Evidence for Enhancement:
Improving the Student Experience

Developing Graduate Employability Support in Scotland

Interim Framework for Designing Graduate Support

June 2019

Report by the Developing Graduate Employability Support Cluster (collaborative authorship)

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Contents

1   Introduction

As students leave higher education and its familiarity, friends, peers and clear support structure, and begin to independently navigate a competitive and ever-changing labour market, often in a new and unfamiliar location, the demands can be significant. Establishing a more critical understanding of what creates and impacts on a successful transition for new graduates and, crucially, the role that career services could/should play, is central to ensuring graduate success.

The forthcoming introduction of the Graduate Outcomes survey (the replacement for the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey), which will survey all higher education graduates 15 months after completing their programme, is also a catalyst for higher education institutions (HEIs) to look again at how they continue to support graduates in the initial period after graduation. The 2016-17 DLHE data shows that 91% of leavers from HE providers in Scotland were either working or studying when surveyed six months after graduation, but 25% of those working were in roles classified as non-graduate level.[1]

Historically, careers services have provided a range of services to graduates of both their own and other institutions, but this provision varies significantly and budget pressures have led to the withdrawal or limiting of this service in some institutions. Careers services have also trialled various specialist initiatives to target recent graduates seeking work - ranging from intensive 'boot camps' and webinars to supported internship programmes - but these projects have consistently attracted low numbers of participants.

This consortium of five Scottish careers services have therefore undertaken a project to:

- optimise existing evidence by pooling the knowledge and small-scale data collected to date on the scope and effectiveness of targeted employability support for recent graduates

- engage with final-year students and recent graduates to improve understanding of the most suitable methods to support graduating students

- pilot and evaluate a range of support activities in participating institutions which will be open to graduates of any Scottish HEI.

This framework has been created to summarise the initial approach and findings of this project and introduce the key considerations and sources of evidence which could be used to identify graduate target groups. It summarises key information and challenge questions which can be applied in order to design, deliver and evaluate successful programmes to support transition into graduate-level employment for recent graduates of any HEI.

The framework has been designed by careers professionals based on the knowledge and understanding gained from interactions with thousands of individual students, graduates and employers. As well as providing a summary document for careers services, it can be used to inform university management, professional services teams (for example, alumni and development), strategic planning departments, academics and students' associations, of key issues in graduate employability and how they may impact on designing support initiatives. It should be used in parallel with the accompanying report which provides additional context and detailed examples of its application.

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[1] Higher Education Leavers Statistics: UK, 2016-17, HESA 2018. Available at www.hesa.ac.uk/news/28-06-2018/sfr250-higher-education-leaver-statistics

2   Identifying current internal support services

All Scottish HEIs offer direct employability and career management support to their recent graduates, but the ways in which this is delivered and the services on offer vary enormously. Institutions considering developing graduate support may wish to consider existing practice and linkages using the prompts below.

Questions	Examples	Specific details	Notes
Who currently offers services to graduates?	- alumni relations - careers service - discipline/school/faculty - IT services - students' association	- mentoring - advice and guidance - maintained networks - email access - appeals and issues	
Are services delivered at individual level?	- one-to-many - group-based - one-to-one	- websites - generic communications - social network - workshops - bootcamps - advice and guidance - mentoring	
Are there limitations on services available?	- duration - priority - limitations	- years after graduation - subject to current student demand - limited range of services available	
Are services available to all students?	- GDPR contact preferences - targeted groups - closed groups	- recorded within Alumni office - refer to section 3 for examples - by subject or another characteristic	

3   Sources of graduate destinations information

There is increasing interest in understanding and quantifying the impact of higher education on graduate destinations. Some of the main internal and external data sources currently used to measure employability and graduate prospects are summarised below. This is a complex area and all available measures have benefits and challenges, both in what they measure and how they are used.

Users may consider these data sources to gain information on graduate destinations and to identify particular groups of graduates who would benefit from additional targeted graduate support.

Data source	Key users	Further information	Notes
Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE**)**	• Unistats • What do graduates do? (WDGD) • Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)	• Comparable data available from HESA covering graduates of 11-12 to 16-17. • Quoted data usually based on the main activities self-reported by graduates six months after course completion. • Quoted data usually based on the results for full-time, home-domiciled, first degree graduates for whom a response rate of ~80% is obtained.	
Graduate prospects measures in UK league tables	• Complete University guide • Guardian • Times/Sunday Times	• Currently derived from DLHE data and based on the proportion of full-time, home-domiciled, first-degree graduates in professional level employment (defined as Standard Occupational Classification for the UK (SOC) codes 1-3) or further study six months after course completion.	

Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data	• TEF • media	• Combines information from Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs records to provide details of salaries of graduates working in the UK. Does not currently include details of self-employment, work location or working hours.	
Institutional destinations surveys	• HEIs	• Some HEIs carry out their own destinations surveys, at the point of graduation or at a later date.	
Individual and group contacts	• individuals • professional services units • academic departments	• Individual graduates stay in contact with their HEI in a variety of ways. For example, graduates may contact former tutors to act as references and graduating classes may maintain groups on social media to stay in contact	

Professional registration data	• academic departments	• There may be a formal requirement for graduates in professional disciplines to register with a professional body such as the General Teaching Council (GTC) or General Medical Council (GMC).	
Alumni records	• HEIs	• Following graduation, many former students opt in to register and maintain contact and employment details with alumni departments.	

4   Designing projects

Focus groups and interviews with final-year students and recent graduates from five Scottish HEIs indicated clear and consistent themes about their hopes and preferences for careers and employability support after graduation.[2] These are summarised below alongside indicative quotes which illustrate student and graduate views. We have combined these suggestions with our knowledge of the graduate labour market, and the recruitment practices of a variety of UK employers, to offer recommendations as to how these elements could be incorporated into graduate support projects.

Consideration	Indicative quote	Recommendations	Notes
Services personalised to degree pathway/ career areas of interest	*'a lot of the emails we get from the careers service aren't relevant to me at all. I'll get an email titled 'Internship opportunities' and it will turn out to be nothing to do with my course. I think it's really hard to know where to start with a degree like mine and it would be great if there was some help with specialist degrees like mine'*	• Projects should include access to resources (such as case studies and careers information) which are categorised and searchable by career and subject area. • Resources should be selected to include career paths which are seen to be relevant to the subject studied. • However, projects should also be explicit about the reality of graduate career paths and the range of options available. Graduate preferences should be used as a starting point for exploration of underlying knowledge, values and preferences in order to explore alternative career routes and viewpoints.	

[2] Davies M, Duffus C, Forbes K, Gilchrist L, Grayburn L, Johnston S, Stringer H, Developing Graduate Employability Support in Scotland: 2019. QAA Collaborative Cluster Project Report. Available at: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/current-enhancement-theme/student-engagement-and-demographics/developing-graduate-support

Reluctance to commit to a long-term career decision	*'I used the careers service after finishing uni… right now I don't think I would use them, I'm not really looking for a graduate job and haven't been for a while. I might think about this later on… but not for a while.'*	• Projects should aim to develop lifelong career awareness and management skills rather than focusing solely on specific career routes. • Projects should include explicit information about the reality of modern career paths, including the breadth of graduate jobs available to any degree discipline and the likelihood of changing trajectories multiple times. • Projects should incorporate case studies and resources which celebrate a wide range of non-traditional career journeys, such as entrepreneurs, non-linear career paths and 'failure' stories	
Concern that 'going back' to HEI is a negative step	*'To be honest I'm not sure why but I just… I think that even if I could, I wouldn't go back to the University for help… I'm not sure why, I just feel kind of done with university… it would feel like going backwards somehow?... I'm just kind of done with uni'*	• While graduates may be reluctant to engage with HE careers services, there is clearly an appetite for guidance, as demonstrated by huge increases in 'crowdsourced' careers advice via sites like 'thestudentroom' and 'refinery29'. Graduates are also paying to use unregulated services such as CV writing and practice aptitude tests, when these are available to them for free. Projects and campaigns should highlight the quality assurance and employer insight that ensure HE careers services offer high-quality provision in these areas. • Projects and resources should be clearly focused towards graduates rather than students, with an emphasis on	

		professional and personal skills development.	
		• Projects should incorporate resources and information based on the transitions of recent graduates and offer opportunities to connect with alumni.	
		• Projects should consider delivery through a white-label web presence or off-campus to move away from association with student services.	
Understanding of the services on offer and how they may be beneficial	*'I think some of the events aren't really relevant to me personally…I've been to careers fairs before as well and there were loads of jobs in business or accounting but there were none that really made sense for me'*	• Projects and campaigns should be designed to take account of the above recommendations, and clearly convey the uniqueness of the graduate offering.	

5   Evaluating projects

Projects incorporating the evidence presented above in their design will lead to the development of graduate employability support initiatives which are designed to meet graduates' needs and will have a higher chance of uptake. If more unemployed/underemployed graduates receive appropriate employability support after graduation, this should improve their chances of obtaining graduate-level outcomes as well as helping them to feel supported and valued by their institutions. Successful approaches will be shared with other HEIs in Scotland and further afield, for example, through the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) network, in order to continually develop services to students and graduates, potentially improving their overall experience and outcomes.

Potential indicators which could be used to assess the impact of graduate support projects are summarised below.

Aim	Indicator	Examples	Notes
Establish baseline	Review current and previous graduate employability support	• institutional audit • AGCAS case studies	
	Obtain information from students and/or graduates on perceptions of and preferences for careers and employability support	• survey • focus groups (see report for details)	
	Review available graduate destinations data for target group(s)	• see section 3	

Understand demand and barriers to participation	Equality Impact Assessment	• review uptake of support by gender, ethnicity, disability status	
	Compare uptake of projects when controlling individual variables	• impact of promoting at different times of year • impact of promoting through different channels	
Evaluate impact	Impact of project on career outcomes of target group	• comparing Graduate Outcomes/LEO data with DLHE baseline (incorporating awareness of the differences between the methodologies)	
	Impact of project on graduates	• compare self-assessment of career confidence and readiness before and after projects	
	Impact of project on sector	• numbers attending dissemination events/ accessing project resources	