

PUTTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES TO WORK

The focus on graduate employability might start with careers services, but it shouldn't end there. International students often require more or different support to translate their skills into employment in the host country, but collaborations within and across institutions can help. ▶

Students from outside the UK and the European Union are vital to the financial success and cultural vibrancy of higher education in Britain. The economic output generated through spending by international students and their visitors in the UK is estimated at

UK's reputation as one of the best places for people from around the world to live, study and work, it is vital that universities offer the support and opportunities that international students need to find success in what may become an increasingly uncertain global climate and economy.

the employability of their international students. At the University of Edinburgh, the careers service and business school use WeChat to engage Chinese students with careers support and connect them to recruiters and businesses in China. Kingston University created a Professional Placement route for all its Master's programmes in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing, with an accompanying 12-month preparation module that has resulted in 177 international students securing a year-long placement in the past two academic years. Newcastle University's China Career Gateway programme is a series of bespoke workshops to help Chinese students develop strategies and skills to plan their careers and make effective job applications in both China and the UK.

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£25.8 billion a year,¹ whilst the opportunity to study alongside international peers gives home students a global network, increases their awareness of cultural sensitivities and better prepares them for working in a global environment.

The UK is second only to the United States as the most popular study destination for international students, with more than 450,000 studying here in 2017–2018. Growth has been relatively flat since 2016, however, whilst other nations have experienced double-digit increases. In recognition of this – and perhaps to prove that Britain still has a global outlook as it redefines its relationship with Europe – the UK government launched an international education strategy in 2019 that featured an ambitious aim to increase the number of international students in the country to 600,000 by 2030.²

Employability is a critical consideration for international students who are deciding where to study, with recent research finding that targeting “good career prospects after graduation” is second only to choosing a degree subject they enjoy.³ In order to maintain the

THE STATE OF PLAY

To understand how UK universities prepare their international graduates for global success, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services collaborated with Universities UK International and various sector bodies to produce a report called ‘Supporting international graduate employability: making good on the promise’. This outlines good practices and recommends areas for continuous improvement to ensure students receive the support they need to achieve their aspirations after graduation.⁴

According to the Equality Challenge Unit (now Advance HE), “Providing equitable careers support does not mean providing the same for every student [...] International students unfamiliar with the UK job market often require additional or specific information and support that UK students would know already or have access to through other sources and networks.”⁵

‘Supporting international graduate employability’ uncovered a wealth of tailored initiatives that university careers services had created to develop

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

Supporting international graduate employability is not without its challenges. Careers services work hard to provide tailored, effective support to a diverse student body to level the playing field after graduation, yet only 28% of the careers services offices involved in this research feel able to meet the level of demand from international students for careers and employability support.

In response to these pressures, careers services around the UK have recognised the benefits of working with other parts of their institution and other universities. Newcastle has developed a cross-departmental working group led by the careers service to support and steer international student employability activity. The University of Warwick and the University of Manchester have collaborated to deliver

a China careers fair roadshow, whilst Warwick is also working with the University of Birmingham and the University of Nottingham on a Work in China fair. Regional collaborations such as the GW4 Alliance and the Midlands International Group are successfully pooling resources to deliver employability events and webinars for international students at scale.

Despite these great examples, only 41% of universities collaborate with other higher education institutions to support international graduate employability. To improve outcomes across the UK, 'Supporting international graduate employability' recommends that universities, sector bodies and employers should collectively invest in research, pool resources to create shared labour market information for countries around the world, invest in training for higher education and career professionals, and consider ways to support UK businesses in accessing the pool of international graduate talent.

THE NEXT STEPS

Helping international students realise their potential is not the role of careers services alone. Positive outcomes for international students will only be achieved

work to understand their international students' post-graduation aspirations and put strategies in place to help meet them.

The collaborators who produced 'Supporting international graduate employability' recently held a seminar to discuss four of the report's main recommendations:

1. Institutions should develop a strategic approach to supporting the employability of international students and graduates.
2. Institutions should establish a cross-department working group with responsibility for international student employability.
3. Institutions should consider ways of embedding experiences that support the development of employability skills of international students.
4. Institutions should provide more opportunities for home and international students to interact to ensure continuous improvement of international students' English language skills.

For each recommendation, attendees from across UK higher education shared their successful initiatives and aimed to find ways to turn the suggestions into reality.

government policy affecting international graduate employability.

Whilst we cannot accurately predict the impact of COVID-19 on student and graduate recruitment, initial research suggests that the UK graduate employment market may be significantly disrupted.⁶ The working group will play a vital role in helping UK higher education to respond to this challenge and understand how to support international students during intense changes to the world of work.

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when those services work closely with alumni and professionals from international student recruitment, international employer engagement and international student support teams. Together, they can

Moving forwards, a working group made up of universities, sector bodies and international student representatives will be formed to help implement the recommendations and influence