

# Surveying Graduates in Ireland

Good Response Rates – 20 March 2021

Valerie Harvey  
Head of Performance Evaluation  
Higher Education Authority (Ireland)

# Outline

## Today's Presentation

- Graduate Outcomes Survey
  - What it is and how it works
  - Results
- Factors that influence response rates
  - Contact details and approach
  - Survey length
  - Promotion and communication
  - Stakeholder engagement



# Graduate Outcomes Survey

## How was it developed?

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

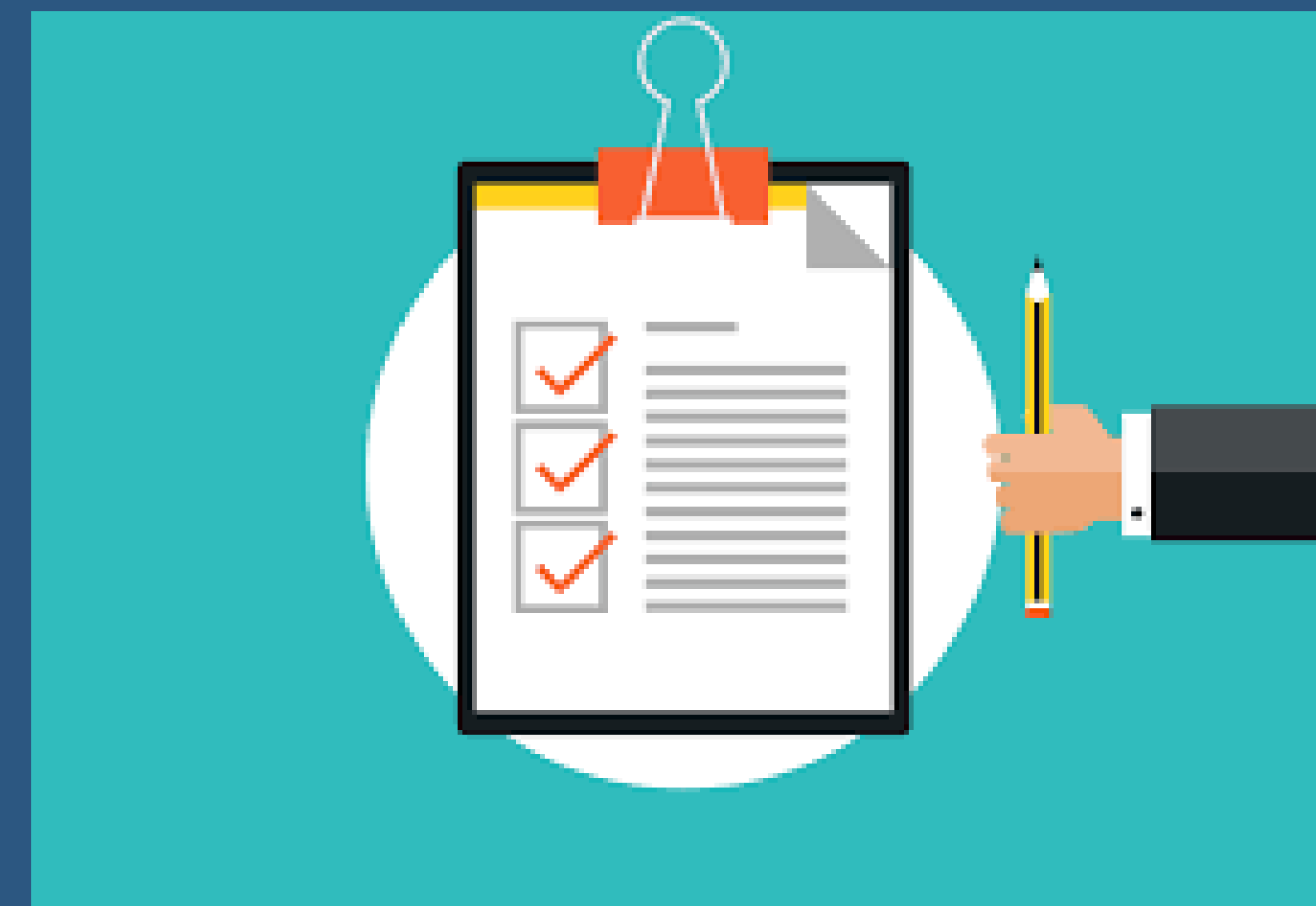
- Current **Graduate Outcomes Survey** was introduced in 2018
- 2015: Set up steering group and subgroups (survey, implementation)
  - Consulted across HEIs, and at different levels within HEIs, both strategic/senior buy in, also those in implementation (Careers, IT/MIS, Data Protection, Communications)
  - Consulted with Ministry, other state agencies
  - Survey design agreed in December 2015
  - Implementation addressed over 2016-2017
- Gave HEIs the opportunity for a pilot year of survey in 2017
- Slow approach to build trust and cooperation



# Graduate Outcomes Survey

## What is it?

- **Coordinated** by Higher Education Authority
- Single national survey for all graduates
- Annual, nine months after graduation (31 March census date)
- Short survey (max. 16 questions), personal details embedded in survey
- Carried out by each HEI in Ireland **locally**
- Fieldwork happens in Spring/Summer of each year



GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



# Graduate Outcomes Survey

## What is it?

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



- Managed by careers offices in each HEI
- Careers offices contact graduates of the previous year, compile responses, and return data to the HEA by September of each year
- The HEA holds the national dataset and carries out national analysis
- HEIs use their own data for internal processes: quality assurance, programmatic review, marketing, alumni etc.
- HEA provides a small amount of funding to each HEI (€1 per graduate surveyed), this year we also provided additional funding to address costs arising from Covid



# How is the Survey carried out?

## How does it work?

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- Graduates are first contacted by emails/texts
  - Graduates are asked to follow a link or log in to their student system to access the survey
- If no response after a few texts/emails, HEIs then follow up with phone calls to graduates
- Determination to chase graduates!

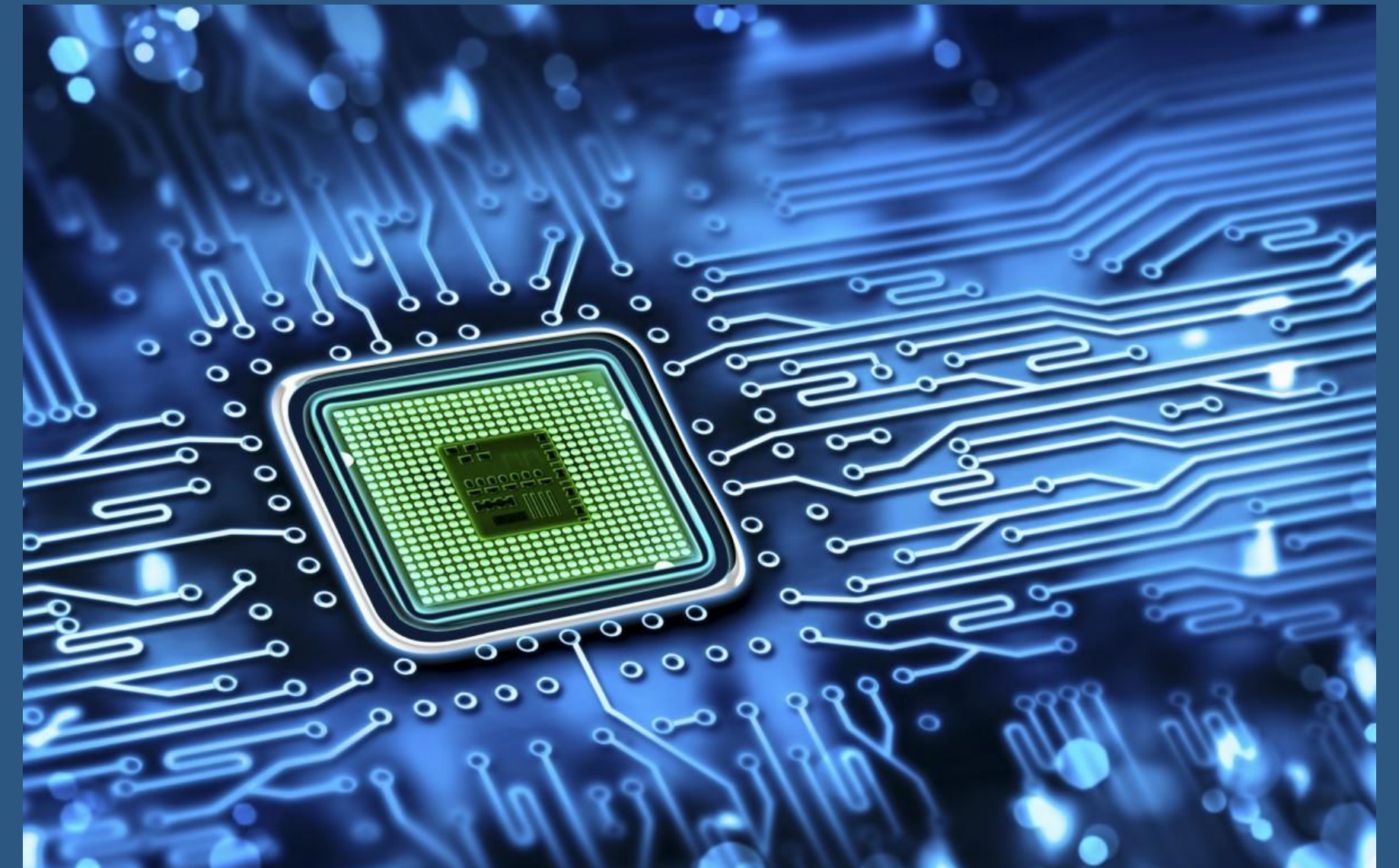




# Survey design

## 1. Personal data is embedded in responses

- Graduates' personal and course details are embedded in survey responses
- 15 fields are pre-recorded
- No need to ask age, gender, course studied, grade obtained, personal identifier etc.
- Can go straight to questions about what the graduate is doing now



GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



# Survey design

## 2. First main question directs to others



- First question: What are you doing now?
  - Employed?
  - In further study?
  - Unemployed?
  - Doing something else?
- Based on the answer to the first question, they get more questions about that activity



# Survey design

## 3. Detailed questions about (a) employment

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- If the graduate says they are in employment...
  - 14 questions about their job
  - 12 factual (should be easy to answer) – job title, type of occupation (list of options), type of job sector (list of options), location, type of employment, contract type, salary, did you do a work placement during college and how long did it last, how did you find out about the job
  - 2 reflective - relevance of course to job and did you need your qualification to get the job
  - [hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/)





# Survey design

## 3. Detailed questions about (b) further study



- If the graduate says they are in further study...
  - 8 questions about their course
  - 7 factual – location, name of HEI, title of course, area of study (list of options), award level (list of options), on campus/distance
  - 1 reflective – reasons for undertaking further study
  - [hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/)



# Survey design

## 3. Detailed questions about (c) unemployment



- If the graduate says they are unemployed...
  - 2 questions on unemployment
  - 1 factual – have you held a job since graduation (list of options)
  - 1 reflective – what are the barriers to employment/further study (open question)
- [hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/)

# Survey design

## 3. Detailed questions about (d) other activity

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- If the graduate says they are doing something else...
  - 2 questions on doing something else
  - 1 factual – what is that activity (list of options)
  - 1 reflective – what are the barriers to employment/further study (open question)
- [hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/)





# Survey design

## 4. Final question

- 1 final question on reflections
- 1 reflective – would you study the same course again
- Options for 4 others (reflective) – not compulsory, HEIs can add if they want
- [hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/)



GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



# Survey design

The Graduate Outcomes Survey is short!

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

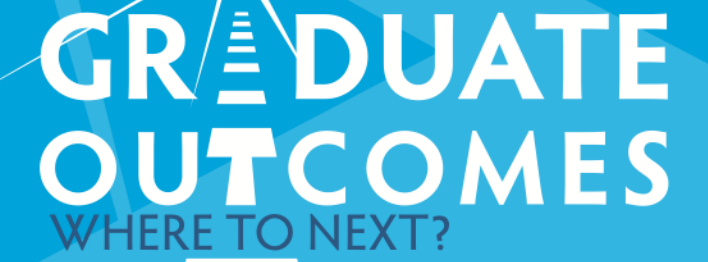
- The max number of compulsory questions on the survey is 16!





# Results

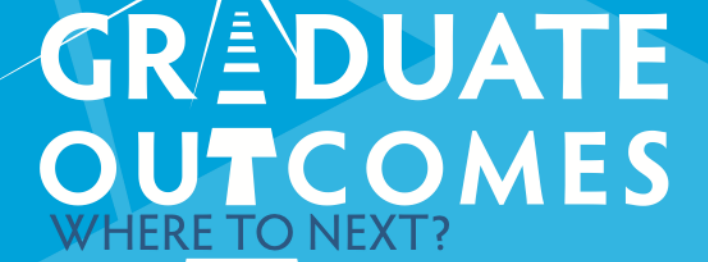
## Some key results from our most recent survey...



- For **honours degree** graduates, all fields of study:
  - 75% were working or due to start work (67% full-time, 6% part-time and 1% due to start);
  - 19% were engaged in further study (17% full-time and 1% part-time);
  - 4% were unemployed;
  - and 3% were engaged in a range of other activities.
- 91% of those employed were working in Ireland, with 46% of those in Dublin.
- 69% said they were likely or very likely to study the same course again

# Results

## Some key results from our most recent survey...



- For **postgraduate research** graduates, all fields of study:
  - 88% were working or due to start work (81% full-time, 7% part-time and 1% due to start);
  - 4% were engaged in full-time further study;
  - 5% were unemployed;
  - and 3% were engaged in a range of other activities.
- 84% of those employed were working in Ireland, with 43% of those in Dublin.
- 66% said they were likely or very likely to study the same course again.



# Graduate Outcomes Survey

## Good Response Rates

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



- Response rate nationally is 50%, though varies from HEI to HEI
- Good response rates dependent on:
  - Good contact details (discussed previously!)
  - Use of multiple modes of contact: text, email, phone contact, social media
  - Survey length
  - Promotion and communication
  - Valuing and disseminating results
  - Engaging stakeholders

# Good contact details

## Recap!

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- Student Information Systems as basis for contact details
  - Contain HEI email address, personal email address, postal address, home phone number, mobile phone number etc.
- These need to be updated for those about to graduate
  - Request that final year students update details
  - At graduation, approach graduates for their updated details





# Multiple means of contact

## Recap!

- Email
  - Text
  - Phone calls
  - Social Media
- 
- Determination to contact graduates!

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



# Promotion and Communications

## National approach and social media

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

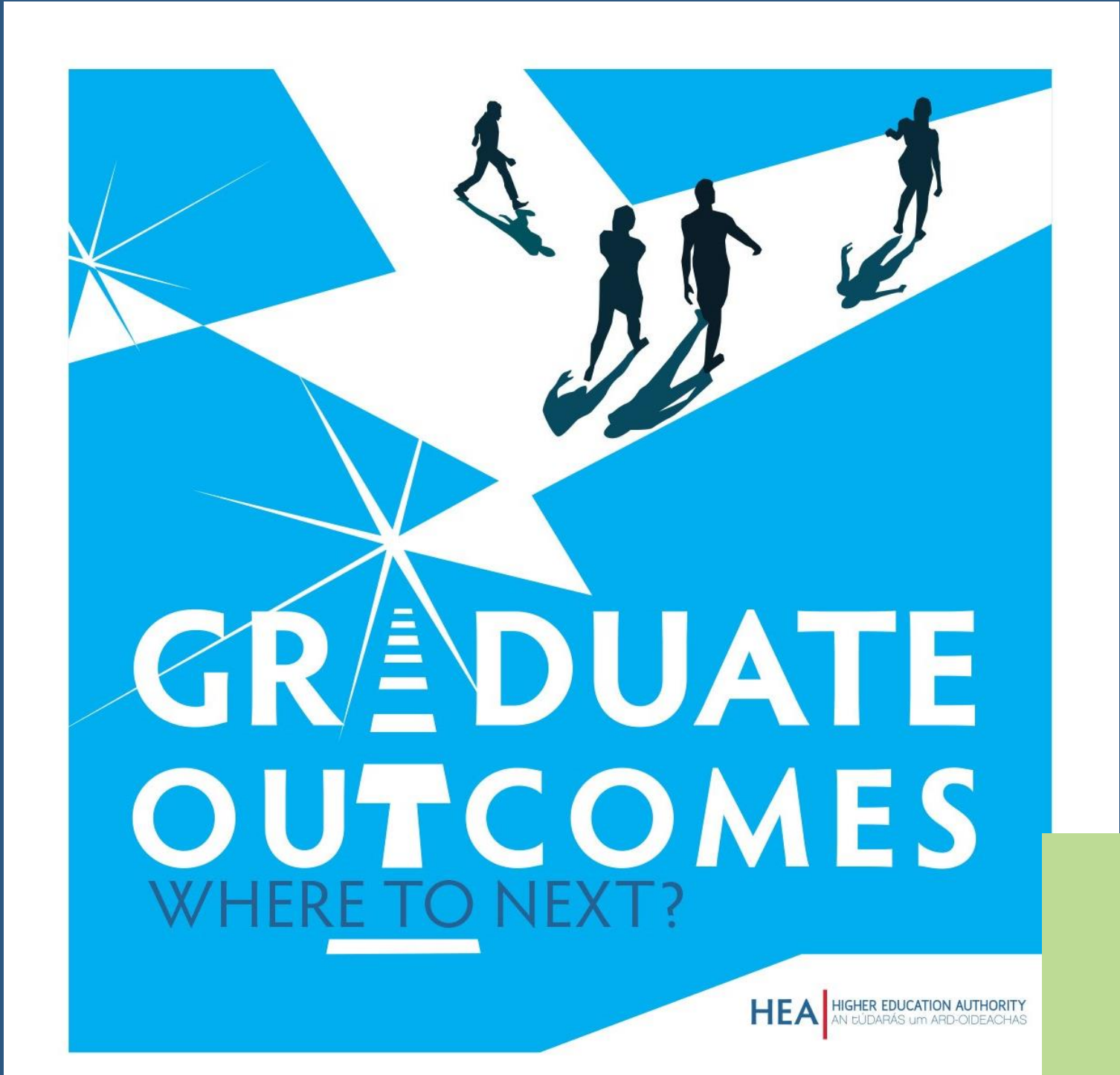


- Single national approach for branding / visual identity
  - All HEIs to use single branding approach
  - HEA - Communications officers have met to discuss
  - Online Social Media Toolkit made available to HEIs
- Reinforce to graduates that they are answering the **national** Irish survey
- Lean on graduate altruism, “paying it forward” to future graduates



# Social Media Toolkit

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?





# Social Media Toolkit

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

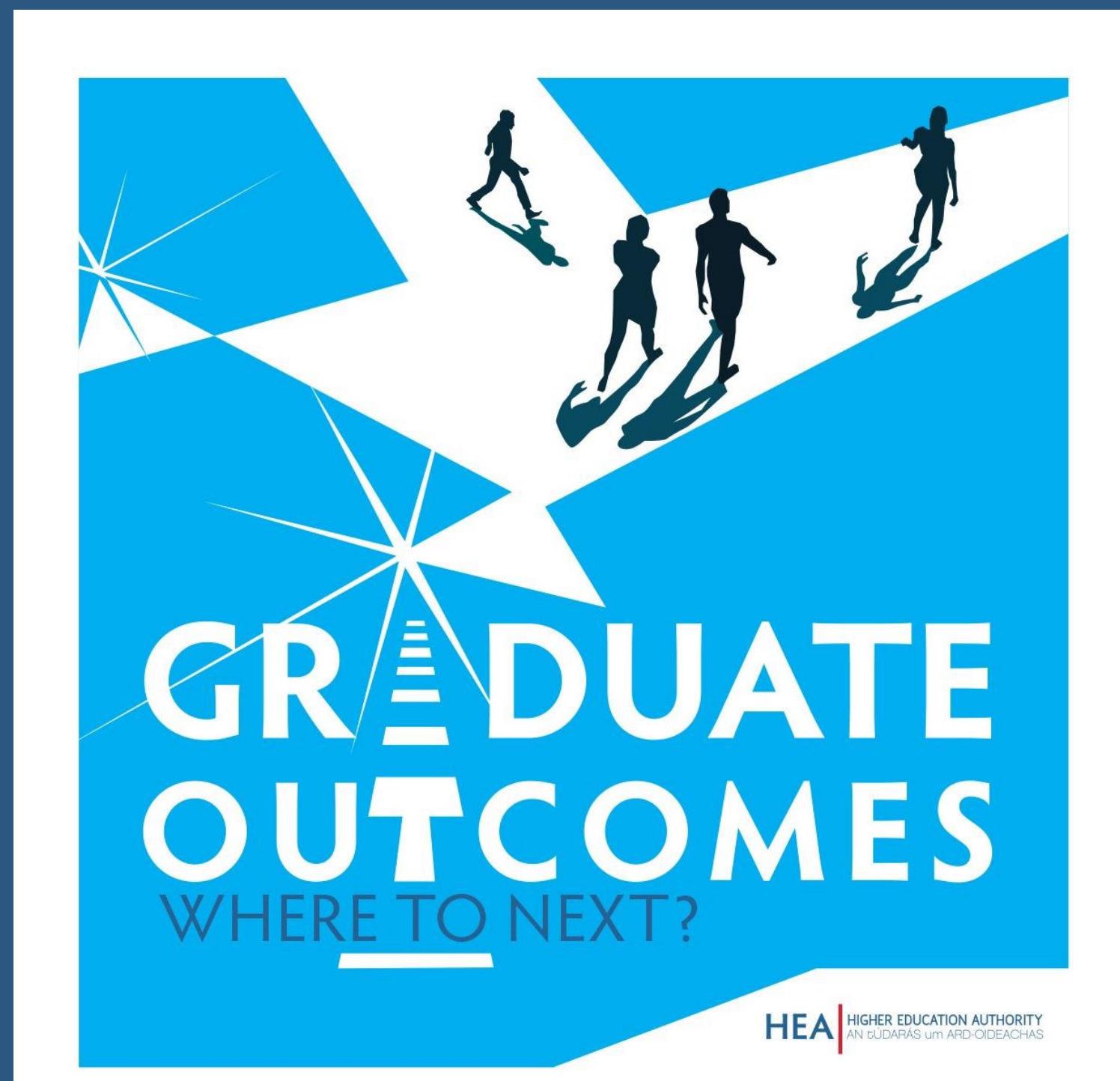




# Promotion and Communications

## National approach and social media

**GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES**  
WHERE TO NEXT?



- Online media toolkit [/hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/online-media-toolkit/](https://hea.ie/statistics/information-for-institutions/graduate-outcomes-survey/online-media-toolkit/)
- Social Media used to promote the survey
  - Twitter: @gradsurveyIRL
  - LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/showcase/hea-graduate-outcomes/](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/hea-graduate-outcomes/)
- Each HEI uses its own social media also

# Incentives

Do they work?

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?



- Be in with a chance to win....
- A voucher?
- An iPad?

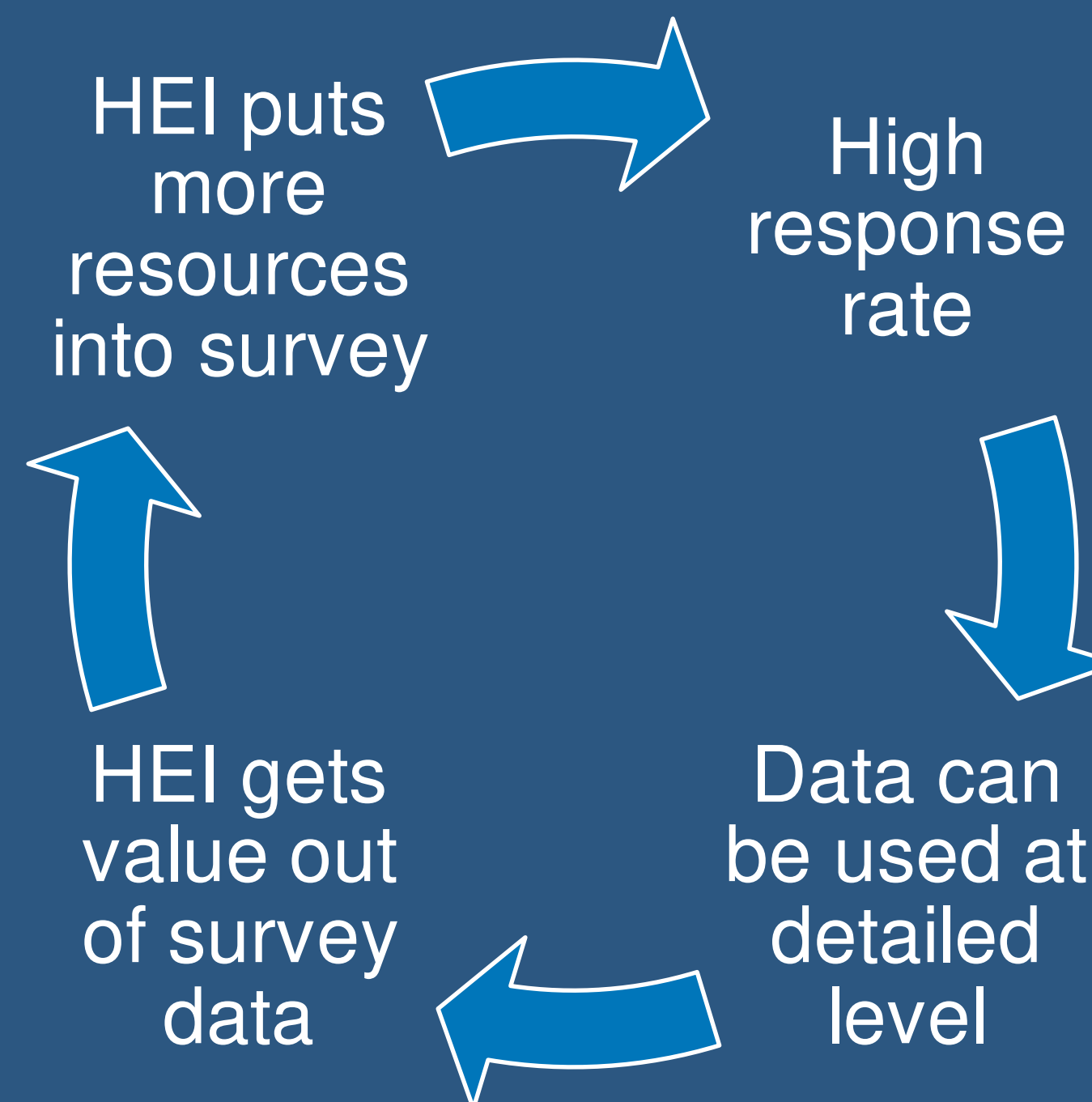


# Value of results

You get out of the survey what you put in...

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- Aim is for a virtuous cycle...
- The higher your response rate, the more value your HEI will get from the survey results
- Those HEIs with a high response rate report more value to the survey than those with a lower response rate



# Value of results

## Disseminating, sharing results

GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- HEA produces a national report, and shares data with the public at aggregate level
- Need to balance how much HEI-level data to produce
  - Need to ensure transparency, inform prospective students etc.
  - Avoid blunt rankings of HEIs or courses
  - At the moment, we have little HEI-level data but will produce more over time
  - [hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/graduate-outcome-data/classof20172018-mapofsalaries-byareaprofile/](https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/graduate-outcome-data/classof20172018-mapofsalaries-byareaprofile/)



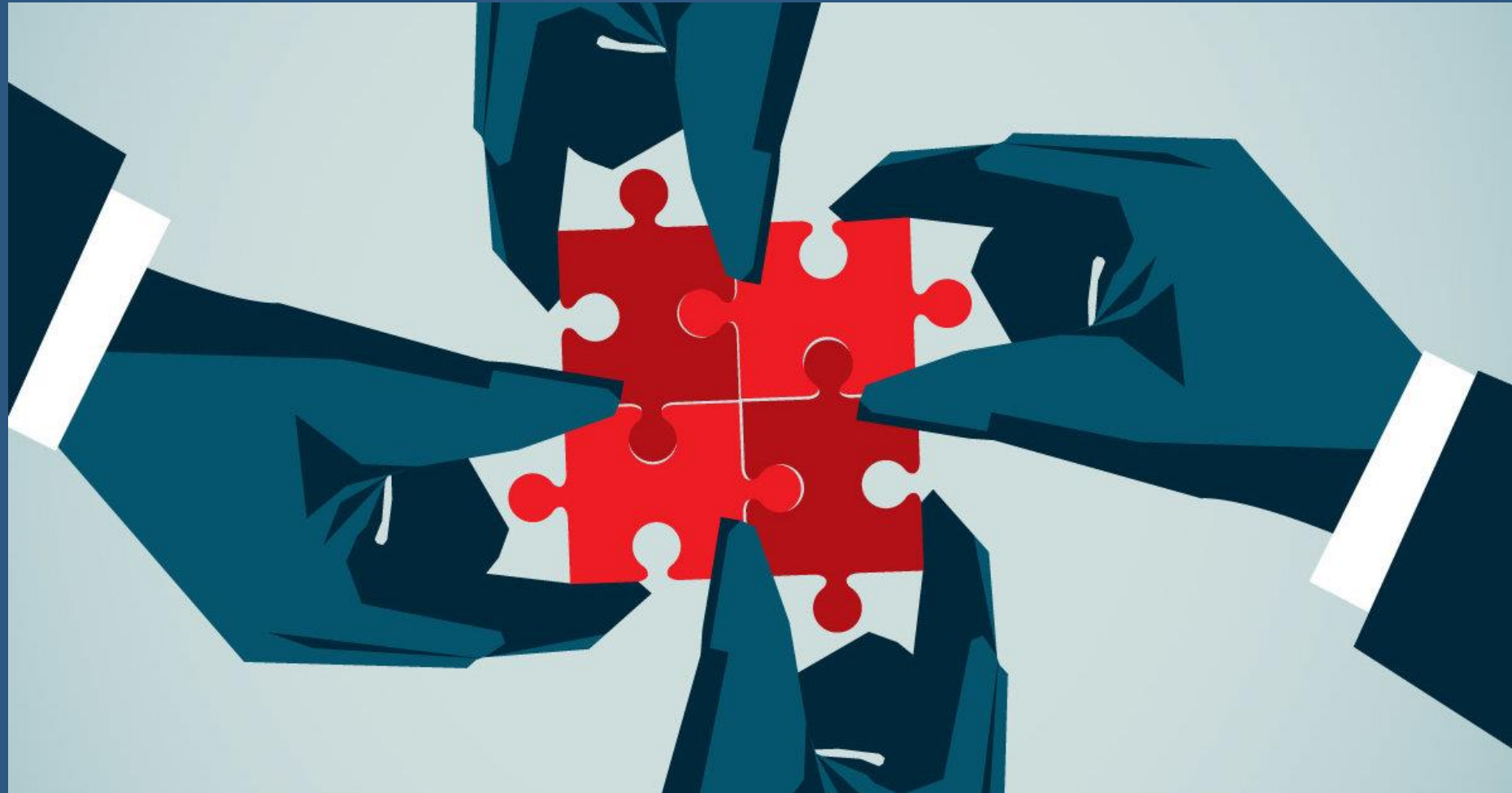


# Stakeholder engagement

## Partners in the national survey

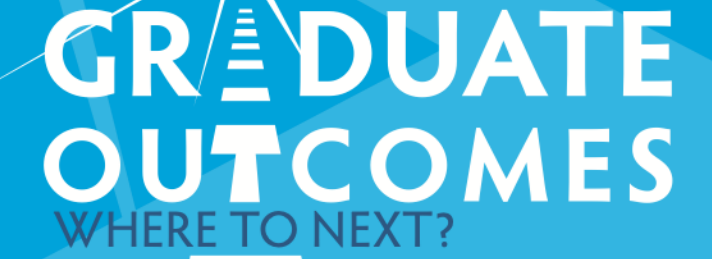
GRADUATE  
OUTCOMES  
WHERE TO NEXT?

- HEA works closely with:
  - HEIs: Careers officers, MIS/IT staff, data protection staff, communications officers
  - Sectoral representatives
  - Ministry for HE, other state agencies with responsibility for HE
  - National statistics agency
- We are all on the same team!



# Summary

## Response Rates



- Good response rates dependent on:
  - A good underlying contact database
  - Determination to contact your graduates using various means
  - A survey that is not too long (embed information you already have)
  - Consistent media approach – encourage recognition of the survey and value of responding
  - Buy-in to the value of the survey
  - Visible, usable results and data
  - Whole of HEI approach and good communication with stakeholders and colleagues




# Our contacts!

## Get in touch

- Web: [www.graduateoutcomes.ie](http://www.graduateoutcomes.ie)
- Twitter: @GradSurveyIRL
- Email: [graduatesurvey@hea.ie](mailto:graduatesurvey@hea.ie)
- LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/showcase/hea-graduate-outcomes/](https://linkedin.com/showcase/hea-graduate-outcomes/)





# GRADUATE OUTCOMES

WHERE TO NEXT?