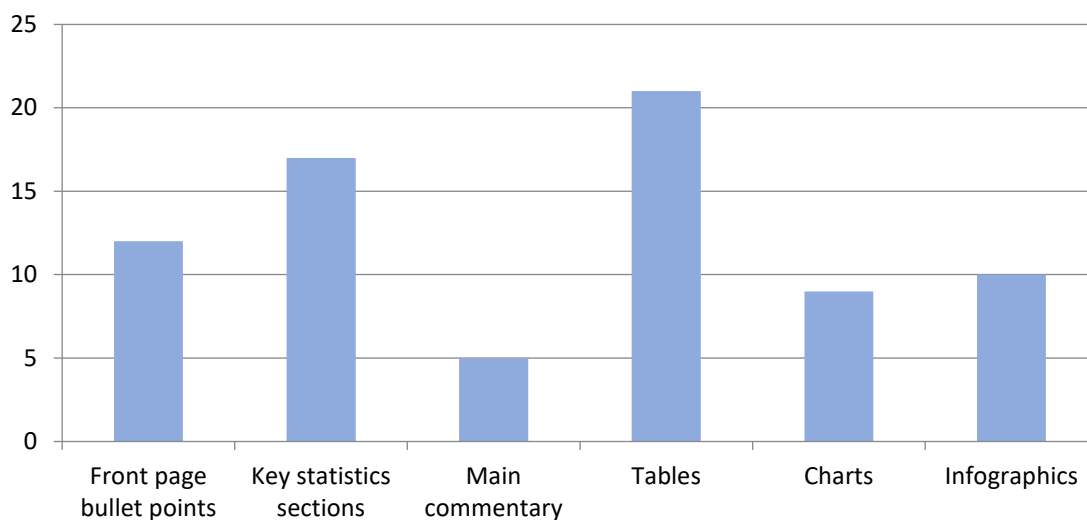
- Within the Enrolments and Qualifications statistics, figures are broken down by a number of different variable categories. Respondents were asked to indicate which of these they use most often.
- The responses showed that all categories are being used to some degree, with the most popular being level of study (by 19 respondents), domicile (17), location of study (17), university (16) and subject area (15).



Q4. Most Useful Aspects

- The content of the bulletins and their associated web pages can be broken down into a number of key areas. Users were asked which they identified as being the most useful.
- 21 respondents indicated the spreadsheet tables are the most useful aspect of the statistics, followed by the key statistics sections (17) and the front page bullet points (12). In contrast, only 5 people chose the main commentary; perhaps reflected in the answer to the next question asking whether a reduction in the commentary would be supported.
- Given the increasing focus on visualisation of statistics, it seems surprising that the charts (9) and infographics (10) were not more popular choices.

Most useful aspects of bulletins and associated web pages



Q5. Proposed changes to bulletin

- Users were consulted on whether a proposed reduction in the length of the commentaries in favour of summaries of the main points would continue to meet their needs.
- All 22 respondents indicated they are content for the suggested changes to be made to the publication.

Q6. Suggested Improvements

- This was a free text field that allowed respondents to propose improvements to the coverage or quality of the statistics.
- Of the four respondents who suggested improvements, two requested additional breakdowns on religion and NI domiciles in NI institutions.
- As the Enrolments and Qualifications publications already contain some information on NI domiciles in NI institutions, we wish to consider what additional information would be useful or if there is a way of modifying the existing information to make it more accessible. Our preferred solution would be interactive tables, allowing users to apply filters for country of domicile and provider. However, ongoing website compatibility issues with such a solution may, instead, necessitate the production of additional standard tables.
- Information on religion of students is published in an [equality fact sheet](#) at a later stage in the year. Further clarification with the user indicates their comment relates primarily to the lack of availability of religion data for NI domiciles at GB HEIs. This is an ongoing issue, which relates primarily to the different equality legislation in place in GB, in particular the unavailability of a Christian denomination breakdown for HEIs in England. While we will continue to highlight this issue, we wish to explore the potential for data sharing with the Department of Education, possibly as part of discussions around the creation of a Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset.
- Another respondent requested clearer commentary on widening participation. At present, much of this information is published in our [fact sheets](#) and [performance indicators](#). While timing of availability of data can be a factor, we will consider the potential to include additional widening participation information in the Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins.
- The remaining response asked for more detailed analysis of trends. However, further clarification indicated that this comment related to the descriptions around the benchmarking outputs in the [performance indicators](#) published later in the year and not the Enrolments and Qualifications publications.

Q7. Retention on mailing list

- All except one respondent said they would like to be kept on the mailing list.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

We wish to thank our readers for taking time to give constructive feedback and helpful suggestions. We will give careful consideration to each response as we seek to improve the coverage and quality of our statistics on HEI Enrolments and Qualifications. In light of recent staff changes, our scope to make substantial improvements to the 2018/19 editions of the bulletins has been limited. While we have adopted some 'quick wins', we will discuss the feasibility of possible options with DfE policy colleagues before drawing up an action plan for the 2019/20 editions.

FURTHER ENQUIRIES

For further information please contact:

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1. How often do you use our HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins and associated web pages?

- Regularly
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Not at all

2. What do you use our HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistics for? (Please select **all** that apply.)

- Service planning and delivery
- Policy development and evaluation
- Target setting and performance monitoring
- Funding models/applications
- Economic comparisons and econometric models
- Academic/social research
- Market research
- Other (please specify)

3. Which of the following categories of HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistics do you use? (Please select **all** that apply.)

- Age group
- Award qualification (e.g. 2:1)
- Campus
- Deprivation quintile
- Domicile (e.g. Northern Ireland)
- Level of study (e.g. postgraduate)
- Location of study (e.g. GB)
- Mode of study (e.g. part-time)
- Sex
- STEM/non-STEM
- Subject area
- UK comparison
- University/College
- Year of study (e.g. first)

4. Which aspects of our HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins and associated web pages do you find most useful? (Please select **all** that apply.)

- Front page bullet points
- Key statistics section
- Main commentary
- Tables
- Charts
- Infographics

5. We are considering improving the accessibility and relevance of our bulletins by reducing the length of the commentary and focusing on providing summaries of the main points, while continuing to provide our wide range of statistical tables. Would you be content with a reduction in the length of the commentary?

- Yes
- No

6. What improvements, if any, would you like to see in order to enhance the coverage or quality of our HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins?

7. Would you like to be retained on our mailing list for future HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins?

- Yes
- No