



Phoenix

ISSUE 171

July 2024

THE CONTEMPORARY CAREERS PROFESSIONAL

**Overcoming data challenges
through collaboration**

Bridging academia and practice

**Developing a partnership model
between employability services
and academics**

**Rethinking online student
engagement**

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July 2024

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message from the **EDITOR**

In this issue of Phoenix, we profile the wide range of roles, priorities and structures existing in higher education careers and employability services. The articles in this issue firmly counter the outdated idea that careers is a 'niche' part of the university experience. Careers and employability are threaded through the student experience from day one and the professionals that work within these services are involved in increasingly wide-ranging activities to meet the needs of students, institutions, employers and regions. Careers work has exceeded traditional ideas of advice and guidance for many years now, and through this issue we demonstrate varied workloads and projects across the sector, plus the journeys that brought some of our members to their important work with students and graduates.

Over the following pages, learn how increasing the focus on data has transformed how careers services approach their targets and demonstrate their impact. Read how introducing new team roles and new partnerships with academics has enhanced in-curriculum employability and graduate transition efforts. Discover how a physical change of location and department, or learning a few lessons from content marketing strategies, can allow for an impactful rethink on student engagement.

Examples of students undertaking paid, ambassadorial roles in careers services feature throughout this issue. For the students, the benefits are clear, including valuable work experience and networking opportunities. For services, student workers can reach their peers and amplify the student voice, plus these routes are creating a pipeline into the profession. Yet we must be sure that student workers are well supported and mentored, and clearly understand the boundaries of their role. AGCAS Professional Standards Director Lizzie Mortimer discusses how taking a rigorous approach to our professional expertise will make the sector more attractive and diversify the profession.

We share some personal reflective journeys from members, including routes into the sector and how research has enhanced professional practice. Thanks to these members for sharing their stories. Research plays a big role in this issue; contemporary careers professionals are increasingly taking on 'pracademic' roles which is developing staff confidence, credibility and ability to influence.

Inspired to take on some CPD of your own? We have articles on how the University of Warwick CEIGHE postgraduate qualifications, and AGCAS's training portfolio, have developed to meet the needs of the contemporary careers professional. And the value of being part of the AGCAS community extends far beyond the excellent training opportunities it provides. It's about being part of a wider network of professionals, a community where learning and support are reciprocal. Members not only gain knowledge but also contribute to the collective strength of the organisation. We hope this issue inspires you to take on your next development challenge and to make the most of being part of this community.

We look forward to welcoming Martin Edmondson as the new AGCAS CEO – he outlines the importance of the sector and invites member comments on the opposite page. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue – I hope you get a lot from it.

Lucy Begley, Editor

INTRODUCING THE NEW AGCAS CEO



MARTIN EDMONDSON will join the AGCAS team as Chief Executive Officer at the end of July. Here, he outlines why AGCAS is so important and invites members to share their views on developing the organisation.

It is an honour and a privilege to introduce myself as the new AGCAS CEO. Of the wide range of messages I have received since this news became public, one in particular lodged with me: AGCAS is such an important organisation.

AGCAS is important because of the people it is made of and the difference we all make to students, graduates and universities. It is also an organisation that cannot afford to be complacent in increasingly pressurised times within HE. The current financial (and political) environment surrounding universities is the most challenging it has been for decades, and in that context, it is vital that AGCAS provides a community of support, insight, influence, leadership and progressive thinking.

The HE careers and employability community is a broad church, and getting broader. Old assumptions about careers services are being shattered daily by dynamic and progressive professionals who are leading and shaping institutional strategy, embedding employability in curriculum, working hand in hand with employers, innovating in partnership with suppliers, and delivering profound social impact.

I began working in this field around 20 years ago, initially running Graduates Yorkshire, a programme founded by a careers service. In that time, I have seen the sector and its people evolve rapidly. Careers services have gone from a relatively small specialist concern to the point where they now sit at the strategic heart of UK HE, and are intrinsic to the success and capability of our universities.

Careers services in the UK and Ireland are often world-leading in terms of innovation, embedding employability in curriculum, and measurement of impact. I often hear surprise and wonder from overseas colleagues when they understand the scale, scope and work of UK and Irish careers services. Much like AGCAS though, this status and reach cannot be taken for granted. We must all continue to work together to advocate for the value and impact of our work, and its importance to individuals, universities and wider society.



AGCAS should feel like an organisation that is on your side and by your side in your work



Bearing all of that in mind, my first task in this role will be to listen and because AGCAS is such a wide-ranging organisation, there are a lot of people to listen to. I'm already conscious of the need for AGCAS to feel like an organisation that is on your side and by your side in your work. I'll be keen to understand how we best achieve this. I want to know what you think will help the AGCAS community grow and thrive, and how being part of that community can make a positive difference to your everyday work.

I do have a lot of ideas, and I'm keen to test them out and work with you all in developing them, but I'll be starting by listening. I want to hear what you think needs to change and about the pressures and challenges you are under in your institutions. I want to understand where you are most expected to make and deliver impact, and how AGCAS can support and add value to that.

Finally, I want to start by saying thank you to the huge number of people who volunteer and contribute to the life and work of AGCAS. Thank you to the team and Board for all the hard work they put into making this organisation tick. Thank you to the membership for entrusting me with this role and the mandate to take AGCAS forward and make it an organisation that enables employability and feels by your side and on your side.

I have taken this role on because I believe in the work we all do. It matters and it is changing fast - and because of that, AGCAS has never been more important.



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Overcoming data challenges through COLLABORATION AND CULTIVATING TALENT



ANDY BLUNT, Insight and Engagement Manager at the University of Leeds, takes us through a partnership approach to delivering the technical and data needs of a modern careers service.

Getting good, trustworthy data is one of the greatest challenges of a modern careers service. Our sector performance is measured by the epitome of a 'lag indicator'. The Graduate Outcomes Survey results reach our desks up to two years after graduates leave their course. In an environment of Teaching Excellence Framework narratives, B3 assessments, Access and Participation Plans and Student Success strategies, a university cannot (in good conscience) wait that long to understand how they are performing in such a business-critical area.

The expectations have shifted from rough numbers on student uptake of services, undertaking opportunities and employer activity, to predictive analytics, data-informed targeted interventions, and evaluation of impact. This shift has come largely with minimal change in funding, and programmes (such as Microsoft Access) so dated that IT services refuse to support them. It's safe to say that it's a challenging landscape.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES, HUMAN SOLUTIONS

The reality of the infrastructure needed to meet some of these demands is eye-wateringly complex. Upsettingly, the more you know in this space, the more you realise you don't know. For an intelligent, efficient build you would need expertise in areas like solution architecture, data integration, data engineering, data modelling, business analysis, system design expertise, business change management and insight analysis.

That is a rather lengthy (and very expensive) list of expertise, which even in a mythical world of unlimited budgets, chances are we would struggle to recruit. The more realistic goal is to recruit a data-literate collaborative worker and wrap some dedicated internal capacity around them to keep things moving.

It's said (to paraphrase Harold Geneen) that every company has two organisational structures: the formal one that's written down and the real one that happens every day based on relationships. All the skills listed above exist in universities. It might be through the IT department, the planning department or through academics – the knowledge will exist somewhere. Building relationships and demonstrating basic credentials of data know-how will get us to where we need to be. Roughly.

“

We have data-informed practice at the heart of our decisions and our strategic conversations

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NOTHING WORTH HAVING IS FREE

A few years ago, Jane Campbell, Head of Careers at the University of Leeds, kickstarted a long-term strategy to ensure that we had the expertise to meet these challenges. That started with a painful decision to recruit data expertise into the service at the cost of a frontline delivery role. This was followed by the gamble of recruiting someone who had no knowledge of what a careers service is or does.

Fast forward a few years and that initial role is now part of the senior management function, so we have data-informed practice at the heart of our decisions and our strategic conversations. Our long-term Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) Officer was empowered to develop into an Associate Analyst role to support delivery. A lifelong ‘technical tinkerer’ in the service was developed into a Senior Analyst. We’ve also taken two graduates with a good mind for logic and appetite to develop (rather than an academic background in the topic) through a graduate traineeship up to an Associate Analyst post.

All that investment in development has happened through leveraging internal relationships to support training. We’ve established a learning culture in the department through ringfenced development time every week for all team members and team “hive mind sessions” on tricky topics. There is an analyst network at the University of Leeds that boasts 400+ colleagues from across different services who are creating reports. That is a lot of people to learn from and share with.

SEEING RESULTS

That investment comes with its challenges. Would it be easier to recruit the knowledge in? Probably. Do we pay competitively enough to attract the expertise? Not even a little bit.

Cultivating talent is not only our financial best bet, it aligns to the ethos of a career service. The first graduate that went through our traineeship is doing some incredible things since moving on. While we had them, we built a reporting infrastructure that self-regulates, automatically refreshes and nudges staff who haven’t followed processes.

Our ‘technical tinkerer’ turned Senior Analyst led on automating all paperwork elements of a year in industry for the 1,300 or more students we send out a year. Tripartite agreements, health and safety evaluations, risk assessments – the lot. Placement colleagues now focus on getting more students into placements and helping students on placement who need more support, rather than trying to keep on top of chasing paperwork.



“

Cultivating talent is not only our financial best bet, it aligns to the ethos of a career service

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IS IT WORTH IT?

Yes (but then again, I would say that). Planning teams need to be courted. Data services need to be wooed. IT services need to be sweet-talked. But partnership working isn’t just financially the best fit, it also brings your team into the broader institution consciousness. After some hard work developing those relationships, the departments have started to see careers as a partner, not just a customer.

When it came to the TEF narrative, the planning team came to us for our lead indicator analysis for outcomes with Career Registration. When the university was looking for data sets to pilot a new central data repository, data services tapped on our shoulder. The benefits extend way beyond us getting the infrastructure that we need - it raises the profile of the service as a professional partner.



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CELEBRATING OUR EXPERTISE AND STANDARDS



LIZZIE MORTIMER, Assistant Director at the University of Edinburgh Careers Service and AGCAS Professional Standards Director, reflects on the changing nature of the higher education careers profession and invites members to share what matters to you in terms of professional standards.

There's no doubt that the work of higher education careers services has expanded over recent times. In the last decade, we've witnessed the ever-growing influence and impact those working in the sector have had on institutional strategy. Positioning ourselves to influence senior leadership and other key stakeholders demands we possess an increasingly forensic grasp on graduate outcome data, curriculum design, the regional and national labour market, widening access and participation, student engagement – to name a few.

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

I've had the privilege of observing the changing nature and increasing range of activities in which AGCAS member services are involved through my role as a peer reviewer for the Membership Quality Standard (MQS). Peer reviews provide a front-row seat to the professionalism of those working in the sector. The services I have worked with vary significantly in size, shape and context, but through the MQS process they demonstrate a shared commitment to quality and our standards.

In thinking about this article, I had a memory of the mid-noughties when I had recently started working in the sector. I joined the Phoenix Editorial Group and vividly remember a meeting in which we kicked around the idea of an article with the theme 'why does nobody like us?'. OK, a bit tongue-in-cheek, but perhaps evidence of a profession that was still shaking off an unfair image problem.

That picture has transformed since then. Collectively, we have influence and are well respected. But of course, we can't rest on that, and this is borne out by a pervasive theme seen throughout MQS submissions: the will to continue developing and innovating, and to maintain, articulate and champion the value of expert careers and employability provision. As many institutions confront challenging financial outlooks and tough decisions, we know what we do matters. It matters to students, to the institution, to our communities, to the economy - and as careers professionals, we can be trusted to do it ethically and well.

Gough and Neary state that 'Being professional is not an end state, but a process'. Our professionalism demands continuous development and up-to-date knowledge and skills. To support us in this, the AGCAS Professional Pathways were developed to articulate the skills, knowledge and indicative professional qualifications typical of various roles within the sector. These pathways help staff members to plan their development and chart their career journeys within the sector. Of course, many services are also leveraging the talents and skills of staff from diverse professional backgrounds with their own professional bodies and frameworks for development, and the Professional Pathways and AGCAS Code of Ethics can support them to apply their expertise to a careers and employability context.

“

What we do matters and we can be trusted to do it ethically and well

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THE STUDENT DEBATE

An example of how our profession has changed in recent years is the increased use of a peer-to-peer careers model. Several articles in this issue highlight the benefits of this approach but there continues a lively and important debate about the role of students working in careers services. Employing students offers numerous benefits, including – for them - valuable work experience and engagement with their own career planning. For us, students can enrich our service delivery through providing insights into student perspectives, amplifying the student voice, and extending our reach through peer-to-peer engagement.

A pillar of our professional standards is effectively recruiting, equipping and developing all categories of staff, and for student employees it is important that this includes support in understanding the boundaries of their roles.

This rigorous approach may reap further benefits. A challenge facing many in our sector is attracting and recruiting a diverse pool of staff. In being robust about our professional expertise, we become more attractive to those who see options to begin a journey along our pathways from a variety of starting points, including current students and recent graduates. Diversifying routes into the profession will yield a more diverse sector, collectively strengthened by our range of skills and experience, while enacting the standards that underpin the value of what we do.

“

Peer reviews provide a front-row seat to the professionalism of those working in the sector

”

HAVE YOUR SAY

The Professional Standards Committee, established last year, is a key part of AGCAS's commitment to enhancing professional standards and quality in higher education careers and employability. We're getting our teeth into a range of issues: reviewing the Code of Ethics in light of ongoing developments in our landscape, supporting members to make use of the Professional Pathways and, as we celebrate member services completing their inaugural reviews, with many now moving on to their first renewal, we're reviewing and enhancing the processes that underpin the MQS.

What matters most to you in terms of professional standards? How can we support you better? We believe in the power of diverse perspectives and welcome lively debates to enrich our profession, and we're eager to hear from you.



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Developing a partnership model

BETWEEN EMPLOYABILITY SERVICES AND ACADEMICS



HANNA LUETKEMEIER, Strategic Employer Engagement Manager and AGA KELLY, In-curriculum Employer Engagement Consultant, outline how Nottingham Trent University Employability Services are moving towards a more collaborative way of working with academics, to support NTU students' employability journey and help them thrive in their future work environment.

Nottingham Trent University's Employability Services are a central team which support the whole institution and have traditionally been comprised of career development professionals, frontline services staff, teams who support with placements and employer engagement colleagues. As the university has developed its student offer, we have designed roles to support our desire to truly ensure employability is embedded within the curriculum.

Our academics are passionate about engaging students in meaningful employability activities. However, we recognise that the busy workloads and competing priorities of our academic colleagues can be a barrier, and the difference between employability embedded in an impactful and transformational way to what may otherwise feel like an "add-on".

NTU have reimagined how, by using a partnership approach, we can support academics with their own employer engagement, embedding employer-led projects in the curriculum and ensuring we are data-informed using engaged employers.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

Whilst the Employer Engagement and Placements team have strong employer partnerships, to ensure we can grow, develop and enhance the curriculum, we acknowledge the need to develop the discrete relationships that academics hold with individual industry representatives.

The In-Curriculum Employer Engagement Consultant works alongside academic teams to enhance and maximise their own employer relationships and supports on the development of Employer Advisory Boards. This role showcases how utilising data, a structured approach and collaborative systems can enable us to maintain sustainable industry contacts and relevant in-curriculum activity.

For example, we currently work with one of the academic schools on an industry engagement information sharing project. This involves utilising NTU's customer relationship management (CRM) system to provide academics with data on which employers are engaged with the school. We are also encouraging academics to share who they collaborate with directly for in-curriculum activities. The project is helping to understand the range of employers and industry contacts and the breadth of activity they are involved in across multiple subject areas within the school. This has led to conversations about potential interdisciplinary projects and funding opportunities to support employers' early recruitment activities.

We are also looking at how employer engagement can lead to knowledge exchange and research and how individuals can be recognised as industry fellows for their engagement. The project is contributing to a more joined up, consistent approach.



EMPLOYER PROJECTS

In 2022, we reviewed our approach to assessed work-like experience (AWLE). Our ambition is to ensure that each undergraduate student has access to short placements, work insights and short projects throughout their degree. AWLE connects the world of academia with the 'real world' of industry and enables students to apply the knowledge they have learnt in the classroom into the workplace. To assist academics with the implementation of these employer-led projects, a small team of Project Officers was created.

The Project Officers help academics source appropriate employers to provide challenges and offer advice to ensure that engagement with these employers can be maximised across the institution. These projects help students develop appropriate skills and knowledge for pursuing and progressing with their career options.

In our 2023/24 psychology employer-led projects, students who agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of the career options as a result of their course increased from 73% at the start of the project to 81% upon completion. Their confidence in transferrable skills also increased through completing the project: 39% of students felt very or quite confident in presenting at the start of the project and this increased to 73% of students who felt very or quite confident at the end of the project.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING

With the increase in work experience provision in the curriculum, we've also seen an increase in the demand for embedded career development learning (CDL). CDL ensures that we have a wraparound approach to support students in the preparation for this assessed work-like experience (AWLE) and enables students to reflect and articulate the competencies they have developed during AWLE and how these might be applied in future professional contexts.

The role of School Partnership Coordinator has been created to lead on conversations with academics to identify opportunities for impactful models of CDL within their curriculum. The Partnership Coordinators work across schools, tailoring their approach depending on the needs and requirements of the individual cohorts of students. Once a CDL design project is identified, they will work with the assigned career consultant who will take the CDL project from consultation and design to delivery and evaluation.



We understand the challenges academics face and are taking a collaborative approach to embedding work experience



DATA-INFORMED EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

In 2023, we created an Industry Insights team, led by our Industry Insights Manager. This team has been transformative in allowing us to understand who our most engaged employers are, by graduate roles advertised, sandwich and short placements secured, and by employer engagement with our calendar of events and initiatives. We now have access to Power BI dashboards that allow us to drill down into course level detail, regional activity and specific industries.

The dashboards tell us when an employer has not readvertised, where we have seen growth in certain industries and informs the wider institution of where there may be potential gaps or strong engagement. These dashboards inform our employer engagement activity but also provide a transparent way of highlighting who we are working with.

All the above roles have been designed to be able to take some pressure off academics with varying workloads, enabling us to understand the challenges they face and to take a collaborative approach to embedding work experience. The Employability Services team are moving towards a partnership model with our academic stakeholders, and the team are involved at a much earlier stage of the design, delivery and evaluation of the curriculum.



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Becoming careers professionals: JOURNEYS INTO THE SECTOR

For this issue of Phoenix, we invited contributions from members on how and why they entered the careers profession. Here, three members share their journey and reflect on their professional development, including how AGCAS training and Professional Pathways have enhanced their practice.



ALEXANDRA BAKER, Careers
Consultant, University of Reading

I never set out to work in careers and if anyone had asked me back in 2016 what I'd be doing in 2024, careers consultant would certainly not have been on my top five list of possible jobs. Instead, my career in careers came about through a chance conversation which led to a job opportunity.

I joined the University of Reading's Student Financial Support team in 2013 but left higher education a couple of years later to care for my terminally ill father. Roll on October 2016 and I needed a job. A catch up with a former colleague led to a three-month contract supporting regulated pharmacy placements. A few weeks later, I successfully applied for a placement coordinator role and in May 2022, after five years in the Placements team, I progressed to careers consultant, the role I have today.

I think a key part of my progression has been my curious mind and seeking out opportunities to learn and step up. This allowed me to take on more responsibility as a placement coordinator, including leading the central training programme for placement year students, creating learning resources, supporting the streamlining of processes and managing a team of student ambassadors.

Advice from Alexandra...

Don't give up on your goals and surround yourself with your own personal cheerleaders.

Applying for jobs as an internal candidate is a daunting experience and I often felt that the roads to advancement were closed as I questioned my ability. University careers teams are brilliant at supporting students to achieve their career goals, but we don't necessarily apply the same encouraging approach to colleagues. After two unsuccessful applications, I rather hesitantly decided to apply one last time when a vacancy came up in the Careers Consultancy team. When I was offered the role, I genuinely thought they'd called the wrong candidate - part of me is still waiting for them to realise their mistake! Luckily, I have great colleagues and an incredibly supportive and encouraging manager who has challenged me to become a better practitioner and tried to help me silence the voices of self-doubt.

The AGCAS Professional Pathways have undoubtedly helped me to find my feet as a careers consultant as they clearly outline the knowledge, skills and required standards of the profession, providing a framework for my professional development. This has become my reference and something I use and reflect on in professional development reviews.

I'm currently completing a PGDip in Career Development at the University of the West of England and I can see the link between theory, practice and the professional standards set out in the pathway. Attending AGCAS webinars and courses has been crucial to my overall growth, enhancing my interest and knowledge of widening participation and equality, diversity and inclusion, and further using theory to underpin my practice.

Seeing my journey neatly laid out, some might say that serendipity or luck is behind my successful progression, and I don't disagree. I am very fortunate to be where I am today, but it's also taken grit, resilience and a drive to do and be more. I love my job and enjoy the challenges it presents and I'm so pleased that I submitted that final application.



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AMY KINSMAN, Careers Adviser,
University of St Andrews

In 2018, I embarked on a professional journey to become a careers adviser and pursued a PGDip in Career Guidance and Development at Edinburgh Napier University. I wanted to assist individuals in finding meaningful careers and realising their potential. The course not only solidified my commitment to this profession but also afforded me the opportunity for professional growth and skills development.

In September 2019, I attended a comprehensive one-week summer school at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, focusing on ICT in guidance and counselling, earning 4 ECT points. This in-person experience provided invaluable insights into using effective models for client engagement across various platforms, including email, telephone and chat messenger.

Upon completion of the program, I secured a position as a careers adviser at the University of Stirling, followed by a position at Newcastle University. In 2020, I joined the University of St Andrews, where I have embraced every opportunity to further develop my expertise and become the most effective careers adviser I can be. Notably, I took part in the intensive AGCAS Guidance Skills (Advanced) course, affording me the opportunity to have my appointments and practices observed by experienced careers professionals. Embracing constructive feedback, I developed my skills, further refining my ability to support students with their careers. I particularly found the opportunity to observe and be observed a valuable component of this training.

Advice from Amy..

While it's crucial to excel in your immediate responsibilities, remember to expand your horizons and engage with the broader landscape. Actively seek opportunities to collaborate on projects with internal and external stakeholders, which not only expands your perspective but also enriches your professional network. Invest time in CPD, not just for personal growth but to enhance the value you bring to your organisation and the wider community. Embrace every chance to learn, share, and innovate—it's through these experiences that you'll truly make a lasting impact.



In addition, I obtained my ILM 3 Organisational Coaching qualification from the joint University of St Andrews and Aberdeen University Coaching Academy. This qualification enables me to coach university staff as part of their joint coaching scheme with Aberdeen University, providing tailored support to individuals in pursuit of their career aspirations.

As a result of completing various qualifications and training, I want to continue learning while supporting my peers. In February 2024, I set up an internal peer-to-peer mentoring and observation group and inspired other careers advisers to take part. The pilot program will run for six months, during which each member conducts observed appointments monthly.

This initiative aims to create a safe space to experiment with different tools, techniques and models in student appointments and to transform observations from a once-per-year inspection day into a continuous, constructive learning experience. To achieve this, we have established a regular meeting schedule for experience exchange, used an MS Teams channel for knowledge-sharing and a padlet for capturing thoughts and insights. This structured framework helps us assess the overall effectiveness of the initiative and enhance our professional skills. Currently, our group comprises of four dedicated advisers, and we are hoping to grow the scheme.

I consider myself very fortunate to be a member of the AGCAS community and to have received invaluable support from my colleagues. I look forward to the journey ahead and the opportunities to extend the same level of support and guidance to aspiring careers professionals entering the sector.



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ELLA WOMACK, current student and Work-based Learning and Partnerships Administrator, University of Leeds

As the role of a careers professional expands, it is no wonder so many university careers services have enlisted the help of paid students to undertake student-facing work. After the pandemic, the University of Leeds experienced increased demand from students wanting time with careers advisors, but an overall decline in students interacting with the service. To address these issues in a way which would both appeal to, and utilise the student body, the student-led Peer Support Assistant (PSA) role was born, and I began my career journey.

The role of the first cohort of PSAs mainly comprised of administrative work. However, increasing awareness of the careers service only made students more eager for careers advice. This led to a change in the PSA role. After a refresh of our formal training – with sessions from university careers advisors, AGCAS and Gradconsult – we were given the opportunity to run peer-to-peer drop-in appointments, with the opportunity to refer queries we could not answer to careers staff. Consistently high engagement with these appointments demonstrated how receptive University of Leeds students are to receiving advice from their peers, especially a group reflecting the university's diverse student body. Working alongside the frontline careers advisors and guidance practitioners provided invaluable experience. I shadowed guidance appointments, learnt about the different approaches to advice and listened to first-hand accounts of their journeys into the sector.

Ironically, I never expected university to help me navigate my career goals. As a humanities student, it often felt that graduate jobs would be more accessible had I undertaken a more specialised course.

Advice from Ella..

My best advice for anyone wanting to move around the careers industry, especially student workers like myself, would be to search for opportunities within your role which would allow you to inject your passions into your workload. This could mean turning your love of Instagram into a social media account for your team, speaking to students at a careers fair because you love to meet new people, or even writing an article about how much you love your job!

However, my journey into the careers sector shattered this impression, and showed me that when university is approached holistically (as much about experiences, as academia), students from any degree background become more employable: a perspective we should all be encouraging students to adopt.

With this perspective, I realised I would be missing a fantastic opportunity for career growth if I did not undertake a year in industry. With my new passion for careers advice, I was delighted to secure a year working within the university's Work-based Learning and Partnerships Team. I am responsible for all student communications: be it promoting a role in the format most appealing to students (e.g. Instagram, or our popular student newsletter), arranging interviews or presenting to my peers about the benefits of undertaking work-based learning. Applying my student perspective to the team's work has allowed us to better understand the needs of our students, leading to higher quality business partnerships with companies students are passionate about (such as the bespoke graphic design agency, Buttercrumble or the niche, sustainability company, Brooks Ecological). There has been a significant increase in student engagement (signing up for our newsletter, applying for jobs, speaking to us at careers fairs) with our 'Exclusive to Leeds' scheme.

I hope to use my experience to ultimately become a qualified careers consultant and one day lead my own team of peer-to-peer careers advisors, giving back to the role I came from.



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Demystifying the PhD:

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO PURSUE DOCTORAL STUDY



EMILY ROGERS, Careers Consultant for Researchers and MAISHA ISLAM, Doctoral College Research Culture Lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - and final year doctoral student - at the University of Southampton, outline how they are working collaboratively with students and staff to improve access and participation into doctoral study through their new Demystifying the PhD information series.

Whilst access into HE has widened to include a diverse range of students, recent policy shifts have emphasised the need to build a stronger pipeline into postgraduate research (PGR), particularly for under-represented and minoritised students. As Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise (CESE) and Doctoral College colleagues, we are responsible for ensuring that students have information, advice, and guidance to support their decision-making into PGR.

From experience, we recognise that considering doctoral study is challenging. There is lacking representation of diverse 'real models' and often limited experiential knowledge of PGR study routes within personal networks. From a career consultant perspective, Emily identified that students attending one-to-one careers guidance are often confused about what a PhD entails or how to take the first steps into doctoral study.

Acknowledging the elusive nature of doctoral degrees, we created Demystifying the PhD – a four-part, weekly information series launched in 2024, supporting students to find out about doctoral study. The programme seeks to encourage more equitable access into PhD study, provide insight into the PhD process and raise awareness of the career options a doctoral degree brings.

Demystifying the PhD was designed by staff from the Doctoral College and CESE team. It is grounded in internal research and student consultation exploring under-represented students' aspirations towards doctoral study and research-related careers. As Maisha identifies as a British-Bangladeshi Muslim woman, belonging to a minoritised background provided a personal motivation to ensure that the series served similar under-represented student groups, particularly where our work revealed students were lacking access to information, advice and guidance.

FOUR PART SERIES

The series is structured in a logical pattern with no mandatory requirements, allowing students to attend sessions most suited to where they are in their career journey:

- 1 - What are doctorates and are they for me?
- 2 - Process for applying to PhD programmes
- 3 - Day in the life of a PhD student
- 4 - Career prospects beyond the PhD

Session 1 introduces students to doctoral study and challenges the stereotypes around who should undertake a PhD. Students take part in interactive 'true and false' surveys and start their career planning process by questioning their thoughts on doctoral study using a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis tool.

The inclusion of SWOT was inspired by Emily's coaching work with undergraduate students, where she finds that involving students in reflection activities helps them to feel more invested in their career plans.

In Session 2, a detailed step-by-step PhD application process is explored, with email templates for students wishing to contact supervisors about PhD proposals, a list of Southampton-specific funding streams and tips on preparing for PhD interviews. In Session 3, current PhD students detail their experiences of doctoral study. This session prioritises participant Q&A, aiming to ensure students feel inspired and empowered about their future by getting insight into the tasks and lifestyles associated with doctoral study.

The final session of the programme explores career options beyond the PhD, so students can identify why a PhD could be a worthwhile prospect. We invite a staff member to detail their post-PhD experiences and secure academics with broad career trajectories, including work in industry and academia, to showcase the diverse career prospects and employability skills a doctoral degree can bring.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

In total, 40 students attended sessions across the programme, with over half completing a post-session evaluation form. These responses have been overwhelmingly positive: 100% of students said they were likely to find out more about PhD study and 88% reported an increase in confidence levels on the workshop topics. Four students sought further careers guidance and two applied for research internships within one month of attending a session. As an inaugural programme, we are delighted to see this feedback which further supported our need to better enhance institutional guidance related to doctoral study.

We are looking to expand the reach of the series through an interactive online course, featuring videos of current PhD students, short quizzes about PhD myths, and signposting advice on applying for programmes. We will therefore continue to ensure that future provision is embedded within the university calendar as part of our 'business-as-usual'.



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ARE THE CAREER EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE IN HE QUALIFICATIONS 'GIVING 2024'?

DR TANIA LYDEN, Assistant Professor and Career Education, Information and Guidance in HE (CEIGHE) Course Director at the University of Warwick, shares how the team ensures that CEIGHE stays relevant for AGCAS members. From evaluation and quality processes through to the unique nature of CEIGHE as a collaboration between the University of Warwick and AGCAS, she shows how CEIGHE speaks to the challenges that career and employability staff are facing today.



My kids are cringing as I venture into Gen Z language for this article. Despite my bravery (or foolhardiness) it resonates with the important role of keeping courses relevant; a duty even more important because CEIGHE students live and breathe what we teach each day.

TRUE COLLABORATION

CEIGHE is a unique entity bringing together AGCAS staff, members and the Career Studies and Coaching Team at Warwick. Most Warwick CEIGHE staff have worked in HE career and employability services. AGCAS staff are in continual dialogue with AGCAS members and Heads of Service about their needs and challenges. AGCAS trainers are current practitioners informing delivery. This collaboration is synthesized through carefully managed university teaching and learning quality processes.

THE CERTAINTY OF CHANGE

One thing we are certain of is change. It influences what we focus on and demands new skills of us. Time and financial pressures squeeze our operating environments which affect our working lives. Movement into the fourth industrial revolution and the emergence of AI forces us to be curious about new technological capabilities and to reassess our services. The cost-of-living crisis further undermines student engagement and, alongside social justice issues, encourages us to embed employability and career learning into the curriculum.

Shifting government thinking about international students increases institutional risk creating a renewed interest in improving support for international students. The pandemic accelerated student wellbeing concerns leading us to consider how career and wellbeing support might connect. Predictions of rapidly changing graduate careers have led to renewed interest in graduate entrepreneurship.

REMAINING AGILE

We continuously review and improve our delivery as module leaders; however, we sometimes look across the curriculum to adapt and stay agile:

- Our Employability and Career Education: Strategy and Inclusive Design module, is designed to include more strategic approaches to employability as well as ensuring any employability and career learning delivery and related activities are inclusive and socially just.
- Incorporating more on entrepreneurship into our Employer/Entrepreneur Engagement and Labour Markets module allows exploration of account management and career learning relating to entrepreneurship.
- Embedding our technology and AI content across our curriculum, tailored to each module, allows for greater agility at a time of rapid change, whilst firmly connecting it with tasks for each CEIGHE member's professional pathway.
- Our Marketing the Service module is being reinvented as Marketing, Communications and Engagement, and embraces data and technology to tailor large scale communications with stakeholders.
- Our flexible Challenges of Careers Work in HE module enables a thorough critique of our individual and service responses to clients, whether international students, those with wellbeing challenges and many others besides.

The changes allow for service differences across institutions and the differing needs of CEIGHE students at various stages along their own professional journey. The bedrock of our courses is of course theory, but equally it is about sharing and discussing practice.

THE FUTURE

Looking ahead, sustainability, including implementation of the UN's Sustainability Development Goals, is finding its place within service priorities. Our Research in Professional Practice and Dissertation modules allow our students to be groundbreaking in their research so they can contribute to, and lead thinking on, new practice in these areas and support the virtuous circle between research and practice within our field.

Our annual course management meeting, evaluation forms and annual Postgraduate Taught Evaluation Survey also keep us on our toes alongside our Student-Staff Liaison Committee of which Seth Jennings (University of East Anglia) and Callum Buchanan (University of Oxford) are our new CEIGHE student representatives.

I hope this article has shown you the ongoing activity that ensures CEIGHE's relevance and reassures you that we 'touch grass' regularly. How do you think we are doing? Contact me or current students can contact Seth or Callum.



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[Connect with Tania on LinkedIn](#)



[CEIGHE course page](#)

WHAT OUR STUDENTS SAY...

"No matter what you do within higher education there is an element of the course that's for you and the staff within Warwick help tailor the course to your needs and your goals... I would 100% recommend the course."

"Undertaking my Masters' with the Centre for Lifelong Learning at The University of Warwick really supported my career development. It gave me the confidence to be able to put forward and develop new initiatives, the ability to think about the strategic context we work in, and I gained insights into other sector developments."



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Building a contemporary team and strategy:

SUPPORTING GRADUATE TRANSITIONS AT PACE



The Graduate Success Team at Bath Spa University (BSU) comprises PAIGE CLARKSON, Graduate Success Manager, IONA JONES and RAJINDER BOUCHER, Employability Coaches (Graduate Success) and BLESSING MURURI, Graduate Success Coordinator. Here, they discuss how they have established a team to support graduate transitions to meet changing needs, the roles and responsibilities within that team and how they are measuring impact.



Established in early 2022, our Graduate Success team began with Paige, who is responsible for our strategic direction. Since 2022, we've been fortunate enough to grow with Iona and Rajinder, who are responsible for project management alongside delivery of careers information, advice and guidance to graduates. Finally, Blessing is responsible for project coordination and organising targeted communications. Blessing shares her experiences:

"Having just graduated, I've been learning about graduate outcomes, their history and strategies that work to improve them. I am building knowledge by participating in AGCAS networks/webinars where ideas are shared. One of my goals is to develop my soft skills, which I have been able to develop through the Elevate program designed to assist women of colour to become self-confident and succeed in higher education. This has allowed me to develop professionally and lay a solid foundation that I will add to as my career progresses."

“

Establishing comprehensive graduate support has necessitated cross-university working

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Historically in the BSU careers service, there has been no targeted interventions for graduates. Graduate-level progression is a significant challenge, and Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) results for 2020/21 graduates, using the Office for Students (OfS) B3 methodology, indicate that our overall progression value is 4.8% away from our comparator benchmark. Subsequently, there is a university-wide focus and investment on improving outcomes.

While supporting graduate transitions, our team also has a responsibility for GOS optimisation. Like many institutions, we find response rates challenging so we have consulted with university staff to understand how and where the GOS can be communicated effectively to graduates. This focus has resulted in some successful outputs, such as Iona creating a well-received GOS toolkit. The toolkit, housed on our intranet, consists of templates and announcements to raise awareness amongst staff and graduates. However, it remains a challenge to embed the GOS within the student journey. Our team are currently exploring establishing a GOS Communications Task Force to feed into our Employability and Graduate Outcomes Steering Group.

SUPPORTING GRADUATE TRANSITIONS

To address challenges, we utilise different data sets to establish priority groups of final year students most 'at risk' of not securing a graduate-level outcome. This includes capitalising on the link between Career Registration data and graduate outcomes, focusing on students who are still in the 'exploration' stage of career thinking with no meaningful work experience reported in the previous year. Also, we target courses which are performing close to or below the OfS B3 progression benchmark. Finally, we use our Access and Participation Plan to explore which student groups have the largest progression gaps.

Our work begins with final-year students near to graduation, and we intensively support graduates up until the GOS. We felt it was important to brand our graduate support offer the 'Grad Support Unit' so this could align to our wider community and allow our initiatives to be scaffolded and easily recognised. We launch the Grad Support Unit each year through our annual careers summit where we recently had over 100 finalists in attendance.

Our Grad Support Unit Fund for underrepresented groups of graduates helps them access a work experience or recruitment activity. The fund also helps aspiring freelancers gain funding for essential equipment. This is important to our diverse student body as 25% of our undergraduate students go on to some form of self-employment according to GOS results for 2020/21. Furthermore, Iona and Rajinder are currently reviewing our digital estate, designing a graduate-focused landing page with tailored resources. With Blessing's recruitment, we've been able to send regular newsletters to support our graduate population with an impressive average open rate of 60.32%.

CROSS-UNIVERSITY WORKING

Establishing comprehensive graduate support has necessitated cross-university working. Specifically, we collaborated with our HR team to deliver our first BSU graduate scheme. This offers graduates the opportunity to begin their career within BSU with university departments offering roles, alongside designing a structured development programme to help graduates feel valued. To implement this, we identified other shared priorities across BSU, such as our People Strategy, and explained how employing our own graduates could positively influence goals by diversifying the workforce. In doing so, we were able to gain investment to establish the scheme in 2023. Rajinder works closely with graduates on the scheme, hosting sessions and building rapport to support them with their career development.

MEASURING IMPACT

Since our 2022 inception, we have engaged with over 600 graduates, which is impressive in relation to BSU's small cohort size. We developed a KPI which explores the overall and priority group engagement with the Grad Support Unit. To ensure continued alignment with the BSU need, Paige completed a Theory of Change for our graduate transitions strategy, which works on the assumption that stakeholders engaging with the Grad Support Unit will develop their employability and ultimately contribute to an improvement in graduate outcomes. To support this, we deploy consistent feedback measurements across our schemes, such as net promoter scores and assessing confidence before and after an intervention.

We work closely with our Data and Insights Service to undertake longitudinal analysis on raw-level data of graduate participation on our schemes, exploring specific impacts this had on GOS responses. We also participate in a reporting cycle aligning with the wider careers team. This ensures our impact measurement is consistent, demonstrates progress against service-level objectives and creates space to review our Theory of Change.

LOOKING FORWARD

We are still very much on our learning journey to support graduate transitions effectively, but since 2022 we have certainly felt the impact of a growing focus on graduate outcomes.

We are required to be contemporary careers professionals to address these changing needs by our team focusing on collaboration to create impact, GOS optimisation and scalable delivery to priority groups of graduates.



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CHANGING WITH THE TIMES AND DELIVERING IMPACT AT SCALE



JAY HARDMAN, Student Progression Manager at the University of Leicester outlines how the new, boundary-spanning careers and employability service role of College Business Partner is opening opportunities to expand the reach and impact of the service's expertise.

Statutory, policy and market forces, coupled with a super-diverse student body and changing student behaviours, have initiated a broadening of purpose to our educational offer. This has included a push to enhance the development of employability through the curriculum, while remaining true to our research-inspired traditions. In rising to this collective challenge, the role of the Careers and Employability Service is evolving to embrace data-informed partnership working that not only delivers more personalised and responsive careers advice, but also widens student access to work-related experience with local, national and global employers.

As well as reshaping our extra-curricular offer, we are changing how we work with academic departments. We are enabling and empowering them to better address their students' employability development needs, drawing on the expertise that our service has to offer in employer engagement, information, advice and guidance, careers education and skills development.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Our approach has been spearheaded by the creation of a college business partner role, introduced in 2022. These colleagues are recruited for their ability to develop and manage relationships, influence and negotiate, and support the use of data to inform the targeting, tailoring and evaluation of employability development activities and support. Colleagues in these roles have come from a range of professional backgrounds including teaching, allied health professions, and HE careers.

College business partners coordinate the planning, delivery and evaluation of partnership agreements with each of the academic departments in their college. They engage staff and students in their departments, alongside delivery specialists from within the Careers and Employability Service, to assess the performance of the employability development offer in each subject area. They target expertise to where it is most needed, and report on the reach and impact of collaborative action.

"My background in lecturing and work-based learning design has given me a strong desire to support the development of excellent educational practice. My current role allows me to work with both academic colleagues and other careers professionals to grow the employability offer to students from a range of disciplines. Whilst the current landscape can sometimes be challenging and unpredictable, there is opportunity to collaborate in innovative ways."

Idalina Rodrigues, Careers & Employability Service Business Partner for the College of Life Sciences

"The appeal of the role is being able to make a difference to the students within each academic school with effective partnership working. By working collaboratively with the academic departments, we can get a more holistic view which allows us to make more sense of the data we have. Through this model, we are able to target more support to the cohorts who need it the most, whilst also ensuring that all students have access to the support and opportunities that they need. The role also brings lots of challenges such as managing resource allocation and being mindful of academic staff who themselves have complex and challenging workloads."

Tom Rowley, Careers & Employability Service Business Partner for the College of Science and Engineering

"The most exciting part of the role is the genuine emphasis on partnership working with academic schools. It is so rewarding to be involved in reviewing relevant data, planning and ultimately implementing targeted support with school-based academics. They are able to bring their own valuable expertise including important sector knowledge and a real understanding of the students studying their discipline. It has been and always will be important to remember that academic colleagues have multiple responsibilities and are often wearing different hats, making empathy and understanding key to supportive partnership work."

Paul Fitzgerald, Careers and Employability Service Business Partner for the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities



College Business Partners target expertise to where it is most needed, and report on the reach and impact of collaborative action



WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

An important short-term measure is stakeholder satisfaction with the approach. Inviting and responding to feedback from within the service and from stakeholders in colleges and academic departments helps avoid misunderstandings, allowing us to cut through to the issues and actions that matter most.

We will know that the approach is working when collaborative activities and support are addressing recognised performance issues and engaging the intended students. As these activities start to reach into the curriculum, we would also expect to see upward trends across the institution in the rate of student engagement with work-related experience and reflective assessments.

Ultimately, we will know that our new ways of working are making a real difference when students in all our departments are achieving progression outcomes in the Teaching Excellence Framework 'gold zone', and our leading indicators point to this level of performance being sustained.

WHAT NEXT?

So far, the activities and support that college business partners have helped negotiate are delivered in the co-curricular space. This is a great place to innovate but does not always achieve the reach or impact required to shift the dial on key student experience and outcome metrics.

Our next challenge, therefore, is to equip academic departments with the tools they need to enhance the contribution of the curriculum to employability development. These include resources to support understanding of students' employability development needs, incorporating both the student and employer voice. They also include resources to enable a programme-level approach to mapping employability and identifying opportunities for enhancement through well scaffolded, real-world projects or work-related learning.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

The aim of these new ways of working is to target the expertise of our Careers and Employability Service colleagues into areas of activity – curriculum design, delivery and evaluation – that enable impact to be delivered at scale. In this way we hope to provide academic departments with the support they need to make their courses as appealing as possible, and graduates from their courses as employable as possible.



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Peers in Careers: HARNESSING THE POWER OF PEER SUPPORT

Members of the Peers in Careers Steering Group outline what inspired the project and what it tells us about the roles of students and graduates working in AGCAS member careers services. Two case studies demonstrate how peers can also be a talent pipeline for our profession.

In February 2022, a serendipitous Twitter chat sparked an idea. Emma Moore took to the platform to share her morning conversation with a team of students from Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). These students were working on a consulting project for the Head of Careers, focusing on student-led delivery in careers and enterprise.

Jane Campbell picked up on the tweet. She revealed that she, too, had supported the QMUL students during their research, and posed a thought-provoking question: What if students working in careers services across the sector collaborated, connecting with one another to share insights, build networks and learn collectively?

A NEW OPPORTUNITY

This simple exchange ignited a powerful idea: Peers in Careers. The idea was embraced by a range of colleagues in the sector and a steering group was created. Together, we embarked on a mission to create a professional conference for students and recent graduates that would bring students across the sector together for the first time.

The vision was clear: students working together and learning from one another as well as hearing from speakers and employers to inspire and develop them. The secondary opportunity was for students to share their insights on the graduate recruitment process with employers. Insight from supporting other students through the process, and from being potential candidates themselves.

In the spirit of co-creation, students from the steering group universities were brought together to input their ideas for the conference agenda. A proportion of the content was also delivered by peers in the form of conference presentations on peer-related updates and innovations from their services.



We have delivered two successful Peers in Careers conferences in May 2023 and November 2023, with over 80 attendees at each. A third conference is planned for November 2024. Conference feedback showed that students appreciated the opportunities to come together, deliver and listen to workshops, take away new ideas and make connections.

STUDENT ROLES

As part of the conferences, we undertook a survey of attendees to understand how and where students are employed within university careers services. There is a huge variety in how careers services maximize the value of peers, but our surveys show the top three roles are careers ambassador, first-line triage and being a social media coordinator. The full range of roles include:

- Administrative and Operations: Front desk triage, vacancy approvals, employer meet and greet
- Marketing and Outreach: Social media management, content creation, pop-up events and career fairs, calling students and graduates and employer meet and greet
- Student Support: Careers ambassador, employability champions, work-based learning assistance, project internships, inclusive careers education ambassadors, peer support assistants

Some great practice around mentoring, managing and developing student employees exists across the sector. Induction programmes range from a couple of hours to up to 70 hours. Training is delivered predominantly in-house by the careers team but longer programmes involve a range of different voices including other university teams, employers and external training providers like Gradconsult.

Often, students are matched with a mentor from the careers team to give them additional support related to their role and their future career planning.

Some universities are exploring coaching qualifications for the students, others provide their students with the opportunity to engage with Chartered Management Institute (CMI) qualifications.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

Through the next Peers in Careers conference, we hope to continue to support and inspire the talented students and graduates working in our careers services, some of whom will become professionals in our sector. For most, it is the first professional conference that they have attended and we have seen new relationships and networks form. The next event will feature employers leading roundtables and more presentations from students.

We have seen how extensive and varied the use of peers is in supporting engagement and the delivery of information and advice across the sector. The use of peers is a complement to experienced practitioners, digital, social and emerging generative AI investments. Given decreasing student engagement and the need to reduce progression gaps, careers services must become more accessible, with student peers as relatable first points of contact. Along with data and surveys, we believe student peer insights are crucial for improving service delivery.

Would you like your employed peers to attend the next conference? [Please sign up here](#) or contact [Patty Shufflebotham](#) with any queries.

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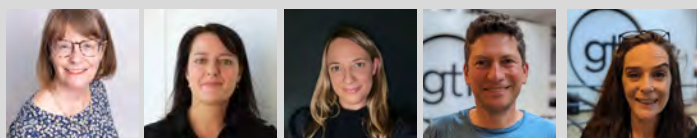
Employers had their eyes opened to the potential of recent graduates

”

PEERS IN CAREERS STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

Jane Campbell, University of Leeds (Joint Chair)
Judith Baines, Queen Mary, University of London (Joint Chair)
Rachael Collins, Manchester Metropolitan University
Jo Eaton, University of Hertfordshire
Jo Poole, University of Liverpool
Emma Moore, Gradconsult
Simon Martin, Group GTI
Patty Shufflebotham, Group GTI
Katie Thomas, Group GTI

Thanks to Jane Campbell, Judith Baines, Emma Moore, Simon Martin and Patty Shufflebotham for leading on this article.



CASE STUDY 1

George Theodorou, University of Liverpool

As a former psychology student who graduated in 2021, I joined the University of Liverpool careers service as a student careers coach in my second year at university, becoming a member of one of the earliest cohorts of Liverpool career coaches. Alongside my studies, I worked for two years in the Career Studio, immersing myself in the world of peer-to-peer.

This experience inspired me to remain in the sector, joining Gradconsult as a project consultant - a role I've been in for just under three years. In this role, I have been able to circle back to the place that set me on this career path, by providing training to the new career coaches at the University of Liverpool - which I have facilitated for three years in a row.

In addition to this, I have delivered training to peer-to-peer students in careers services at lots of different institutions. I have also worked with Emma Moore to design and deliver a new kind of CPD programme for careers professionals involved in delivering peer-to-peer careers support – the Peers in Careers Ideas Factory. This was a real career high for me!

CASE STUDY 2

Aimen Mahmood, University of Leeds

During my graduate internship with the careers service, I gained invaluable experience in project management, from inception to completion. I built lasting networks, deepened my understanding of widening participation efforts, and identified and filled service gaps through targeted interventions and evaluations.

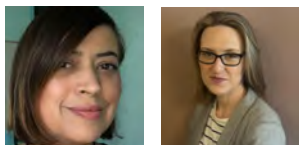
I helped organise the Peers in Careers conference, collaborating with senior leaders and boosting my confidence. Drawn by its collaborative and improvement-focused environment, and the opportunity to make a tangible, long-term difference in students' lives, this role fuelled my passion for this sector. As someone from a widening participation background, my commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion only grew stronger.

Now, I facilitate exclusive work-based activities to enhance underrepresented student engagement and employability, driving sector-leading projects and shaping impactful EDI initiatives. My experience has ignited a deep passion, and I can't wait to see where my career takes me.

Bridging academia and practice: RESEARCH JOURNEYS OF CAREERS PROFESSIONALS



In the age of careers professionals providing increasingly tailored support to key student cohorts, some are pursuing independent research to gain the information and insight required. Individuals are becoming 'pracademics', blending roles as careers practitioners, educators and researchers to enhance professional practice. But what does this look like in real life and what benefits can it bring to your role? What are the impacts on an individual who engages in careers research? These case studies spotlight very different journeys and highlight how research has influenced their work and identity.



MARNI MCARTHUR, *Lecturer and Student Experience Manager, The Open University (OU) and AMANDA POTTS*, *Careers Consultant, Lancaster University*

SELECTING A TOPIC

MARNI: When I was offered the opportunity in my previous role to embark on the PGCert CEIGHE at University of Warwick, I jumped at the chance to strengthen my careers knowledge and enhance my professional practice. I found the course so fulfilling I switched to the PGDip and then (in my new role with the OU) finally completed my remaining research for the MA dissertation. I had collaborated on research projects but until my dissertation, I had never managed the research process on my own. Now I'm considering dissemination opportunities, I have been reflecting on my experience and how I managed researching alongside a full-time job and caring responsibilities.

Being employer-funded meant I felt an obligation to research something that would have a direct impact on my substantive role. Despite some early reservations about lack of academic freedom, I ultimately ended up satisfying both the desire to research something I felt strongly about (equality, diversity and inclusion), alongside the wish to find a research topic that would impact my daily work around degree apprenticeships.

As part of my research study, I interviewed several participants from minoritised backgrounds from the first cohort to successfully finish the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA), following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017. Understanding the lived experiences of these former apprentices has been pivotal in informing both how I support apprentices and how I contribute to policy shaping and course management as part of my role.

BUILDING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

MARNI: In addition to individual sessions with supervisors, I've found group supervision incredibly beneficial. It has led to flourishing professional connections and the forging of great cross-university working relationships, including with Amanda. The collegiate atmosphere of the peer-to-peer support sessions was vital in calming insecurities, fostering reassurance, getting answers to questions, and having the space for the occasional group moan about ethical approval processes.

As a research-intensive University, the OU are hugely supportive of scholarship work. There have been multiple opportunities to further my MA CEIGHE research, including contrasting data from a previous research project I collaborated on to see how recent policy changes have impacted our apprentices and their employers. Being research active alongside my practical work has given me the space and time to develop how I articulate and make sense of my research interests. It has been enormously rewarding.

RESEARCH VALUE

AMANDA: Like Marni, returning to research for the MA CEIGHE following a break of a few years (with three young children thrown into the mix) was challenging, but also a motivating and energising way to explore my own perception of the boundaries of my role. Having an academic tutoring remit within my careers consultancy role, I decided to explore the nuanced relationship between these areas of work and how they influence the student experience.

Not only has my position as a practitioner informed my research, enabling deep reflexivity, the research has in turn informed my current practice and enhanced my approach to student consultations.

I now have greater awareness of the influence that academic tutoring can have on students' career development thinking, and the importance of ensuring this is recognised and explored with students. It has also raised my profile and opened opportunities to engage with a wider institutional agenda, for example using my research outputs to feed in the career practitioners' perspective to a strategic internal project, which encompassed the development of the academic tutoring system.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

AMANDA: Previously, I experienced a degree of imposter syndrome when engaging with academics (a theme frequently discussed in our peer-to-peer supervisions). Undertaking research has helped me to address this, emphasising a research-informed approach and developing confidence in my practice.

Conversations with my dissertation supervisor were particularly impactful, helping me to further develop my identity as a practitioner-researcher. Undertaking research within career studies has inspired me to delve deeper into what it means to be a careers professional, and how we work alongside the academic community in our specialist roles. I can't imagine continuing my career without integrating further plans to undertake research – the MA CEIGHE has provided the perfect platform for this, and I am excited to see what the future holds!



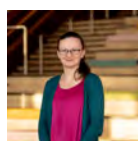
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EMMA LENNOX, *Careers Consultant*
Queen's University Belfast (QUB)

CHASING STORIES

I first engaged with careers research through my MA CEIGHE at Warwick. As an AHSS graduate working with creative students, I was becoming frustrated with the negative narratives being attached to these subjects, and wanted to understand the stories behind the metrics of those in non-vocational degrees embarking on potential non-linear career paths. No-one warned me that research mushrooms and every question generates another five. What started as one project with final-year QUB students as part of my masters degree led to a more detailed study with mature students in the same cohort. After graduation, I completed a follow-up project with first-year QUB creative students. My findings have been used to create more targeted marketing and programmes for creative students.

Seeing the benefit to both students and the careers service, my manager has allocated time within my caseload to pursue research. I'm currently interviewing creative academics from ten different UK universities on their view of their students' employability. I gained my first ever JISC research funding this year and am currently managing a project recruiting current English students to interview English alumni about their career journeys and workplace transitions.

GIVING VOICE

Research has given a new sense of focus and purpose. In a job where it can sometimes be difficult to measure impact, I finally have some quantifiable output, combining years of experience with actual data to highlight issues and make recommendations which could make a difference.

There's no point doing research if you don't share it – consider it as highlighting the student voice if you're a bit shy. I've spoken about my research at conferences, online and in person, and published three articles in peer reviewed journals.

One of the most impactful sessions was a 'Lunch and Learn' with my own university feeding back student experiences. The message that Arts students shouldn't be measured by the same timescale and metrics as STEM students was starting to get through. I've been able to represent the careers service on the university's Student Voice group, increasing the visibility of the service in a larger, cross-institutional forum, and build stronger relationships with academics who appreciate the advocacy for their disciplines.

FINDING A NETWORK

Engaging with research has allowed me to find my research tribe. When your institution doesn't quite know which box you fit it, it's been brilliant to connect with the AGCAS Research and Knowledge Committee and meet other researchers at conferences. This has opened doors for wider collaborations - I was able to represent AGCAS at a recent National Oracy Commission session providing evidence for policy makers regarding student communication skills and I hope to contribute to a book project later this year. This would never have happened if I hadn't put my frustrations into research then down on paper. I've increased in confidence, become a multitasking machine (my spreadsheets have spreadsheets), and I finally feel like I have a voice. As do the students I work with and advocate for.



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KEREN CONEY, AGCAS Research and Knowledge Director and Careers Advisor, Liverpool John Moores University

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

Though I completed a Masters in Career Guidance nearly twenty years ago, my real research journey began more recently when I was supported to study for a Masters in Teaching and Learning at Keele University, where I worked as a careers consultant. I quickly realised two key elements about studying alongside work. Firstly, seeking to do both simultaneously is a constant juggle! Secondly, learning related to practice has many benefits, including developing confidence as my expertise increased through my learning.

At this time, I had started to develop as a disability specialist careers practitioner but was aware of how much I had to learn. For the dissertation aspect of the Masters, I opted to explore an area that was completely new to me: considering how to support autistic students to prepare for the workplace. Through developing an action research project involving mentoring and supported work placements for autistic students, and through collecting data from all individuals involved, I gained new understanding about the challenges and strengths of these students. This in turn enabled me to enhance my practice. I was so pleased with the impact of my studies that I was eager to share this with fellow careers practitioners, through presenting at conferences and publishing my findings.

FORGING NEW PATHS

The success of my Masters studies and subsequent dissemination led me to be bold enough to seek new opportunities to develop my practice, including two HECSU/JISC funded projects (with a colleague) and ultimately, embarking on a PhD. This is the biggest but most rewarding challenge I have ever undertaken.



Research has enhanced my practice, and that of my service



Studying has changed who I am: through conducting participatory research with autistic students, I have moved from a position of supportive practitioner to committed ally, with a deep concern for social justice. It has enhanced my practice, and that of my service. My co-creation approach to develop employability provision first used with autistic students is now being adopted as an effective model for other disadvantaged students, including disabled and neurodivergent students and those who are care-experienced.

The 'ripple effect' of the research can be seen at an institutional level too. I invited two of the participants from my studies to join an institutional disability employability group. This has led to these students working with me and one of the university's pro-vice chancellors to develop a podcast and disability employment event for Disability History Month.

Finally, I am delighted that my research and related work has led to me being invited to speak nationally, including at the House of Lords and recently, to being shortlisted for the Shaw Trust Disability Power 100. If someone had told me that choosing to study would lead to all of this, I would not have believed it! For me, conducting research has involved many setbacks and numerous occasions where I have wondered if I am up to the task – but as I look back, I can see that it has also developed my credibility and ability to influence others to bring about positive change for students and graduates.



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As these case studies demonstrate, there are many benefits to taking on a 'pracademic' role, including developing confidence, credibility and the ability to influence within your service, at an institutional level and beyond. If you are just starting out on this journey, an academic qualification can be beneficial. Find out about the [AGCAS / Warwick CEIGHE qualifications](#), or hear reflections from the Course Director on page 18.

Finding a research 'tribe' of like-minded colleagues really helps. The AGCAS Research and Knowledge Committee are happy to offer support and provide a review process for research activities led by AGCAS task groups, working parties and committees [via this form](#). Also look out for an upcoming series of online networking opportunities, and join the conversation in the [AGCAS Research and Knowledge LinkedIn group](#).

In partnership with



and



targetjobs

AGCAS produces a wide range of expert careers resources to help busy careers professionals in their work with students and graduates.

These online resources are produced in collaboration with members and with our partners, Prospects and Group GTI. Together, we create and publish content aimed at students, graduates, careers professionals and the wider HE community.

JOB PROFILES

The AGCAS Job profiles, produced in partnership with Prospects, cover over 500 roles that new and recent graduates are most interested in. Profiles provide information about:

- qualifications and other entry requirements
- salaries
- work experience
- vacancy sources
- professional development
- career prospects

"I rate the Job profiles very highly as a careers resource. I make frequent use of them with my students in both talks and one-to-one appointments."

Madelaine Chapman, AGCAS member and writer

WHAT CAN I DO WITH MY DEGREE?

The WCIDWMD? series, also produced in partnership with Prospects, provides an overview of the different options open to current students and graduates from over 100 degree subjects.

They highlight the skills gained through study, provide examples of typical jobs, and give statistics on what graduates have gone on to do 15 months after graduation.

All new Job profiles and WCIDWMD? titles are thoroughly researched and written by HE careers professionals, usually AGCAS members. They are given an in-depth update every two years by experienced AGCAS editors who collaborate with relevant professional bodies and associations, employers, academics, AGCAS members and other organisations to ensure they remain up to date and relevant.

CASE STUDIES

Many Job profiles and WCIDWMD? titles feature case studies from recent graduates in real jobs or undertaking further study or training, offering prospective students a real-life insight into potential careers.

TEACHING

The Teaching series, produced in partnership with Group GTI and published on the targetjobs website, is written and updated annually by the AGCAS Teaching and Related Professions Task Group, supported by the AGCAS Publications Team. The series covers:

- teacher training routes
- applications for teacher training courses
- getting a first teaching job
- teaching in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

EDUCATION ALTERNATIVES

Written by the AGCAS Teaching and Related Professions Task Group, and published on the AGCAS website, Education Alternatives explores the range of careers in education that are available other than teaching in a school.



EMPOWER: STUDENTS AS RESEARCH PARTNERS INTO WORKPLACE WELLBEING AND RIGHTS

ROSIE POLLOCK, Careers Advice and Guidance Consultant at Leeds Arts University outlines how a 'students as partners' approach can be utilised for research into workplace wellbeing and rights for students and graduates, including the co-creation of bespoke resources. Recommendations are made for further research including how to set up effective student partnership groups at other institutions.



The 'Empower' research project, initiated at University of Huddersfield (UoH) and implemented at Leeds Arts University (LAU), was established to investigate students' and graduates' experiences of workplace wellbeing and rights. Focused on exploring their readiness to have these discussions with their employers and the support needed, this research examines the experiences of different demographic groups, both in work and in accessing work. We also wanted to find out whether there were any significant differences between demographic groups, regarding their experiences in work, or their access to work.

Graduates struggling with workplace wellbeing may leave due to workplace stress or illness, affecting graduate outcomes and their future career development. [The Sutton Trust \(2023\)](#) also found that 49% of undergraduate students have missed classes this academic year in order to do paid work, yet little research has explored their experiences of workplace wellbeing and rights while studying. The project ran from May 2023 to May 2024 and began with a questionnaire, co-created with a student partnership group. The questionnaire received responses from 68 LAU students and 35 LAU graduates.

STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

Ten LAU students and graduates were recruited as paid creative partners to help analyse the data and develop resources based on the findings. They co-created a workshop on workplace wellbeing and rights, complemented by an online written resource. The workshop was co-delivered by a staff member and a graduate ceramic artist, integrating clay-making for its educational and wellbeing benefits ([Argyle & Winship, 2018](#); [Wei, 2022](#)).

Unsurprisingly, this approach has presented challenges both practically in terms of availability and working around competing priorities, and in terms of role dynamics. Student partnership groups are defined as "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation or analysis" ([Cook-Sather et al., 2014: 6-7](#)). This differs from a traditional focus group in that students have agency to make decisions and co-create resources as equal partners with staff.

At LAU, students and graduates are accustomed to a hierarchical system between students and staff, and expect to receive detailed instructions when undertaking a live brief. As a staff member, I struggled to eliminate this hierarchy, often reverting to a leadership role due to time constraints and to give them more direction. Deciding the focus of our intervention was difficult given the broad scope of workplace wellbeing and rights. Without time or resource restrictions, we could have created extensive materials, however, we focused on creating a simple, yet attractive online information resource to educate students on their employment rights and how to discuss them at work.



BECOMING A RESEARCH PRACTITIONER

This project was inspired by my own experience as a creative graduate. I had a very negative workplace experience as a graduate eight years ago and left that job due to work-related stress. Conversations with colleagues and students revealed similar struggles among graduates from various sectors, ranging from microaggressions to sexual harassment, lack of reasonable adjustments to poor implementation of disciplinary procedures.

Driven by a desire to prevent others from the experience I had, I proposed this research to the Head of Careers at UoH, and when I moved to LAU, the research continued in both institutions. It was certainly a challenge to complete this research project alongside a new role, encouraging the creative partners to co-create resources while building relationships with academic staff and providing careers support to 2000+ students. Having this passion project propelled me forward and kept me motivated, allowing me to develop as a careers practitioner and researcher.

IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Leeds Arts University students are exceptionally talented, and this project provided paid opportunities to build their creative portfolios while enhancing employability, something I am keen to continue. By adopting a students as partners approach, we ensured that outputs were engaging for other students and graduates. The response to the final workshop, co-created and delivered by a graduate ceramic artist, was remarkable. One attendee with ADHD stated that “the making process together with conversation was an incredible experience, as it helped [them] to listen throughout and stay focused on difficult topics”.

As a careers consultant and researcher, this comment really resonated with me, and made me reflect on my practice when working with groups. Perhaps I could utilise more ‘making’ activities into my group workshops to make the sessions more accessible and interactive to all. This could be an interesting area for further research among career practitioners and educators. I hope to continue this research to further explore the topic for different demographics – I would be very interested to hear from individuals and/or institutions wanting to collaborate!



We wanted to educate students and graduates on their employment rights and how to discuss them at work



RECOMMENDATIONS

If you are considering how you could conduct your own ‘Empower’ Project why not:

- Read [Cook-Sather et al. \(2014\)](#) and consider establishing a student partnership group – ideally, make these paid roles!
- Make a case to your Head of Service, outlining potential impacts on National Student Survey and Graduate Outcomes measures
- Form a working group, co-create and adapt resources from the toolkit for your own institution and cohorts.
- Share your research and resources widely so that together, we can build an empowered network of students graduates and staff.
- Take a look at the following links:
 - a. [Toolkit of Resources](#) (including workshop and online resources)
 - b. [Start of Project documents](#)
 - c. [Promotional Material](#)

If you would like to read the full findings of the Empower Project, [Prospects Luminate](#) will be publishing this in July as part of the [Jisc Careers Research Grant](#).



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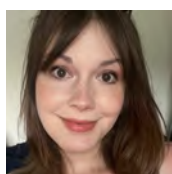


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HOW THE STUDENT VOICE CONTINUES TO SHAPE OUR GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

HELEN HOOK, Enterprise Educator, MATT EDWARDS, Employability and Enterprise Learning Development Consultant and SIMONE CLEWES, Project Officer from Careers Network, University of Birmingham explain how an interdisciplinary team and the student voice has supported the university's ambition to embed refreshed Graduate Attributes into the university experience.



The University of Birmingham has relaunched its Graduate Attributes which are an integral part of the university's ambition to support all students in their study, work, and personal lives, and for the university to be a place of transformative education.

To support this, Careers Network's curriculum team worked with multiple departments across the institution to develop a Graduate Attributes Academic Toolkit, which supports academics to embed employability, enterprise education and Graduate Attributes into their teaching. Having an interdisciplinary, cross-institutional team ensured we were building something which had both scale and impact.

GAINING STUDENT INSIGHTS

Capturing the student voice was an integral part of this work. To achieve this, we received University of Birmingham Educational Enhancement Funding (EEF) to recruit six students to support the project. This included roles on student voice, reflection, sustainability, digital and data, and academic insights.

These roles ensured we co-created academic content in which students had expressed an interest in engaging while studying. An example includes a sustainability infographic for academics to embed sustainability into their teaching.

The student voice role was critical in helping us to gain a better understanding on how to engage our student community with the Graduate Attributes. One participant in a student focus group commented "I think the term 'Graduate Attributes' is inspirational because it doesn't make students feel like they need to have all the skills to be the perfect graduate." This provided insight into how the university could best support students to reflect upon the skills they develop across their experience. It was a sentiment shared by all students and a primary example of why centralising the student voice continues to be so important.

Promoting the notion of a 'perfect graduate' was something which students consistently felt was off-putting, outdated and reductive. Instead, the insights gained across focus groups, on-campus informal discussions and online questionnaires revealed that students wanted to see Graduate Attributes communicated in ways that were relatable, diverse and inclusive.

REPRESENTING THE STUDENT VOICE

"A key part of the university's employability strategy is focused on using our students' and graduates' insights and experiences to shape and deliver an inclusive, future-focused service for all our stakeholders. The work that Simone has done to support the development and implementation of our Graduate Attributes is a superb example of this in practice"

Etta Parkes-Firth
Director of Student Employability

To ensure that the student voice has continued to be at the heart of what we do, Careers Network created a project officer role to support the cross-departmental approach to our Graduate Attributes work. This facilitated Simone, who previously undertook the student voice role on the toolkit project, to co-lead on a series of university-wide Graduate Attribute-related projects, each of which has incorporated student co-creation.

This has ensured that we continue to support students to develop Graduate Attributes in a way that works best for them. Examples of our most recent work include:

Graduate Attributes videos

An EEF-funded suite of videos is being created to support students to understand the value in developing Graduate Attributes. Careers Network has recruited ten students to work with us and the university's creative media department to take part in storyboarding, producing and filming the videos. This will help ensure that the videos created are inclusive, relevant and inspiring to students.

Enhancement in a generative AI world

Another EEF-funded project, co-led by Careers Network and the university's Business School, has recruited two students to undertake student and employer research on the attributes needed to use generative AI effectively during recruitment and in the workplace. This has involved undertaking interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and desk-based research. We will be co-creating resources with students to support them to use generative AI in an ethical and effective way when applying for jobs and creating guidance for colleagues on how generative AI skills link to the refreshed Graduate Attributes. The student researchers will also co-author a peer reviewed journal article.

"It's been fantastic to have worked on these university-wide, multi-department projects which have the student voice at their heart. Graduate Attributes have been developed to support students and so it was crucial that students played an integral role in how they were revised, relaunched and represented. The university's commitment to giving representation to the diversity of the student population has shone through as these projects have developed over the years. To have played a role in creating safe spaces for students from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences to share their views has been fulfilling."

Simone Clewes, Project Officer

By working with students, the university has developed Graduate Attributes that are not a tick-box to reach an 'ideal' standard. Rather, they are designed as an inspirational list to guide students to discern which skills, values and behaviours they are currently developing, or may wish to develop in the future.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"If we are serious about helping students to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to be successful in their studies, find fulfilling work and flourish in life, then we must involve students in developing an educational approach that is fit for the future. Developing connections across departments with a focus on student voice has been core to our university-wide approach, and Simone's fantastic work has exemplified everything we are trying to achieve."

Tom Harrison, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education & Innovation

We look forward to continuing to work with students to co-create resources and activities which will help our students to thrive in their future professional and personal lives post-graduation, delivered in ways which are meaningful to the priorities and values of our diverse community of students.



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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

ALLSA MCLEOD, AGCAS Learning and Professional Director, and ERICA IMHOF, AGCAS Professional Development Manager share how the Association's training and wider Continuing Professional Development offer evolves to support the myriad roles in our membership.



Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training at AGCAS is never standing still. The constant changes to higher education and the evolution of careers services within the sector mean that we are continually adapting and developing our training offer.

CPD FOR ME?

We offer more than training and conferences, there are various ways to develop professionally. Joining a Task Group, Committee, Working Party or even the AGCAS Board gives you the opportunity to meet and work with fellow members representing a range of universities, all facing similar challenges, barriers and opportunities. It also puts you in the driving seat – steering the course of AGCAS activities and ways to represent and support the membership.

We are lucky enough to work with our fantastic [Learning Committee](#), who represent you. Committee members are from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, big institutions and small. Dynamic and full of ideas, they are keen to represent their peers and push us forward.

We know that time is a valuable commodity for all members. To ensure knowledge and skills development for all, this year we offered a series of free, one-hour member webinars and Future Leaders Forums. Perhaps you were one of the 2,500+ members (over half the AGCAS membership!) who signed up for the webinars that explored a variety of topics from AI to pursuing fellowships, group guidance to becoming a Head of Service?

Some topics require more in-depth exploration. And that's where our training programme excels. You can choose in-person, online or blended learning options to suit your preferences and needs. We also know that budgets are tight, so you can benefit from AGCAS training from as little as £40 for a two-hour workshop.

EVOLVING COURSES

There are certain courses such as [Challenges of Careers Work in HE](#) and the [Management and Leadership Programme](#) - both modules on the CEIGHE ([Career Education, Information and Guidance in Higher Education](#)) postgraduate qualifications we collaborate on with The University of Warwick – that change year-on-year to discuss the hot topics in HE.

As well as refreshing established courses, here's a sample of our newer training courses, offered this year:

- [Supporting Neurodivergent Students into Employment](#)
- [Overcoming the Challenges of SME engagement](#)
- [Design Thinking for Careers and Employability](#)
- [Unlocking the Potential of Case Studies: Researching, Developing and Sharing Careers and Employability Case Studies](#)

With the phrase '[the three E's](#)' becoming a part of our careers service vocabulary through the AGCAS Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Task Group, we developed a stronger link with [Enterprise Educators UK](#) (EEUK) who now offer their [Fast track to Enterprise and Entrepreneurship for Careers Professionals](#), tailored for you. Learning Committee are consistently committed to reviewing potential collaborations for the benefit of our members.

We are also excited to announce a new course, Building Blocks for Management: Managing Self and People, aimed at those taking their first steps into management or those who want to lead projects and influence decisions within their roles. And keep an eye out for more employer engagement training and a course on embedding employability in the curriculum.

SAFE, SUPPORTIVE SPACES TO LEARN

We strive to make all our learning spaces inclusive and safe, whether that's online or in-person. This environment allows everyone to try out new ideas, make connections and share best practice with other institutions.

And the learning doesn't stop when the course finishes. All of our courses help you relate the learning to your context, and that of your careers service and wider institution, encouraging you to make action plans to implement in the immediate, medium and longer-terms.

WHICH COURSE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

Using the framework of the [AGCAS Professional Pathways](#), we have mapped courses to the facets of HE careers and employability work. This makes it easier for members to see which courses may aid their professional development, without being prescriptive.

Keep an eye on the [training and events calendar](#) on the website, as well as member mailers ARENA and CPD Spotlight for more training coming in 2024-25.

Contact learning@agcas.org.uk to receive an alert when any course is open for booking.

DEVELOP BY TRAINING OTHERS

How do we ensure that our trainers and presenters know what they're talking about? Simple. They are your peers – fellow members, working in similar roles up and down the country.

Representing the spread of AGCAS membership, we channel the knowledge and expertise, enthusiasm and passion of the membership, to the membership.

Interested in becoming a trainer? If you are a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) FHEA or have a teaching/training qualification then you can [apply to join the AGCAS trainer pool](#).

We are seeking trainers from all facets of the membership, so apply to undertake the next in-house trainer training course, Designing and Delivering Peer Training. We'll train you up, free of charge. And you'll gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to design and deliver a workshop, and potentially more!

SOMETHING MISSING?

We value your feedback. Contact [Erica](#) with your thoughts and the Learning Committee will discuss options.

“
In 2022/23, 100% of participants felt our trainers successfully made adjustments for their needs and created an inclusive and supportive environment where they were able to contribute
”



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Collaborative innovation: EMBEDDING EMPLOYABILITY IN ART AND PSYCHOLOGY EDUCATION



NENAGH CLARK, Employability Adviser and LOUISE TARRANT, Employability Coordinator at Northumbria University give an overview of a cross-university partnership with academics and students within the departments of Art and Psychology. Nenagh and Louise explore how this partnership enabled an innovative, experiential approach to embedding employability within the curriculum, whilst supporting cross-collaboration between two programme areas.



In our roles in Northumbria University's Graduate Futures Service, we work directly with students attempting to navigate job interviews. Anecdotal and observational feedback from students highlighted that interviews often make them feel anxious, prompting us to explore innovative approaches to help build confidence and develop interview techniques. A case study from a project by the University of West London ["Cop in the Head: A Forum Theatre Approach to Interview Performance"](#) demonstrated success at enhancing both students' confidence and interview skills. With a shared background in performance, we were inspired by the approach and the potential it could have within our practice. Could an interactive, experiential learning experience improve our students' interview confidence?

COLLABORATION

Working directly with academics to embed employability education within the curriculum led to a meeting with Kay Hepplewhite, Senior Lecturer on the Theatre and Performance programme. Forum theatre was a taught element of the curriculum, within her level five module Applying Theatre Practice. We also identified the potential for an interdisciplinary collaboration with the programme of Psychology on their level six placement module which included an assessed mock interview.

The project outline was developed to work in semester one of the 2023/24 academic year with level five theatre and performance students, utilising an interview scenario as the subject matter for a forum theatre performance. From this, more detailed subject specific scenarios were developed for the theatre and performance students to 'perform' as part of the teaching and learning process within the level six psychology module in semester two. This approach allowed students to continue developing academic knowledge and understanding whilst applying it to an employability context.

We developed our learning activities in partnership with the students, using improvisation and thought tracking with the theatre and performance students to explore their feelings about interviews. We gathered feedback from the psychology students through an online survey focusing on "dreaded questions" and interview anxieties. The psychology module leader Scott Houghton added to the feedback by sharing common areas where students underperformed during mock interview assessments. These insights shaped the forum theatre script, ensuring it was relevant and engaging. The psychology programme leader's positive feedback on the script affirmed its accuracy in reflecting a typical first-time interview scenario for psychology students.

One of the challenges we had to overcome due to the interdisciplinary nature of the project was upskilling the theatre and performance students on subject specific terminology used throughout the psychology script. We reminded students that their role was to perform and respond to the psychology students, therefore understanding specific psychology terminology was not a necessity. However, being familiar with the language and confidently being able to articulate and infer meaning within the script was vital.

The experiential learning approach allowed students to engage in hands-on experiences and reflect on them, applying their learning to real life situations. Incorporating reflection points throughout the process enabled students to provide feedback on their experiences. In one such session, an autistic student highlighted the importance of discussing the disclosure of disabilities and requesting adjustments. This feedback was crucial in creating a fully inclusive script, ensuring all students could participate in the process. Scott Houghton praised this aspect, saying "Great effort was also taken to consider diversity and inclusion within the performance."

IMPACT

Student and academic feedback on this approach has been overwhelmingly positive. According to the online survey, 100% of students felt the project improved their interview preparation and technique. 100% found forum theatre an effective method for teaching interview skills. One student noted, "I will definitely go into interviews with a different view and feel more confident."

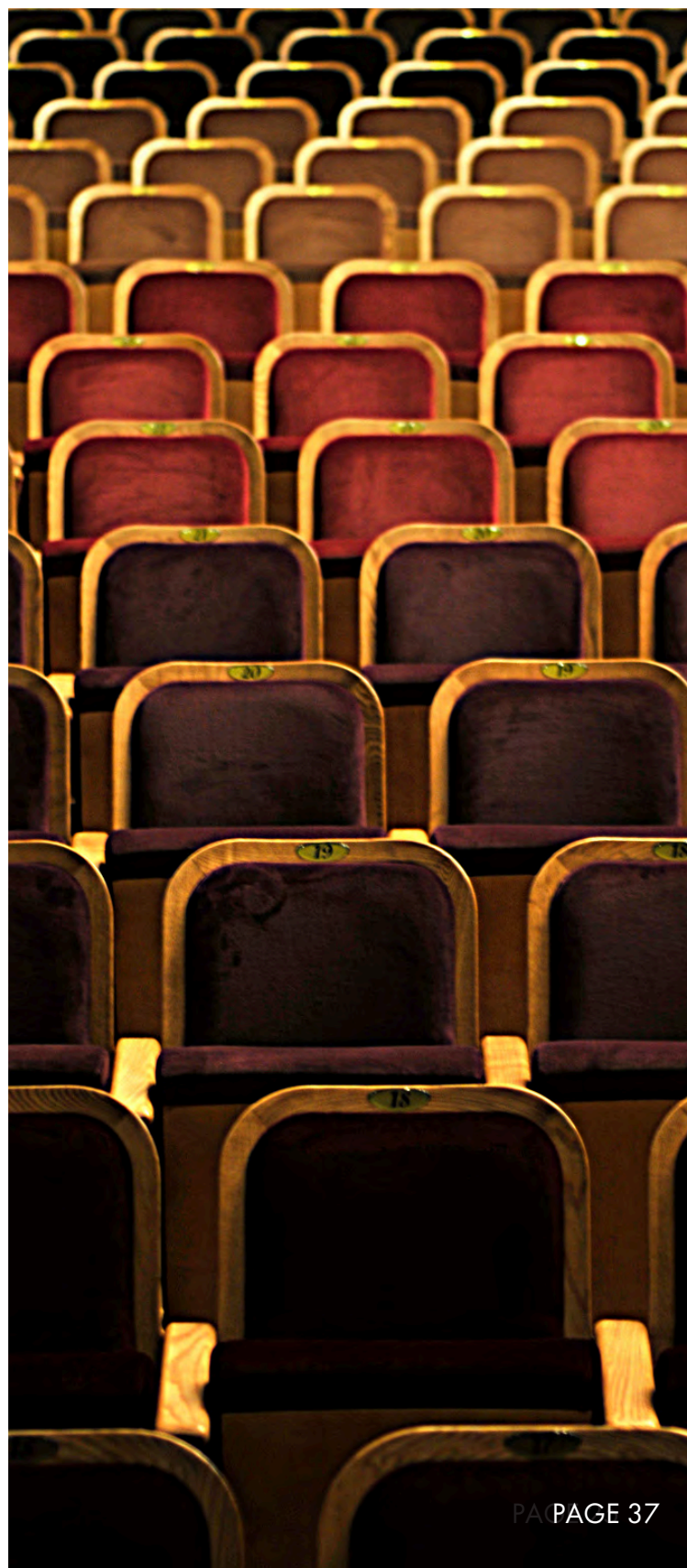
Given this success, both psychology and theatre and performance academics are keen to re-embed the forum theatre approach in their modules next academic year. Discussions are underway on leveraging this method to develop other employability skills across different modules to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation skills.

This cross-university partnership not only created an interdisciplinary learning opportunity, but it also transformed employability education through experiential learning. As we look to expand this innovative approach, we remain committed to equipping students with the confidence and skills they need for successful careers, employability and lifelong learning.

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The experiential learning approach allowed students to engage in hands-on experiences and reflect on them, applying their learning to real life situations

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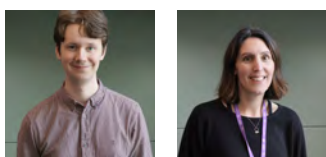
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The important role of graduate interns: AN INTERVIEW



NATHAN TOPLIS and KATIE WATERS, Graduate Interns at Leeds Beckett University, explore the benefits of integrating students and graduates into the careers workforce to tackle the challenges of student engagement. They share their experiences of entering the careers team via the Graduate Intern Pathway and offer insights into how the sector can benefit from creating more distinct student and graduate entry points.



What has been your experience of entering the Leeds Beckett careers team via the newly created Graduate Intern Pathway?

NATHAN: After graduating from Leeds Beckett University in 2023, I joined the Graduate Intern Pathway at the beginning of 2024. This programme is a 24-month contract with the Business Engagement team in Beckett Careers, and at first, returning to the university was quite surreal. I was suddenly on the other side of the glass, trying to reach students who were focussed on their academic work and social lives to the exclusion of all else – just as I had been.

KATIE: Returning to Leeds Beckett University as a graduate intern could also be compared to going backstage. As the recipient of a public-facing service, you experience the finished article - the lecture that was delivered, the careers fair on the day. You catch only a glimpse of the networks, collaborations and creativity that lie behind these visible aspects of a careers service.

What have been your first impressions of joining the careers service as a new graduate?

NATHAN: My first impression was of a stark disequilibrium between the tireless work of my new colleagues and the muted response of the students. This reminded me that, throughout my course, the fees that my peers and I had been paying were constantly referenced (especially during the locked down first year.) Yet very few of us made full use of the range of services that we were paying for.

How can this be explained? The key word here is 'visibility' – my recent experience allows me to always keep in mind the numerous other drains on the attentions of a student and to approach our communications accordingly.

CAPTURING A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

How has being a recent student at the university informed your work/approach as a graduate intern in the careers team?

KATIE: I can draw on my unique perspective when working on planning, delivery, communications and outreach. I can easily remember how I felt finishing my dissertation, for example, or during the initial job search after graduation. These feelings and memories will fade over time, so capturing them provides a valuable source of insight. Having regular opportunities to share my perspective with my team during the planning of events and projects has allowed me to share these insights, continually reflect and implement ideas on an ongoing basis.

Tell us about your role in enhancing student engagement

NATHAN: In my role as a graduate intern, I have focussed primarily on designing printed collateral, as well as creating content for social media, newsletters, and digital screens across the university.

KATIE: My role is in the Graduate Progression Team, so my work is mainly aimed at final-year students and recent graduates. Making use of my lived experience as a student, I've supported our call campaign, making around 500 phone calls to recent graduates to signpost them to our support, and I've designed communications and lecture shout-outs. My aim has been to normalise feelings of uncertainty about what to do after university and encourage students to engage no matter what stage of career thinking they are at.



THE 'WHY' BEHIND STUDENT BEHAVIOURS

What have you been able to bring to the role as a recent student and new graduate?

NATHAN: Rather than viewing the careers service as an essential part of the university package, some students view it as an appendage which they can avoid. I have used my familiarity with social media and my understanding of student priorities to create materials which blend into the 'social' side of their feeds and relate much more explicitly to their problems.

As a recent graduate, I can deliver messages that students might not want to hear in a format that catches their attention regardless. Since I started working on these materials, we have seen an increase of 143% in online engagement and 398% in reach. More importantly, there is early evidence to suggest that this is increasing the actual engagement with our events and services.

KATIE: My goal has been to discover the 'why' behind certain student behaviours and career service successes. Recent Leeds Beckett research has found that a sense of belonging is key to engagement (Pugh, E. 2024)*. This resonates with my experience. Helping students feel connected to the careers service would, I believe, support their engagement with our offer. From my time as a student, the key here for me is in-person interactions with the careers service team, which could build familiarity, trust and a wider sense of belonging to the university community.

How could the sector benefit from creating more distinct student and graduate career pathways?

KATIE: The sector could benefit from recruiting students and recent graduates as they can help careers services take a step closer to those at the centre of the work. If the challenge is student or graduate engagement then these voices must be represented in the research, design and implementation of solutions.

Creating pathways such as the graduate intern or student careers assistants roles is one way to hear from these key stakeholders and learn from their recent experiences. Through this learning, there is scope for careers services to develop a sense of community with students which continues after graduation and supports engagement.

NATHAN: I agree that a continuing community would greatly benefit any careers service. Graduates wouldn't have to be recruited full time - they could be hired as freelancers or on a casual basis to support their development.

THE OPPORTUNITY UNDER YOUR NOSE

What challenges do you see for careers services working with graduates?

NATHAN: Careers services can sometimes miss the opportunities right under their noses and students can sometimes miss out on opportunities that they don't see as 'real' graduate jobs. Giving them significant ownership and responsibility in their positions, as well as appropriate training and development opportunities, can counteract this. I deeply appreciate the experience that I've gained in this multi-functional intern role because I have this trust.

We firmly advocate for roles for new graduates within careers teams. A graduate will always be much closer than other careers staff to understanding the challenge of student engagement. This is also a valuable way to increase diversity, as these roles are well suited to students who don't necessarily have high levels of experience or developed networks, but who do have unique and valuable perspectives.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

How has your AGCAS membership provided support?

KATIE: My AGCAS membership has been a great benefit. I have attended webinars and training courses, which have helped me familiarise myself with the sector and my role.

Undertaking the Employability and Career Development Learning course has supported my professional development, and I recently applied my learning when co-delivering a skills session. Exploring the AGCAS website and attending the 2024 Annual Conference has also helped me to discover possible progression pathways and learn from careers professionals to understand wider trends across the sector.



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*For more information on the Leeds Beckett University research on belonging, contact Katie Waters

Threading employability into the curriculum: **A SEAMLESS APPROACH**



SARAH BROWN, English Literature lecturer and ANDY UNDERWOOD, Careers and Employability Adviser, Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) outline their collaborative project to embed employability into a first-year English Literature module. This has encouraged students to creatively engage with employability at an early stage, laying foundations for them to build on.

Post-graduation options for humanities students are vast and diverse, meaning that career planning can feel overwhelming. As a result, some fail to engage fully with the many careers events and services on offer, which is why it is crucial to support students at an early stage to make full use of the time and opportunities to maximise their career readiness.

Joining students in the classroom to explain what the careers service offers only scratches the surface. Supporting students to reflect upon career interests, motivations and values, explore potential career options and develop confidence and skills, is a process. We set out to encourage first-year students to engage with employability on a deeper level, in hope of laying strong foundations upon which they can build.

“

Supporting students to reflect upon career motivations, explore potential career options and develop confidence and skills is a process

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I’LL THINK ABOUT IT LATER

Students can seem reluctant to think about the world of work as they feel it is a problem for ‘future me’. Lecturers sometimes express concern that hosting careers colleagues in seminar hours eats into vital time for delivering the curriculum. Employability, in other words, can be a turn-off. Therefore, a key goal of our project was to find ways of incorporating employability within the curriculum in a way that addresses the concerns of all parties, whilst ensuring that students develop their career ideas and skills throughout their course.

While students often respond negatively to the idea of employability in the abstract, they engage enthusiastically if it is linked to the content of the module and sets them a real creative or critical challenge. We worked closely with students on a Level 4 English Literature module - Myth, Miracle and Magic – exploring ways to embed career planning from first year, ensuring that students did not leave this until ‘later’. The group worked together to devise classroom activities and assignment briefs in which literary texts and employability skills were intertwined.

By initiating career conversations with students at an early stage in their academic career, we have helped them to make meaningful connections between the work they are doing in the curriculum and how this links to useful transferable skills, as well as identifying motivations that could point them in a direction of a possible career pathway.



A CREATIVE CAREER JOURNEY

Many activities had a playful or creative element. For example, students were asked to visit the university’s employability page and complete a ‘what is my management style’ quiz using the persona of a character they’d been studying – Homer’s Odysseus. In a similar vein, they were invited to write a letter of application in response to an advert for a project management graduate job in the voice of a character from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, using evidence from the play to back up their claims.

Although these were light-hearted activities, they ensured that students began to navigate their way around our careers website and draw on a whole range of experiences to provide evidence that you are a great fit for a company. It wasn’t only students who benefited from the experience. From an academic perspective, there was the opportunity to learn more about the different roles within the employability team, and how they could help colleagues and students. From the careers perspective, the project offered a chance to engage with first years at a time when they could consider shaping their academic journey in tandem with their career plans.

Some activities were more narrowly focused on employability; for example an exercise analysing interesting job adverts, looking at what we could learn about these workplaces from the way they presented themselves and the kind of language they used. We then researched the companies in more detail so that students could reflect on their reputation and ethos. However, even these activities could be seen as related to the study of English, as they develop students’ analytical, critical thinking and research skills.

SOME KEY FINDINGS


We conducted a number of surveys to gauge students’ responses to the employability activities and attitudes towards careers more generally. One interesting finding was that overall, more of the students found the activities interesting and relevant to the study of English Literature, than useful from a careers point of view. For us, this was a positive start to our project, as what we were trying to battle against was students’ tendency to see ‘employability’ as a distraction from their degree subject.


It also indicated that the activities would seem worthwhile for students who either already have a clear career plan or have retired. We now want to build on this foundation to help students become more aware that the activities we have introduced are giving them confidence and understanding in relation to career planning too.

Another survey asked students for their views on funded internships. Our university offers bursaries to support such schemes, and it’s surprising how few students put themselves forward for these. The results from students on the Myth, Miracle and Magic module, plus students on a Level 5 science fiction module, gave us a greater understanding of this. It was interesting that quite a few respondents ticked a statement about lacking confidence or feeling out of their depth. To address this, we invited three Level 6 students, who had already taken internships, to visit the class and encourage them to feel more confident about their own ability to succeed on similar schemes.

GOING FORWARD

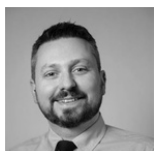
While this was a one-off project, these experiences will continue to inform our practice in the future. We feel confident about which of the activities and assignment tasks worked well, and we hope to encourage colleagues in other subject areas to develop their own ways of embedding employability in the curriculum.

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The only constant is change: CONTINUAL INNOVATION IN CAREERS PROVISION

IAN BOARDMAN, Head of Careers and Enterprise at the University of Salford, highlights the increasing appetite for, and expectation on, careers teams to generate new ways of inspiring and supporting students to explore their life/career goals. Through innovative approaches, including a physical change in location, the Salford careers team are supporting students to achieve their ambitions.



The drive and expectation to increase engagement with students, and to demonstrate evidence of positive impact on students' readiness to achieve their life and career goals, has guided our careers culture at Salford. Since 2016/17, we have secured resources to innovate and introduce new impactful ways of working.

Our key drivers have been engaging as many students as possible, as well as proactively engaging specific target cohorts. This includes a focus on undergraduate home students on programmes with lower-than-average rates of highly skilled employment graduate outcomes, combined with lower-than-average levels of readiness to achieve life/career goals. These students were identified via their answers to optional questions within the annual online registration process and the National Student Survey.

We work to inspire students to progress along a journey of identifying and taking actions to help them achieve their life/career goals. We have used inspirational stories to motivate students to take action and access support. Embedding employability conversations within the timetabled curriculum at programme level is a key priority. We have trialled allocating students' places at workshops relevant to their disclosed needs, but attendance has been mixed. Equipping programme teams to embed key messages and activity within the curriculum has been more impactful.



INNOVATING AND MOVING ON

Over recent years, we have developed provision that has then become embedded in other areas of the university, allowing the careers team to move onto other initiatives. Examples include our Unitemps recruitment agency branch, now within a wholly owned subsidiary and Launch, a business incubation programme which now sits within Salford Business School. We introduced a graduate internship programme which is now managed by the Work-Integrated Learning team, and Careers Registration questions and answers have been built into the university's online registration process.

The Careers and Enterprise team no longer manages these initiatives but continues to work closely with teams now delivering them, to align provision within a coherent offer that develops students' professional and employability skills and enhances their recruitment and self-employment prospects.

This process of change has been both challenging and invigorating. We have adjusted our provision to create capacity, moving away from drop-in and bookable CV reviews towards an online self-help job application skills platform. We have been bold in trying out new initiatives, often managing a range of projects at different speeds, which has been challenging due to changing resources and circumstances.



We inspire students to progress along a journey of identifying and taking actions to help them achieve their life and career goals



WE MOVED HOME

In 2020/21, we moved our Careers and Enterprise team from a student support department to the library. Library staff deliver services through similar models to careers and enterprise, including advice, skill development workshops, self-help resources, and collaborative work with academic colleagues. The support and expertise of library colleagues has enabled us to procure, implement and drive-up engagement with self-help platforms and to make business cases for resources to innovate new provision.

Since this move, we secured funding to deliver business start-up schools and 'Big Pitch' awards to inspire students to explore an entrepreneurial career journey, using financial incentives and a competitive process. We also secured funding to appoint two new international-focused careers roles. Through these new posts, we have introduced themed alumni events and connected stakeholders to external providers of information and support.

In 2022/23, we secured funding to create a new Careers Hub in a high footfall location on-campus to improve service awareness. We appointed paid skills ambassadors, students from diverse backgrounds, who proactively engage students on-campus in conversations about life/career goals and connect them to relevant services. These new parts of core provision are key for engaging commuter students who spend minimal time on-campus.

Engaging all students with provision remains a challenge (40% of full-time UK undergraduates have engaged by the time they start their final year of study), but these year-round proactive measures are making it easier for students to access support. Developing this provision would not have been possible if the team had not moved to the library and taken advantage of the opportunity to be more visible and proactive.

STAY PROACTIVE AND LEARN LESSONS

Making business cases and applications for pilot funding, to then secure longer term funding, to innovate and sustain proactive interventions with target (and indeed all) students has required us to be imaginative and resilient. We have learnt lessons from other universities and organisations, taken risks and worked collaboratively with stakeholders across and beyond the university community, including external funding providers.

Though our work, we have increased student engagement with services by 36% in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23, and increased students' confidence from before to after engagement with services by an average of 30%. Our mission is to keep reinventing what we do and how we do it to engage, inspire and support students to work towards their life/career goals.

"I would absolutely encourage anyone at the uni to get involved with the team. I've not only done Big Pitch, I've done Launch...I've had support from so many different areas across the university and without them we wouldn't be where we are today. So, I just feel so much more confident that people believe that we can do what we want to do...that boost is just really positive and I'm never going to forget it."

James Miles, Comedy Writing & Performance student

"The quality of the Careers and Enterprise support is nothing short of exceptional. When you have limited understanding of the job application process and interview process and the ways to handle yourself in a work environment, this team has provided so many different ways of preparing you for this final stage of being the well-blended graduate that UK industry wants"

Oluwatoyin Saka, Project Management in Construction student



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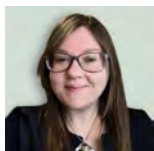
www.salford.ac.uk/careers

Enhancing international employability:

FOSTERING CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN KENYA AND THE UK



ANTHONY MANNING, Director and Dean for Global and Lifelong Learning and GEMMA WITTS, Senior Careers Adviser, University of Kent together with NAOMI NYABOGA, Chief Information Officer and JOHNSON KINYUA, Dean of Students and Careers Services, University of Nairobi discuss their joint project which shares best practice in employability between the countries.



The challenges that UK careers services face in supporting the diverse needs of international students with employability have been well documented ([AGCAS, 2024](#)). Careers services have continued to respond to the uncertainty and upheaval in the sector in a range of ways including through the [International Student Employability Group](#) (ISEG) Chaired by UKCISA (2024), responses to the creation and impact of the Graduate route visa ([AGCAS, 2023](#)) and supporting students with subsequent adjustments to policy around dependents ([BBC, 2023](#)). However, the needs of specific groups of international students have arguably not been addressed ([Huang and Turner, 2018](#); [UKCISA, 2022](#)) with 44% of employability staff lacking confidence in addressing international students' needs ([UUKi, 2020](#)).

Although the University of Kent supports international students in their employability development in a range of ways, staff recognised the need to develop a closer awareness of the Kenyan labour market. Despite recent government initiatives and reforms in Kenya, it remains challenging for Kenyan graduates, with 82% of employment being in the informal sector ([Federation of Kenya Employers 2021](#)). Many highly-skilled Kenyan graduates resort to 'tarmacking' ([The Star, 2024](#)), the entrepreneurial yet stressful process of selling goods on the streets. This is just one indication of the thriving Kenyan start-up culture, which also means that digital skills will be a key requirement in 55% of jobs by 2030 ([People Daily, 2021](#)).

The Kenya UK Student Employability Project (KUSEP) initiative was developed, and originally funded through an Erasmus grant, to allow employability and internationalisation teams and their students at University of Nairobi and University of Kent to exchange knowledge, network with alumni and employers, and understand job-hunting challenges in both countries. Although KUSEP began and continues online, collaboration has been greatly enhanced through reciprocal visits to Kenya and the UK, which facilitated a rich exchange of insights and perspectives.

RECIPROCAL PROJECT IMPACTS

Since its inception in 2020, KUSEP has helped to deliver a range of innovative solutions and initiatives which have benefitted both University of Kent and University of Nairobi. Staff in Nairobi were particularly interested in learning from Kent staff about CRM systems, digital careers tools, career fairs and the award-winning employability points scheme, which rewards students for employability activities and creates work experience opportunities with businesses. Through observing activities and speaking with staff at Kent, Nairobi staff have been able to implement their own version of the scheme and update their careers service bookings system as a result.

Kent staff have benefitted from speaking with Kenyan employers, current students and graduates to find out more about labour market trends and needs. Whilst in Nairobi, Kent staff had the opportunity to speak with the Chamber of Commerce, government ministers and an SME. The information gained proved very useful when advising students returning to the country and in understanding how employability aligns with Kenyan national values and workforce development commitments as it does in the UK.

This has helped staff in Kent's careers and recruitment departments to improve their understanding of the labour market in Kenya so that they can advise and counsel current and future students about their employability development opportunities and future work opportunities in the UK and Kenya.

"Working on KUSEP was a transformative experience. The classes were insightful, and the collaboration allowed us to share valuable employability models while addressing unique challenges in Kenya"

Muchemi Muriithi: University of Nairobi student

"KUSEP represents a forward-thinking approach to international education and support services. As an alumnus of the University of Kent, I strongly advocate for this initiative, recognising it's potential to create a more tailored, culturally aware, and effective support system for Kenyan students."

John Makokha, PhD: University of Kent Kenyan Alumni, Researcher & Consultant

"I have spent many years supporting students from Kenya. Having the opportunity to learn from careers staff and students at the University of Nairobi really added to my understanding of the challenges faced by Kenyan students in job hunting".

Sue Hopkinson, Head of International Marketing and Recruitment, University of Kent

"I'm grateful for the KUSEP venture in collaboration with our human resource capital in Kenya. We totally agree with your timely service and role in enhancement of employment opportunities abroad and in Kenya."

James Wanjohi: Director of Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI)

"KUSEP embodies our core values of unity, hard work and service in Kenya. Empowering youth with employability skills fortifies our national cohesion, national values and prosperity."

Josiah Musilli: Secretary of Directorate of National Cohesion and Values

"It was great to support KUSEP as an employer and media professional. I look forward to recording a podcast in coming weeks to help promote innovations in Kenyan student employability development."

Dickson Morande: Co-Founder Campus Radio Kenya & Aqute Media

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This successful and cross-functional transnational collaboration has allowed us to learn from multi-stakeholder lived experience, including students, staff, alumni and employers in the UK and overseas. KUSEP has allowed us to harness staff and student responses to UK and international challenges to improve employability skill narratives, support CV development and job-hunting success.

Some outputs that have already resulted from the project include the introduction of a careers passport at University of Nairobi inspired by University of Kent's Employability Points system. A partners database has also been created, linking students to work opportunities. Colleagues have organised online and in-person careers workshops to prepare Kenyan students for the job market, including a focus on digital skills employability and cross-cultural sessions. Other highlights include the identification of funding sources and fundraising schemes to support student experiences of work, and the development of CPD activities to train staff in both countries.

RECENT AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Collaboration and conversation between staff at University of Kent and University of Nairobi continues, most recently through meetings with Kenyan academics involved in national employability and career guidance as well as a presentation of project outcomes at a recent UUKi Kenyan Vice Chancellors event.

We are currently investigating the possibility of cross-cultural mentoring opportunities through the enterprise hubs of both universities. We are also looking forward to working with media agencies in Kenya to continue to promote the need for innovation in careers services.

Unfortunately, Erasmus funding is no longer available in the UK, but other funding opportunities are being actively explored. We are also considering extending the project to other countries to support a broader group of students, whilst also continuing to enhance the international employability knowledge within our international and careers teams at the University of Kent.



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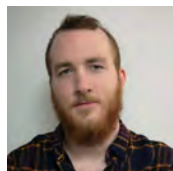
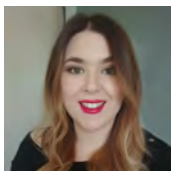
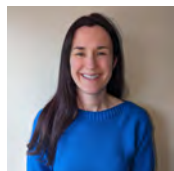
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The role of student employability ambassadors IN ENHANCING PLACEMENT SUPPORT



BETH LAWRY, Lecturer and Placement Lead in Biomedical Sciences, KATE ROTHERY, Careers Consultant and HARLEY STEVENSON-COCKS, Lecturer and Academic Lead for Employability in Biomedical Sciences, Newcastle University showcase their use of student employability ambassadors to support students through all stages of year-long and summer placements.



In the School of Biomedical, Nutritional and Sport Sciences, in collaboration with the careers service, we provide important placement information, CV advice and interview tips to put students in the best position to gain and succeed on summer and year-long work-based placements. However, students often relate to this information better when a student peer tells them. Indeed, [Bolton-King \(2022\)](#) highlights the importance of peer mentoring in enhancing employability skills. In addition, as a team, we found juggling both the academic and career aspects of our roles challenging. Therefore, in September 2017, we began utilising employability ambassadors (EAs) for specific placement support activities.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

We have around 380 students in our stage two (second year) cohort, which is when students apply for year-long and summer work-based placements. The students are on a variety of degree courses and have a broad range of influencing factors including, but not limited to, financial background, widening participation indicators, neurodivergence and nationality. As a placement team of three, the one-to-one support we can provide to this number of students is limited due to time constraints. Therefore, in September 2017, we began utilising employability ambassadors (EAs) for specific placement support activities

AMBASSADOR ROLE

Our EAs are motivated students both with and without placement experience. They range from second-year to Masters students and they serve as peer mentors, offering comprehensive support via in-person and virtual platforms. EAs are trained by Kate (Careers Consultant) to provide introductory CV guidance, disseminate information, identify and share placement opportunities and provide general guidance around professional behaviour. Another important role of the EAs is to support students while they are out on placement and when they return to university. This peer support is vital during these transitions that can often be tricky for students to navigate.

Because the majority of our EAs have worked in part-time jobs, internships or completed summer or year-long placements, they have the experience to share with the cohort about how they found and applied for these roles. They can provide unique insights into the challenges of gaining a placement, what questions they were asked at application and interview stages, what working in a professional setting is like and what their role entailed. The EAs reflect the diverse student demographic and their variety of experience provides support that can meet our large cohort's varied requirements.

“

We provide a programme of training to ensure the appropriateness of student-delivered information, advice and guidance within the careers context

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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In the induction of the EAs, Kate delivers a programme of training to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of student-delivered information, advice and guidance within the careers and employability context. The ambassadors reflect on their own experiences and work through scenarios to showcase the diversity of students' career priorities and the processes in the recruitment of work-based placements.

Providing training at the outset of an EA's term that grounds their experiences in practical knowledge and career exploration principles allow us as professionals to ensure that EAs leverage their peer experiences whilst protecting against unconscious bias. For example, one particular EA's CV may have been perfect for securing their research and development placement, however, a different style or approach may be more appropriate for a peer they are supporting who is applying to a scientific marketing placement.

MEASURING IMPACT

Since involving EAs in placement support, along with other interventions, students successfully gaining year-long placements have increased from 10 in 2017/18 to 20 in 2018/19. This has consistently risen to a current total of 33 for the upcoming 2024/25 academic year.

The EAs have helped improve student employability confidence, as shown in survey and placement feedback comments, and have especially supported students pre- and during-placement via emails and virtual meetings. Some examples of this support include specific advice around preparing for interview and help with navigating the first few weeks of placement transition.

The placement student feedback we have received has been excellent, especially on the quality of support and resources provided by EAs:

"The CV support and guidance I received was invaluable and definitely factored into me gaining my year-long placement"

"The placement opportunities that were advertised on our Teams site were fantastic"

Placement students

EAs also reported benefits from the experience:

"As an EA, I got to witness the personal and professional growth of my peers by helping them navigate a vast range of career-enhancing opportunities. In doing so, this role helped me develop transferable skills applicable to real-world scenarios."

Neha, Employability Ambassador

"One of the most rewarding aspects of my role was providing guidance to students about applications and CV tailoring and later hearing back from them about their success in securing placements"

Kristi, Employability Ambassador

"I have loved the opportunity to be an EA, both to see the benefits in those I have helped to get a placement, and development of my own skills in supporting others and improving my own graduate schemes applications"

Becky, Employability Ambassador

As academics and careers staff, we have seen a reduction in our time spent identifying placement opportunities and providing one-to-one CV support, meaning we can dedicate more time to improving our core information and providing vital interview practice. The use of EAs in our department has garnered recognition from the Royal Society of Biology and our external examiners, who have both highlighted in their reports the value of using peer mentorship for employability. We would urge others to consider using EAs to support students, especially in the placement context.

Thank you to Neha, Kristi, Becky and all of the other Employability Ambassadors for their excellent work over the years and we look forward to working with other EAs in the future.



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Supporting researchers: THE ROLE OF CAREERS CONSULTANTS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH CULTURE



ROBERT BOWLES, Careers and Professional Development Adviser at the Royal Society of Chemistry and co-chair of the AGCAS Research Students and Research Staff Task Group, details the challenges faced by career consultants for researchers (CCR). These challenges are compared with his own, unique position within a professional body.

An AGCAS [research study](#) revealed that most UK and Ireland careers services (both research-intensive and otherwise) provide careers support for researchers. Some services have staff dedicated to postgraduate research (PGR) students, whilst others have colleagues who work solely with research staff, such as postdoctoral researchers, and some work with both cohorts.

The role of a career consultant for researchers (CCR) differs significantly from offering support to undergraduates and new graduates. We face common challenges but also unique ones due to working with PhD students and academic research staff. Researchers navigate a very specific, highly competitive academic job market and often struggle with job security, uncertainty and funding, a prerequisite for career progression.

Researchers often have a key decision to make at some point in their career: do they continue seeking work in this environment or move into a non-academic role? We help them build their careers in this research environment, transition into a teaching role, or leave academia altogether to pursue other opportunities, using their research skills and knowledge.

“

Our ability to share insights into academic and non-academic career pathways fill a vital gap to support researchers

”

FUNDING CHALLENGES

CCRs have a deep understanding and working knowledge of the realities of academic career paths in an international context. We need a strong awareness of where and how funding for fellowships and research is distributed. In the UK, falling funding rates from Research Councils, who distribute UK government research funding, are making the academic career pathway harder to navigate.

This is further compounded by the structural inequities affecting distribution (see for example [Royal Society of Chemistry](#)). To combat this, a typical workshop for a researcher audience would be ‘[Understanding the HE Landscape in the UK](#)’, elucidating some of the ‘[hidden curriculum](#)’ in elements of this sector. These inequities often surface in the power dynamics between supervisors and principal investigators, who control project funding.

Managing this relationship is challenging for some researchers, and the need for change in this area is leading to a focus on developing [research culture](#) to support researchers. This describes the environment in which research is conducted and takes in norms in behaviours, expectations, attitudes and values of research communities. Challenges researchers might face include workplace bullying and harassment, unhealthy competition and issues with mental health, as highlighted by a [Wellcome Trust survey of researchers](#).

My role at the Royal Society of Chemistry gives me unique insights into the scientific policy that supports improving research culture through liaising with our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and our science policy teams. These relationships have led to speakers from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council supporting our biannual conference for early career researchers who are seeking to establish an independent research career. In addition, these insights are invaluable to me when offering advice directly to our early career researcher members.

RESEARCH IDENTITY

According to a [Universities UK publication](#), researchers are often a more mature audience than UGs and PGTs, so CCRs are required to understand how mid-career professionals deal with career change. Many researchers have committed their careers to their research and struggle to separate themselves from it, which is by its very nature, highly specialist. We therefore often must work hard to ensure that all career pathways are portrayed as equally valid.

We work with those who have not secured a prized academic job, or perhaps those who have realised over time that an academic role is not what they thought it would be. This need has grown as universities face reduced funding for teaching and research. We see the disappointment, a sense of regret and grief concomitant with the initial stages of identity change as they seek to understand and then pursue non-academic career paths.

CCRs bridge the gap between the 'students and education' and 'research' sides of the institution. Often, we bring knowledge of new policies and initiatives affecting UGs and PGTs into the research arena. We learn how research operates in our universities and use that to inform careers colleagues about topics such as the [Research Evaluation Framework](#) which may impact the amount of time and attention that academic stakeholders have for careers work.

CCR ACTIVITIES

Many CCRs are also involved in research, especially into areas such as research culture. This requires a completely different set of skills than traditional career advising, and indeed satisfies many of the requirements deemed desirable in an academic.

"There's a lot more to my role than delivering CV workshops! Indeed, the focus of my role is as much towards using data to inform strategic planning, as it is about delivering activities (or bringing in external partners) to boost our students' careers."

Pete Evans, PGR Employability Consultant at the University of Bristol and AGCAS Research Students and Research Staff Task Group member



An example from Pete, quoted above, is how his PGR employability report fed directly into the university's strategic plan for postgraduate researchers, and supported a successful Research England funding application for a project within Doctoral College. This project led to the creation of an online 'insider's guide to an academic career' resource, demonstrating how CCRs can play a role in shaping holistic support for PGRs.

CCRs IN THE FUTURE

The CCR role will continue to be vital to the success of the UK academic environment by ensuring universities can keep on attracting and retaining research talent. Our ability to share insights into academic and non-academic career pathways fill a vital gap to support researchers. Our ongoing success relies on support from senior management as university budgets continue to tighten and we are asked to take on more work in our roles.

With thanks to members of the AGCAS Research Students and Research Staff Task Group and Kate Murray from the University of Cambridge [AARC group](#) for their input into this article.



[AGCAS Research Students and Research Staff Task Group](#)



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RETHINKING ONLINE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

SUSAN SMITH, Careers Consultant (Content Creator) at Queen Mary, University of London outlines the multiple 'hats' required for her role and suggests how content marketing strategies can inform how to engage students with careers activities.



As a seasoned careers consultant, I have witnessed firsthand the difference good careers guidance, information and advice can make to students' and graduates' wellbeing and the realisation of their goals. But since Covid, the way students want to engage with us has changed.

With the pandemic behind us and a bold new horizon of AI and increasingly empty lecture rooms, our challenge is to get students to engage with higher education and careers through blended learning and content that moves our clients from 'aloof' to 'all in'. In addition to losing much of their face-to-face confidence, students have become seasoned voyeurs of content, hiding behind cameras and insta reels and only engaging with your content online if it speaks to them and their situation. We must take students on a journey from online to in person, using content marketing strategies and 'social selling' in order to grow the 'know, like, trust' factor.

MANY 'HATS' MAKE LIGHT WORK

In addition to being a careers consultant and 'pracademic', where I lecture on professional development modules, I also wear another hat of digital content creator. I create online content to support each aspect and stage of students' career planning and development, including repurposing in-person events for students who couldn't attend and offering asynchronous learning to support in-curriculum lectures and blended learning.

Developing online content meets students where they are; whether it's after that night shift, or once the workday is out of the way and there is time before bed to ponder what might be next after their degree. I have had to upskill myself on communication and content strategies and social media platforms, to compete effectively for students' attention amidst the 'noise' of work, studies, insta influencers and all the other demands on our students' time.

APPLYING A NEW STRATEGY

I propose that we should be applying content marketing strategies to bring our students back to engaging with us and our offer. In the 'awareness' phase, we provide attention-grabbing content, such as blogs and videos that introduce our value proposition. As the individual moves into the consideration phase, they actively explore options. Content here should address their specific needs and pain points. Case studies, comparison guides, and expert articles can help to guide them.

In this conversion stage, the student becomes a customer. Content should focus on building trust and providing detailed information. Product descriptions and customer testimonials help convince them to consume our information. After they have engaged with us, the journey continues. Content now shifts toward nurturing the relationship. Educational content (such as user guides), personalized emails, and loyalty programs keep the customer engaged and satisfied. The final stage is advocacy and loyalty. The engaged consumer becomes an advocate. Content should encourage them to share their positive experiences.

Whilst this consumerist approach may jolt, it is also important to remember our students have become consumers of online content and if we are to 'compete', we need to begin to market our valuable content in a similar way.

In the Cybil Graduate Research Survey, QMUL students were asked directly why they hadn't engaged with their careers service. Pain points such as 'I'm too busy' or 'it's too early in my studies', led us to devise a marketing campaign to challenge these perceptions and offer tips and careers advice online where students needs could be met in short, focused bursts. With this 'social selling' approach, we saw a huge boost to our users in Semester A of 2023. Our digital content and campaigns manager reported the following analytics:

- Our most engaging piece of Instagram content this semester received over 7000 views and we have gained 429 new Instagram followers over the course of Semester A (September – December).
- This semester, we have reached over 11,000 Instagram accounts with our content (up 9.4% on the previous semester) and our profile page has received over 3,300 visits (up by 32.2%).



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DEVELOPING THE EXPERT, DIVERSE CAREERS WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE



PAULINE MADEN, Director of Careers and Employability, University of Nottingham, outlines a refreshed focus for the AGCAS EDI Working Party.

In February 2024, the AGCAS Board endorsed the updating of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Party terms of reference to actively focus on supporting the diversification of the recruitment, retention and progression of careers professionals within member services.

A FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS

My experience of being involved in EDI within my own institution is that it is all too easy to focus on initiative-led approaches which are well-intentioned but crowd out a focus on what really matters. As a Head of Service and senior leader, what concerns me about the HE sector and the careers profession is its lack of ability to truly reflect the diverse student population it serves.

In 2023, AGCAS shared the findings of its inclusivity survey at the Heads of Service Conference. The headline findings were a catalyst for roundtable discussions about routes into the profession, recruitment and selection, and progression and development. Whilst the survey data provided a benchmark of the diversity of the profession based on those that took part, it had not been designed to identify the challenges the profession faces in developing the diverse careers workforce of the future. Nor did it reveal the lived experience of careers professionals from underrepresented groups.

The EDI Working Party will be focusing on two questions: How can we support members to remove the barriers to recruitment, retention and progression to build a more diverse and inclusive careers profession? How can we create the space to give voice to the authentic and honest experiences of underrepresented careers professionals for whom those barriers exist?

OPEN CONVERSATIONS

Our plans for the year ahead involve engaging the membership in conversations to better understand your challenges and experiences from an individual, role and service perspective. Whether you are experiencing barriers to progression or are a manager looking for support to develop a more inclusive approach to recruitment, we want to hear from you. We want to create a space for members from underrepresented groups to share their experiences in a safe and trusted way, but it is equally important that we provide a platform for service leaders to hear lived experiences. Watch this space for further details of how you can get involved.

SECTOR COLLABORATION

It will come as no surprise to learn that careers are not the only HE profession struggling to develop a diverse workforce. Over the last 12 months, AGCAS have been active members of the Higher Diversity Coalition, alongside other HE sector bodies. The coalition aims to unlock the barriers that persist to increasing ethnic diversity in HE in the leadership of academic and student professional services. The coalition want to drive change through data, best practice, telling the real lived experience stories of staff and a coherent approach to development programmes that build, develop and support the talent pipeline to grow and flourish. Over the coming months, the EDI Working Party will collaborate with the coalition to identify where we can gain most from the relationship and where we need to lead change through AGCAS.

CALLS TO ACTION

Join the EDI Working Party. This is a great opportunity to broaden your network and get involved with an AGCAS group. Applications are open until 1 August 2024.

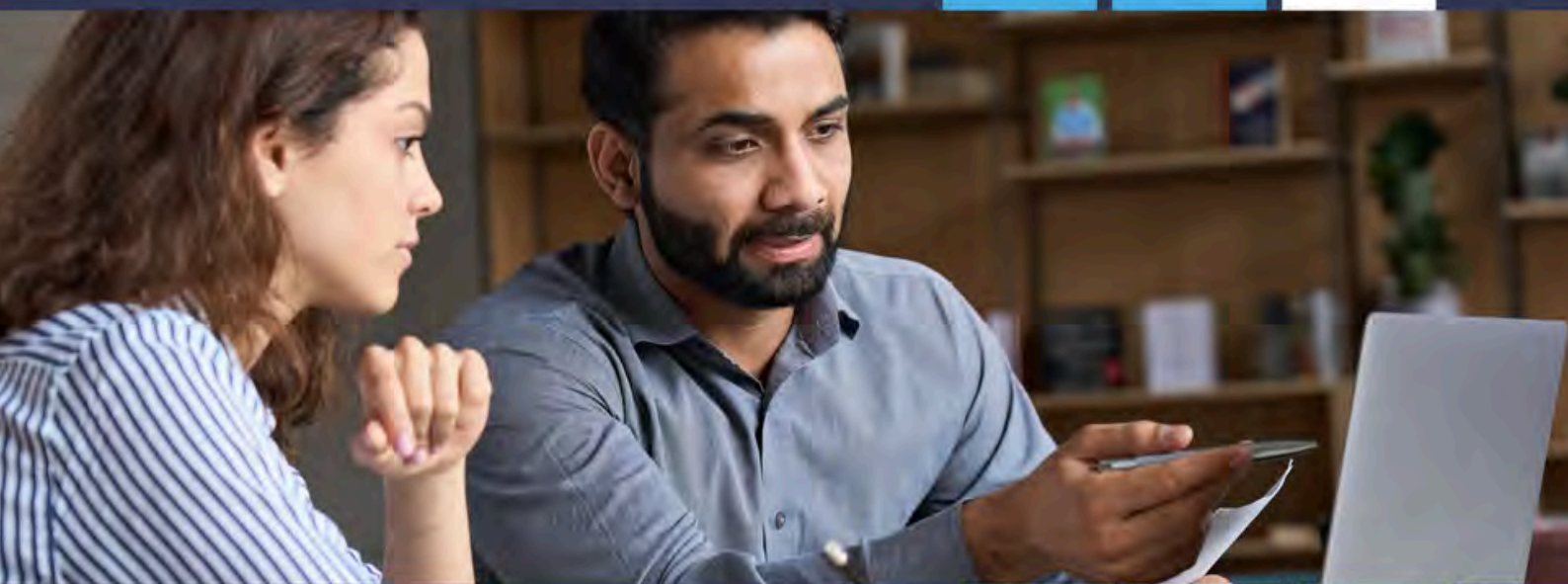
The Higher Diversity Coalition are gathering anonymised case studies of lived experiences of colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds who are working in HE careers and employability. Contact Tim Fletcher, Head of Membership Development, to provide a case study or ask questions.



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AGCAS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Party members

Pauline Maden (Chair), University of Nottingham
Ashley Bheeroo, City University of London
Anna Levett, University of Hertfordshire
Marni McArthur, The Open University
Obi Oputa, St Mary's University
Ayesha Peeran, The Open University



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Based in the UK, we're committed to helping universities, charities and businesses streamline their mentoring programmes by reducing administration.

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We currently work with a number of AGCAS members and are always happy to give anyone who may be interested, a demonstration of sfG MentorNet. Whether you're looking for a demo, a 30 day free trial, or would just like to have a chat about your mentoring programme, please get in touch.

Find out **more:**



www.sfGMentorNet.com



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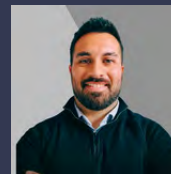


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ENHANCING CAREER SERVICES THROUGH MENTORING

BEN HOSIE, Product Manager at sfG Mentornet outlines the role of mentoring in fostering career development and employability



In the dynamic and ever-changing landscape of higher education careers and employability services, professionals are continuously adapting to meet the evolving needs of students, institutions, employers, and regions. The role of careers services within universities has expanded far beyond traditional advice and guidance, embracing a broad spectrum of innovative roles and activities. Among these, mentoring has emerged as a crucial element in fostering career development and employability. One platform that stands out in this domain is sfG MentorNet, an online mentoring platform designed to bridge the gap between aspiring professionals and seasoned mentors.

The crucial role of mentoring

Mentoring plays a pivotal role in this evolving landscape, offering a structured framework for professional development and personal growth. The process of mentoring provides invaluable guidance and support, helping mentees navigate the complexities of their careers. Mentors can identify skill gaps and suggest targeted improvements, fostering continuous learning. They can also introduce mentees to their professional networks, opening doors to new opportunities. Regular interactions with a mentor can significantly boost a mentee's confidence, preparing them for future challenges.

Impact of mentoring

The impact of mentoring on career development is well-documented. According to a study by the Association for Talent Development (ATD), individuals who have mentors are five times more likely to be promoted than those without mentors. Additionally, 71% of Fortune 500 companies have mentoring programs, highlighting the value placed on mentoring by top organisations. The National Mentoring Partnership reports that mentees are 55% more likely to enrol in college and 78% more likely to volunteer regularly.

Furthermore, a study by Gartner found that mentoring increases employee retention rates by 72% for those who receive mentoring and 69% for mentors themselves. This data underscores the reciprocal benefits of mentoring relationships. The presence of mentoring programs also correlates with higher employee satisfaction and engagement. According to a survey by CNBC / SurveyMonkey, 91% of workers with mentors report being satisfied with their jobs.

Introducing sfG MentorNet

sfG MentorNet is designed to facilitate these critical connections between mentors and mentees. This online platform offers a range of features that make the mentoring process efficient and effective. The platform has a flexible matching feature to match mentees with mentors based on their profiles and career aspirations. Users can connect through various channels, including integrated video calls, private chat, and discussion forums, accommodating different preferences and schedules. Mentors and mentees have access to a comprehensive resource library to support their mentoring journey. Admins running the programme can track their progress and monitor achievements, ensuring that the mentoring relationship remains productive and goal-oriented.

Supporting innovation

The integration of mentoring into careers services is just one example of the innovative approaches being adopted across the sector. From hybrid working models and graduate transition programs to the rise of 'pracademic' roles that blend practice and academia, careers professionals are at the forefront of driving change and innovation. These efforts are crucial in preparing students and graduates for the demands of the modern workforce.

In conclusion, as higher education careers and employability services continue to evolve, the importance of mentorship cannot be overstated. Platforms like sfG MentorNet are making it easier than ever to connect mentors and mentees, fostering professional growth and development. Now is the perfect time to explore how mentoring can unlock your potential and drive success. Embrace the future of careers services with sfG MentorNet and join the movement towards more comprehensive, innovative support for students and graduates.

How are students engaging with careers advice?

PROSPECTS

Jisc



Prospects Early Careers Survey 2024 reveals how students are engaging with careers advice, explains SAM BRESLIN, Student Services Head of Portfolio at Jisc.

Careers services are critical to young people's early career success, so when engagement declined in the period following the pandemic it inevitably raised concerns across the sector. So, where are we now?

Users of Prospects.ac.uk were surveyed in January and February 2024 to find out about their career plans and experiences over the previous 12 months. The responses from more than 6,000 students and graduates are analysed in our [Early Careers Survey](#). The report provides useful insights for those supporting and advising young people about their careers.

RETURN TO CAREERS ADVICE

The findings reveal that there has been a return to careers advice following the post-Covid slump. Last year's Early Careers Survey found declining levels of engagement with all forms of careers advice sessions when compared to the previous year. However, this year's survey suggests that the trend has reversed and levels of engagement are now increasing. While there has not yet been a return to 2021 levels, engagement with all forms of advice session were up compared with 2022.

In common with the findings of previous surveys, talks by university staff about courses, careers events, and CV, cover letter and/or job application guidance remained the most sought-after forms of advice among university students.

DISCONNECT

The findings also found a disconnect between who students seek advice from and where they find it most valuable. When asked where they had actively sought careers advice, university students indicated that they had used careers websites more than any other resource, followed by lecturers and then friends.



While career services and industry professionals did not make the top three sources of advice, students and graduates highly rate the advice that they receive from them.

When asked to rate each source of advice for how helpful they were, industry professionals (93% positive), careers professionals (89%) and teachers/lecturers (89%) were the most useful, when combining 'fairly' and 'very' helpful responses. This suggests there is a lack of awareness about how valuable professional assistance can be and more still needs to be done to encourage engagement.

DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN MOST NEED

It is vital that groups with the greatest need for high-quality advice and guidance (such as disadvantaged pupils or students and those from an ethnic minority background) are aware of the resources available to them, as [research suggests](#) that they are often the least likely to access them.

Respondents whose parents did not attend university were less likely to engage with careers advice than those whose parents did. This suggests that respondents from more advantaged backgrounds found it easier to access the resources available to them or had more knowledge about where to find them. The importance of this is even more apparent, when considering the benefits students found from careers advice.

A PROFOUND IMPACT

The benefits of engaging with careers advice were found throughout the survey. Compared to those who did not seek guidance, individuals who actively sought various forms of advice reported higher levels of certainty about their careers. This was particularly true of students who had participated in talks by employers about careers or a careers workshop.

The majority (76%) of respondents who attended a job interview preparation session felt prepared for getting a job/apprenticeship compared with 64% who did not attend such a session. Also, students who had received careers advice in the last 12 months were more likely to say that they were prepared for getting a job or apprenticeship than those who had not.

Attending a careers guidance appointment also helped mitigate struggles finding work. Just over half (53%) of those who did not attend a careers guidance appointment said that they struggled with having the skills needed to find work, compared to just 38% of those who did.

Likewise, 41% of those who attended a careers guidance appointment said that they struggled with knowing what opportunities will suit them, compared with 50% of those who did not. Those who attended a careers guidance appointment (39%) were also less likely than those who did not (51%) to indicate that they struggled to find opportunities to apply to during their job hunt.

And 40% of those who attended a careers guidance appointment said that they struggled with staying motivated, compared with 50% of those who did not. These findings highlight the key role that careers services can play in helping students and graduates with skills identification, job suitability and motivation.

There are many more findings on the early experiences of students and graduates with careers in the report, which is available to [download on Luminate](#).



[Prospects Luminate](#)

[Prospects](#)



RESEARCHER'S DIGEST



DR JULIA YATES, Associate Professor in Organisational Psychology at City, University of London, shares her latest digest of careers-related research.

01

TEACHING CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Glover-Chambers, T., Dean, B. A., Eady, M. J., West, C., Ryan, S., & Yanamandram, V. (2024). Academics' practices and perceptions of career development learning in the curriculum. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1-16.

These authors were interested to find out how academics teach career development within the curriculum. These academics were all supposed to include some elements of career development within their lectures, and the academics generally seemed aware that addressing career development was important for their students and agreed that the curriculum was the right place for it. But the authors felt that the academics generally addressed career development quite superficially, and in an ad hoc way, talking about careers when it occurred to them, and in the way that felt right in the moment rather than following any kind of considered framework. The academics also often spoke about including career development learning implicitly rather than explicitly in the classroom. The most common specific approach they used was to talk about their own career experiences – sharing their own career stories with the students. The authors concluded that career development learning should be included in the curriculum in a more structured and explicit way, to make sure that all students get the input they needed. This research was conducted in Australia, and the authors focused on one single institution, so we should be cautious about how we generalise the findings, but it does illustrate what can happen when career professionals are not involved in planning the employability aspect of any academic curriculum.

02

EMPLOYABILITY ATTITUDES IN LAW

Casey, C., Mountford-Zimdars, A., & Hancock, S. (2024). Player, Purist, Pragmatist: a comparison of employability strategies in access to the solicitors' profession via alternative degree pathways. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-12.

We know that law is a fiercely competitive field and that students with privileged backgrounds and those from elite institutions are more likely to secure successful legal careers for themselves. The authors here give us the somewhat stark figure that in a single year in the UK we have more than 20,000 students graduating with a degree in law, competing for just over 6000 legal training contracts. This paper compares the employability strategies of students studying a degree in law with those undertaking a graduate apprenticeship in law. On the back of interviews with 23 aspiring lawyers, the authors identified three different approaches that students typically took. Players tended to be at elite universities and looked on the whole idea of graduate employability as a game – describing a set of rules and accepting that you need to jump through particular hoops in order to get the prize. The purists saw the idea of graduate recruitment as a technical puzzle, believing that you must find the right fit and gain the right skills and experience that are needed to meet your goals. These were most often degree students at non-elite universities. The pragmatists were more likely to be on the apprenticeship programmes, and their view was that you should be flexible about your goals and always be on the lookout for opportunities that might come your way – even those that you might not be looking for. I wonder what those of us supporting law students should make of this?

03

METAPHORS AND CAREER CHOICE

Cohen, H., Baruch, O. K., & Katz, H. (2024). Career Metaphors and Significant Childhood Experiences in Social Entrepreneurs' Career Choice. *The Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09713557241255409>

A psychodynamic approach to career choice holds that people choose a career that will meet their deep-rooted psychological needs, often one that links to difficult childhood experiences. Here, the authors delved deep with their analysis of metaphors, using psychoanalytic theories to work out how entrepreneurs' metaphors for career, alongside their childhood experiences, relate to their career choice. Metaphors can be a great tool for helping people to understand, making sense of and communicate ideas or feelings that might be quite well hidden in their psyche.

In this study, the authors conducted a whopping 138 interviews with social entrepreneurs, asking them to identify a metaphor they might use to describe a social entrepreneur, and to discuss any difficult childhood experiences. They identified five common metaphors the participants used: justice fighter, caregiver, creator, leader and martyr, and found that these metaphors were often linked to specific childhood negative experiences. They describe what they call a 'compensation process' that seemed to underlie their career choice. For example, the participants who described their jobs in terms of leadership were often those who experienced loneliness as a child; those who had experienced helplessness as children were more likely to describe their current roles as caregivers. The authors describe the idea of career choice being part of healing. Delving this deep might be a bit beyond what most of us can manage in a quick query but does show the potential contribution that metaphors can have within our work.

04

VALUES-DRIVEN APPROACH

Bazine, N., Stevenson, L., & Freour, L. (2024). Protean Career Orientation and Career Success: On the Roles of Proactive Career Process During the School-To-Work Transition. *Journal of Career Assessment*.

This one is specifically about the transition from school to work but could have some parallels with our students. The authors conducted a rigorous study focusing on what makes a successful school-to-work transition, trying to work out the relationships between certain characteristics that predict a thriving start to a career. They have come up with a process model that all starts with a protean orientation to careers – an approach that is values-driven and self-directed. This attitude then encourages people to come up with good career plans, and these plans lead people to start to network and this networking then leads to successful career transitions. The values-driven and self-directed protean orientation seems to engender a proactive approach to career planning, which reaps rewards when it comes to finding, securing and succeeding in good jobs. This model could be quite interesting to think about when we are planning our career education sessions, suggesting that perhaps a clear focus on increasing our students' protean attitude (i.e. focusing on identifying values and increasing agency) might be an effective use of time.



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VIEW PHOENIX THEMES AND ISSUES



next issue
OF PHOENIX



NOVEMBER 2024



THIS ISSUE INCLUDES CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AGCAS MEMBERS AT THE FOLLOWING SERVICES:

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Lancaster University

Leeds Arts University

Leeds Beckett University

Liverpool John Moores University

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