

# Case Study: The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)

Accreditation body moves survey online, achieving higher quality results and reduced costs

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Since working with Presidion (formerly SPSS Ireland), the response rates of the First Destination Response survey have improved significantly. This year's survey achieved a response rate of 41% which increased dramatically from 25% in the previous year.

## SITUATION

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) is the national qualifications awarding body for third-level educational and training institutions outside the university sector in Ireland.

The role of HETAC is to develop, promote and maintain programmes of higher education and training leading to national awards that meet the needs and expectations of both Irish society and the international community.

HETAC aims to contribute to national economic prosperity, by ensuring the supply of people with the right qualifications at the right time. To achieve this goal, they must first understand and assess the employment path of previous students in order to make predictions about the future.

Up to 23,000 students are contacted annually to get an update on their current status, be it continuing with their study or going into employment. This survey is called the 'First Destination Response' (FDR) and reports must be delivered to HETAC, and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The final output from the process is the 'Where Graduates Go?' series of reports.

## CHALLENGE

Prior to working with Presidion (formerly SPSS Ireland), survey research was conducted by distributing paper questionnaires by post to each student. Collecting high quality data was a challenge as many of the questions were not answered correctly. In addition, the data collected had to be input manually, which increased the likelihood of errors in the transfer process.

Once all the data entry was complete, the laborious task of combining the survey data with the information available on the student from each college was a complex administrative job. This was made more complex through changing staff resources. The production of the reports took months and tied up people resources which in turn slowed down the evaluation process.

## At a Glance

County: Ireland  
Industry: Education  
Sector: Third level outside the Universities  
Employees: 33  
Learners: 22,418  
No. of reports: 16  
Web site: www.hetac.ie

## Application

Survey Creation /  
Deployment / analysis

## Solutions Used

SPSS-IBM Data Collection,  
SPSS-IBM Statistics,  
Presidion (formerly SPSS  
Ireland) Consultancy  
Services

*"We have been able to improve the quality of the First Destination Response survey significantly. By getting the student to give their feedback online not only saved us money but improved the quality of the answers. Doing this project in-house was taking up a huge amount of resources, especially when it came to restructuring the data files. Now, by using Presidion (formerly SPSS Ireland) expertise and their online survey capabilities, it was easier and faster to measure opinions".*

Ian McKenna, Head of  
Framework Awards at HETAC

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HETAC needed a solution which ensured high quality data would be collected from a greater number of students – and in a less expensive way. HETAC also wanted to speed up the time it took to compile their reports so that they could get the results faster.

## **SOLUTION**

Following a tender exercise, HETAC chose to work with Presidion (formerly SPSS Ireland) as it met all of their key requirements including: a secure log-in for respondents, the ability to use student data from other sources in the online-survey, appropriate question routing and the monitoring of the survey in real-time.

HETAC needed someone to manage not just the collection of the data, but also to combine it with student data from each institution, in order to produce a comprehensive report. They chose Presidion (formerly SPSS Ireland) because of its sophisticated data collection toolset and expertise in data analysis and reporting. In addition, they wanted to increase the value of the data for the Institutes of Technology and generate a series of reports specific to their needs.

The solution provided by SPSS included, designing the 'look and feel' of the online survey to ensure that it aligned with HETAC's corporate colours and logos on their website. SPSS was responsible for the data collection, validation, formatting and reporting of the online survey and production of several reports.

Data collected from the online survey needed to be restructured to meet the HEA's unique code book. Experienced SPSS-IBM consultants used SPSS-IBM Statistics Base and Modeler to make this complex task much more manageable. All processes were saved enabling automation and efficient reproduction of reports.

Presidion used automation techniques to quickly compile the reports for each academic institution.

Merging, manipulating and restructuring the data was straight-forward using its tools. Specific table looks were applied to all reports ensuring consistency and a professional appearance.

The CRISP methodology, the best practice industry standard for data collection, was adhered to during the entire project which ensured that risk was minimized throughout. This collaborative approach guaranteed that at each stage of the research process, the project was aligned with HETAC's overall objective.

## **RESULTS**

Since working with Presidion (formerly SPSS Ireland), the response rates of the First Destination Response survey have improved significantly. This year's survey achieved a response rate of 41% which increased dramatically from 25% in the previous year.

Significant cost savings were achieved by switching the data collection from paper questionnaires to an online survey. Costs associated with printing and posting the paper questionnaires was avoided.

Data restructuring and formatting was automated which resulted in the reduction in the time from data collection to reporting. The benefits of this will be immense in the coming years as the steps involved were recorded and can be reused easily.

Student feedback is now being collected faster than ever before. HETAC has been able to reduce the time needed to conduct the surveys from two months to a situation where almost 90% of student responses were collected within two weeks.



“The response rates and the quality of the survey are critical because we need to have an accurate picture of the path the student takes after their HETAC qualification. We succeeded in our first objective of having timely data available for the HEA. Secondly, we now are now providing the Institutes of Technology with accurate data on their graduate cohort, a task which we could not have undertaken before.” Ian continued. “Dimensions is an excellent tool that enables us to collect feedback in a timely manner and also deliver huge cost savings to the organisation.”