Tracking of graduate degree holders in Europe

Lesley Wilson
Secretary General, European University Association
CGS Annual meeting, Friday, 6 December 2013
1. Why tracking?

- A decade of reforms in Europe, more students at master and doctoral level, greater diversity
- Greater emphasis on learning outcomes, skills and competences, and employability – also outside of academia for doctoral holders
- Pressure to demonstrate impact and results
- EUA carried out 3 projects on the topic
  - ‘Tracking Learners and Graduates Progression Paths’ – Track-It
  - Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – ARDE
  - Doc-CAREERS – 2 projects (2008 and 2013)
2. - Tracking: for what purposes?

- The development of indicators helps to improve institutional and system level performance

- The data collected:
  - Contributes to strategic policy development at institutional level
  - Can also be used for institutional research purposes
  - Feeds into QA/accreditation process

**Can also be helpful for:**

- Identifying ‘blind spots’, e.g. International student mobility, lifelong learners etc.; and students at risk
- Providing information on graduate/doctoral level employability or/and drop outs
3.- How widespread is graduate tracking?

- In 28 of 31 HE systems surveyed some HEIs reported tracking graduate careers; in 7 countries all HEIs track their graduates.
- These are recent developments: approaches, methodologies and technical possibilities are still being developed.
- Graduate tracking requires considerable resources to ensure good response rates, more structured relations with employers & better synergies with fledgling alumni services.
- Monitoring careers of doctoral holders depends on the existence of structured doctoral programmes.
4. In summary

Graduate tracking

- No tracking between the first and the second cycle
- Graduate tracking requires substantial resources to ensure good response rates
- Link to alumni relations – also new for European universities

Tracking of doctoral candidates

- Depends on the existence of structured doctoral programmes
- Under development
- Long experience only in the UK: tracking of doctorate holder careers
5. - Tracking of Doctoral Degree holders

- Growing in importance as greater numbers of doctoral holders find employment outside of academia
- Becoming an important means of monitoring career development and also possible (mis)match between training, career profiles and skills needs
- Responsibility lies with the growing number of Graduate/Doctoral Schools in Europe
- Important for universities and funding bodies – not only EUA but also the ESF has published a study on perspective funding organisations
- OECD has also just produced a thorough analysis of careers of doctoral holders > labour market and mobility statistics
6. Main project results: Career Development and Tracking

- Growth in career development services that also use surveys as a feedback mechanism, e.g. UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey – but measures satisfaction vis-à-vis expectations
- Employer feedback also mentioned as good practice especially in the context of growing collaborative university /private sector (often national) initiatives
- 30% of respondents (112) reported using ‘careers of doctorate holders’ as an indicators in internal & external evaluations – risks lie in sample size
- Only 23% do systematic tracking & only 12 univs had been doing tracking for 4 + years after graduation
7. Outcomes from collaboratives schemes

- Growth in the numbers of collaborative PhD projects & programmes between academia and industry in recent years through the development of new support schemes.
- Some 50% of doctoral degree holders work outside academia.
- Consensus that doctoral holders from collaborative schemes are more employable in the business sector than those from traditional programmes because of:
  - Their ability to be ‘bilingual’, bridging the academic and business sectors and cultures.
  - The development of ‘transferable skills’.
8. Additional feedback from focus groups

- Systematic tracking is challenging, costly and time-consuming
- Many rely on social networks such as LinkedIn to keep in touch with alumni
- Tracking is often linked to the establishment of Alumni relations, relatively new for European universities
- Tracking as a performance indicator can be risky in all but the largest institutions given the size of the cohort
- EUA’s 3 projects underlined the value of tracking as a feedback mechanism for institutions in strategic decision-making rather than a performance indicator
Thank you for your attention

www.eua.be/eua-projects

- TRACK-IT – Tracking Learners and Graduates Progression Paths
- DOC-CAREERS and DOC CAREERS II
- ARDE – Accountable Research Environments for Doctoral Education