Graduate Market Trends distrusts editorial columns that ease themselves into gear through a series of seasonal references and metaphors so any suggestions of falling leaves and gathering gloom are entirely accidental! In any case, this time of year is at least as much about vivid colours and sharp contrasts as it is about overflowing gutters and dampened spirits – which is an apt moment to introduce to you to another cast of contributors that between them combine fireworks and mellow fruitfulness to powerful editorial effect in this, the Autumn 2015 edition of Graduate Market Trends.

With the return of the GMT Interview and the launch of a quarterly column by a regular contributor, plus a selection of top research and policy articles and useful case studies, this edition of Graduate Market Trends tackles the multifarious dynamics of the new academic year and seeks reliable signposts for the road ahead.

We talk to Association of Graduate Recruiters CEO Stephen Isherwood about all things graduate recruitment, a frank and direct piece that reflects the core values of the organisation. GMT Sector Opinion is up next, a brand new column authored by Brian Hipkin.

In perhaps his most powerful contribution to GMT to date, Tristram Hooley deconstructs the graduate ‘rat race’ and makes the case for a serious injection of ethics and politics into graduate careers practice. Prospects’ in-house graduate labour market expert Charlie Ball follows on with some serious number crunching in his annual employment review.

If you live in Scotland and your home is closer to Bergen than Edinburgh, how does this inform the decisions you make about university and your graduate career? Rosie Alexander puts graduates from Orkney and Shetland under the spotlight. We follow with two very useful case studies aimed at careers practitioners and employers: Lydia Lewison presents new insights from the latest Creative Skillset’s latest Media Skills Survey and Louise Cooper talks to us about the successful experience of Sheffield University’s recent summer placements campaign.

Finally, our regular HEA employability update is for one issue only supplanted by an introduction to the Academy’s revised employability framework.

If you enjoy reading this issue of GMT half as much as I enjoyed putting together I know you are in for a treat. See you in the New Year!

Aphrodite Papadatou GMT Editor
NEWS IN BRIEF

• Proposed abolition of student fees: Jeremy Corbyn, the Islington North MP and Labour’s new leader, declares his intention to abolish fees and reintroduce maintenance grants at a cost of £10 billion a year during his successful leadership campaign. For this and other Corbyn policies visit www.labour.org.uk

• Student satisfaction scores: New research conducted by University of Oxford academics proves that NSS scores are unconnected to exam performance. The study, ‘Validity of student satisfaction ratings as a quality metric in UK medical education’ was conducted by Dr Tim Lancaster and is available to download at www.weblearn.ox.ac.uk

• University Alliance: The mission group for business focused universities officially announced in September the launch of their doctoral training programme that will run without research council sponsorship. For this and more UA news go to www.unialliance.ac.uk

• FE to HE progression: BIS have released the latest research findings about the progression to higher education of students from all further education and sixth form colleges in England. To find out more go to the publications section at www.gov.uk

• Equality and Diversity: New HEFCE evidence shows that three-and-a-half years after leaving university, 96.4% of graduates were in employment and nearly 80% were employed in professional jobs or undertaking further study. To find out more about the latest differences in employment outcomes visit www.hefce.ac.uk

• Differences in degree outcomes: Yet another important new report by HEFCE which addresses the effect of subject and student characteristics. It looks at the degree outcomes of UK-domiciled first degree graduates from English higher education institutions in 2013-14. More on www.hefce.ac.uk

• Paying for employability? New research findings from an annual survey conducted by the Research Academy and published by UPP and HEPI show that three-quarters of students canvassed would be willing to pay higher fees if it guaranteed them a graduate-level job upon degree completion. ‘Work Hard Play Hard’ is published by UPP at www.upp-ltd.com

• THE World University Rankings 2015-16: The latest annual rankings have been published by THE in what the publishers call the most inclusive results ever. The world’s top 800 universities are revealed. Three universities from the UK are ranked in the top 10, 16 in the top 100. More at www.timeshighereducation.com

• YouTube over teachers for careers advice: New government-commissioned research shows that fewer schoolchildren are turning to their teachers, while YouTube, Google and social media sites are becoming increasingly popular. Find out more about the campaign and download the research at www.yourlife.org.uk

• Graduate salary ‘premium’ is bigger for women than for men: Major study conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies finds that women’s median earnings in England a decade after graduation were more than three times those of women without a degree. In contrast, the median earnings of male graduates were about twice those of men without a degree. Find out more at www.ifs.org.uk

• German abolition of tuition fees ‘cannot be a model for UK universities’: A recent Hepi report has concluded so because, they say, the two countries’ higher education systems are so different. Do you agree? Either way you can download the publications section of www.hepi.ac.uk

• HESA latest statistics find that graduate unemployment levels are back to the pre-recession levels: But the difference is that more university leavers are now working part time or engaging in further study six months after graduation. A big ’but’? You can find out more about the longitudinal survey of 2010/11 graduates at www.hesa.ac.uk

• Postgraduates (what they worry about and why it matters): A new study suggests that government loans may not reverse the decline in postgraduate numbers. This is supported by evidence from the Postgraduate Experience Project, a HEFCE-backed study involving 11 universities that is testing different ways of supporting students to progress from undergraduate to postgraduate study. Find out more at www.postgradexperience.org
AGR: MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE TO THE GRADUATE LABOUR MARKET

STEPHEN ISHERWOOD

Aphrodite Papadatou discusses all things graduate recruitment with Association of Graduate Recruiters CEO Stephen Isherwood. Stephen also sits on a number of steering groups related to HE and employment including the HEAR Advisory Committee.

Why did you decide to work in the graduate recruitment industry?

Once I left university I began working at Coopers and Lybrand (who in 1998 became part of PwC). My first job was recruiting management consultants. This gave me the opportunity to work in a graduate recruitment team, which I did originally on secondment but I stayed on as I enjoyed it so much. I have been in the graduate recruitment or development world ever since.

I didn’t go to university until I was 25. Whilst sitting my A-levels I was offered a place on B&Q’s management programme – it was the boom years for the DIY industry and I was able to work up into a more senior role pretty quickly. But I felt I’d missed out by not going to university and I didn’t want to stay in retail. From a personal point of view I understand the power of education for its own sake. Studying helped me think differently and gave me a new outlook on life as well as changing my career opportunities.

And now you are at the AGR. How would you describe the AGR’s role?

I think the AGR is in a fantastic position to make a real difference to the graduate labour market. If we can match supply and demand then students coming out of education will go into the right channels to achieve their ambitions and employers will get the right talent to help their organisations succeed. The AGR sits in the middle of this process.

The AGR can help address the dysfunction in the graduate labour market. When some employers have unfilled vacancies in the middle of a recession, something is not working. Either graduates are not understanding opportunities or developing themselves in the right way, or there is more that employers can do. Again, the AGR is in the middle. We can’t solve everything but we can help all our stakeholders understand the student market better, we can help build networks to bring together employers, graduates and higher education practitioners in a more effective way. This is why the AGR is investing heavily in analysis, learning and development, and member services.

What are the hot topics for AGR right now?

It’s a cliché, but the ‘War for Talent’ is with us again. Now we are out of recession many of the graduate market metrics are back at 2006 level. We are seeing strong growth in vacancies and almost half of AGR members don’t fill all their vacancies, particularly in STEM roles.

Social mobility issues are often in the headlines and many employers and suppliers are looking at innovative solutions to tackle the problem. Big employers are changing their selection criteria. Contextual data, a tool pioneered by university widening participation teams, are being used by some employers.

One of the hottest topics at the moment is the allocation of work visas for international students. Employers are dealing with a tougher regime and I don’t think the situation helps universities either. The UK has to be seen as an attractive place for international talent to study and work.

The UK graduate market is unique as so many employers don’t mind what a student studies. A student of History, for example, can become an accountant, lawyer or doctor. This is not the case in most other countries. This is one reason I think need some focus on employability in our schools and universities.

Employability! One of our favourite words.

As we know, good employability skills are a combination of transferable skills, knowledge and attitude. Many AGR employers are looking closely at how they nurture and assess these attributes. The rise of strengths-based assessment, the use of situational judgment tests and the search for attributes such as resilience show how recruitment practices are evolving.

Work experience is another issue I want to do a lot more work on in AGR, because everyone knows that people with work experience – whether it is a placement, gap year or summer internship – are more likely to get better jobs. We need to find a way for employers to create more opportunities but we also need make more students aware of the importance of work experience.

In our manifesto we made it clear that we oppose unpaid internships. A typical AGR member will pay its interns because each wants the best students and they know they must invest in them.

How can universities and colleges help AGR deliver its mission?

Collaboration: finding ways to work together. The employability debate has the tendency to get wrapped up in jargon. Take for example the use of the word ‘enterprise’, which comes up quite a lot. I think both employers and universities can find it hard to articulate to students why such concepts are important. What it means is the knowledge, skills and attributes that will equip students for the world of work. It’s not just the private
sector that expects their new graduates to demonstrate commercial awareness.

But let’s not forget the full student experience. The employers I work with want students to have a full university life but we need to feed the world of employment into it. This is why work experience is so important.

**You mention contextual data. What are your thoughts on its use in graduate recruitment and in HE?**

The use of contextual data is very interesting. I think the use of it combined with differential offers is something we need to understand a lot more. Most employers are not aware of how some universities are using information on students’ background to make differential offers. One of the biggest problems employers face when factoring in the social background of a candidate is how you fairly compare a large number of candidates from different walks of life. Employers can and want to learn a lot about this from universities. If you compare university admissions and employer selection processes, the two are actually very similar: how to select the right talent from a large pool of applicants.

The algorithms some universities are using when recruiting students is a science that employers are keen to learn from. The more analysis and data AGR gets from universities, the more we will be able to feed it into the world of graduate recruitment. We need to be fair but we also need practical solutions that employers can implement.

**How are changes in the AGR survey going and what can the sector do to help?**

We are investing in the AGR’s research base. We have not yet radically changed our surveys but we have refined what we are asking so we can get better data for particular sectors. From an employer perspective, we will be looking at cost models to help employers invest effectively in graduate recruitment. I also want AGR to do a lot more work on defining graduate attributes. We want to communicate better to students in more detail what employers are looking for. The graduate labour market is actually a series of individual labour markets that all function differently. The AGR is in a great position to facilitate better understanding of the different sectors of employment.

**Have skills issues and retention become more Important?**

Yes, and I think retention is going to be an even bigger issue. An ageing population, the growth in demand at the higher skilled end of market and greater competition are all creating the skills shortage. Employers I talk to could genuinely grow faster if they could recruit more effectively. This also makes retention an issue. Recruiting talent is only productive if you retain your talent.

The skills gap can also be tackled by keeping people for longer in an organisation, even retraining them if necessary. So work experience, retention and closing the skills gap are all closely bonded. Interestingly, retention is also a big issue for universities so there is plenty of work to be done between the two of our sectors to understand the problem and tackle it.

**What skills are employers particularly looking for at the moment?**

I think there is evidence in the post-recession era that employers are looking closely at attributes like resilience and an ability to deal with a very changing environment. I’ve mentioned the shift from employers using competency-based recruitment to strength-based recruitment. Employers are looking more closely at what people love to do rather than what they can do. There is quite a lot of thought and debate happening in this area at the moment and AGR has to help facilitate this conversation.

**The 2011 Winter AGR survey showed that AGR members expected salary expectations to Increase as a consequence of fees. Is this still the feeling?**

There is little evidence yet that graduate salaries are increasing significantly. There was a small growth last year but you would expect that coming out of a recession. This mirrors what happens in the broader labour market, where salaries have been very flat and are now just about starting to increase. We don’t know about the impact of fees yet, although we do know that it hasn’t affected the number of people going to university, which means that it hasn’t yet affected salary demands. We have likewise seen no change in the packages employers are offering to attract students. This is something to watch as demand for graduates increases. My personal view is that graduates have a much more ambivalent attitude to this debt than we or their parents think they have.

**What excites you about the AGR, your role in it and the work you are doing?**

What really excites me about my work at the moment is how we are building both the analysis and learning that we can input into the industry –whether this is through training courses, sharing knowledge with our networks, putting research and data out there, it’s about making this graduate market work better. That is our job. Learning and development and research are the great services we can offer our members and the sector as a whole. We are developing into a content-rich organisation with a depth of expertise. We need to keep building our knowledge and expertise and use this for the benefit for all our stakeholders. This excites me!

**Us too! Thank you – and we will look forward to collaborating with a content-rich AGR!**

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IF THE CAP FITS (and a tale of two students)

BRIAN HIPKIN

Our now regular columnist Brian Hipkin, delightfully progressive and deliciously entertaining as ever, returns with a two-in-one story of HE policy news, linear students, GPs and Monty Python. Curious and excited? So were we!

Brian is Dean of Students at Regents University, Vice Chair of AMOSSHE, author and academic.

A Monty Python-esque surprise

I used to teach Popular Culture but sadly not anymore. However the habit of using old television programmes to illustrate wider points about today's society has never left me. Even if as it frequently turns out my audience look at me blankly as we both realise that they were not even born when my extended metaphor was first broadcast.

My most recent reminder of my media age came when I was speaking at a conference on the changing face of HE Policy post the General Election. Since both myself and my audience had signed up before a single vote was cast I soon realised that this was going to be as close to an improvised gig as I had been since the time I left my lecture notes in the toilet.

So old habits kicked in and I reached for my Monty Python book of quotes, which rather sadly lives in my head rather than resting on my bookshelf.

I have never subscribed to the ‘tablets of stone’ model of HE policy. Regulations do not come out of thin air, they have a backstory, a place in time and space; they are rarely handed down as fully formed beings.

One of the most unexpected heavyweight ‘tablets’ at least in terms of impact rather than substance was the announcement in the Autumn statement that the cap on numbers in public sector universities was to be lifted.

As Monty Python would have it, ‘No one expects the Spanish Inquisition! Our chief weapon is surprise, fear and surprise.’

Whilst universities are often left to sweat the small stuff around the student experience, when it comes to things that surprise and reshape the HE landscape, universities are more done to than doing.

If the releasing of the cap was meant to unleash the dogs of unfettered competition it could not have happened at a worse time. With the slow and lingering death of the part-time student and a static demographic of 18 years, it has simply meant that we now had an unlimited number of deckchairs available to rearrange on the deck of the Titanic.

The scene moves on to July and I was welcoming two hundred delegates to a conference having picked up two minutes earlier the news via the budget that widening participation was being cut off at the knees (cue more Month Python) with the transformation of the grant element into a loan for the hugely neglected Student Maintenance funding. Your maintenance loan will beat the pants off a brand new library in the fight to determine a good student experience.

We are entering a new era where the shape shifters of HE are not big bold policies and nor even ‘big data’ but thresholds and definitions. This may look like ‘nudge’ politics but it is in fact ‘big fat smack in the face’ politics.

The fundamentals of a student experience lie in the soft stuff, things that in fact make it possible to even start at university: targeted funding for widening participation, retention, disability funding and of course getting and keeping a student visa. All of these are moveable feasts, collections of shifting thresholds and definitions.

So what, I hear you ask, is the relationship between the removal of the student number cap and the student experience? I know you didn’t but I need to come to the point.

We saw last year the opening up of recruitment gaps between Russell Group universities, with some consciously hoovering up students with ABB almost as soon as they had finished jumping up in the air in front of TV cameras on results day.

This year we are likely to see this pattern continue with some universities over-full in the physical rather than the planning sense and others still keeping a light burning in the window in the third week of teaching in the vain hope that someone may turn up. This is bound to impact on the student experience.

It takes a matter of a few months to ‘over recruit’ but it is the work of years to build libraries, lecture theatres and student halls to accommodate them. The bricks and mortar element of the student experience works when times are good and reserves can be used to plan and fund projects over a period of many years but simply cannot adjust to the unpredictable nature that the removal of the numbers cap brings.

I really feel for university planning departments, a lonely place to be at the best of times. Over the past decade they had perfected the art of recruiting to target with an accuracy that would make those setting ‘in play’ betting odds blush with shame. Now with no fines or claw backs what are they to do?

Perhaps the days of the ‘build it and they will come’ model of student recruitment have gone. Black holes where pension
funds should be will soon be swallowing up university reserves rather than shiny new buildings. What then for the impact of concrete and double glazing on the student experience? Recent surveys seem to have given the lie to this model anyway, with students pointing to what happens in and around the classroom as what matters to them.

Perhaps we should look to another piece of popular culture to help understand just how the lifting of the cap will impact on the student experience over the next few months – Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Student numbers will vary as much between courses as between institutions, so some universities may have too many students for their academic and support provision to cope with, some too few students to make the learning gained meaningful or some just the right number – all within the same institution.

**It started with a GIF**

Google is a wonderful thing. Of late I have taken to delivering conference presentations using just pictures and no words. It was partly as a result of listening to too many people read out the endless amounts of text that they crammed onto their PowerPoint slides and as a little piece of revolution against conference organisers asking for your slides in advance so they could hand them out before you speak.

I guess it is human nature to look ahead at what the speaker is going to say, just as we may turn to the end of a detective novel to see ‘who done it’. But it is really annoying when you are speaking to look out at a sea of bowed heads and the sound of turning pieces of paper.

I started my lecturing career before PowerPoint, come to think about it, well before PowerPoint. It was just me, a whiteboard and a board marker. I must admit on a Monday there was nothing like the smell of a board marker in the morning. Despite often starting my lectures with a multi-coloured tip of my nose I learnt my craft without the aid of Microsoft. Something that has stood me in good stead on the not infrequent occasions when I have been speaking and the technology dies.

Back to Google. I have taken to typing into Google the phrase I want to use in my talk, click on images and sit back and looked at the result. This was how I discovered an image of learning styles that I try and use as often as I can. This is not due to a lack of imagination but rather it is an entry to some really powerful food for thought.

What I saw was two charts that mapped the progress of two students, imaginatively named Student A and Student B, as they progressed through a twelve-week semester attending a lecture and a seminar each week.

In the first chart they were taught in a traditional ‘linear’ fashion with their learning gained incrementally each week, ending with an exam in week twelve. Student A was a model, the chart showed them attending everything and therefore passing the exams at the end. Not so Student B. It was clear that their student loan was misspent as soon as week two as the chart recorded their failure to attend first seminars then lectures until the inevitable happened and poor hungover B failed their exam.

So far so normal.

The second chart again starred the same two students but this time they were learning in a dynamic way familiar to those studying online. The lines charting their progress moved backwards and forwards. Some topics one of them totally aced so they moved ahead faster. Other topics proved more challenging and they had to go backwards to get hold of the basics again before they could move on. The end result in week twelve was a surprise. Although their learning journeys were not the same and reflected their own styles, capabilities and perhaps commitment to the topic, they both passed.

But this was not what caught my attention. I had a real insight when I realised that the ‘linear’ model of learning was something that we could administer, timetable, report on and produce reading lists and other materials for. In other words, our whole university administrative default position was based around this linear model.

For some, the technology element that makes the ‘dynamic’ model possible is the thing ‘disrupting’ higher education. I don’t agree. This model poses a fundamental challenge to our models and practice of University administration. How can you timetable if individual understanding determines what you do next? The traditional university year has nothing remotely to do with the pace of learning. Yet for centuries we have forced generations of students to learn at a speed dictated by the religious festivals of the mediaeval period.

This simple chart taken from an Australian online learning journal was my Copernicus ‘moment’. A moment when I realised that we have for centuries been trapping students into a model of learning by creating a ‘life support’ system by way of our administrative structures and assumptions around the ‘norm’.

If we just stood back and even without the aid of Google Images remembered how we learnt, we would realise that if we changed our models of learning to reflect the dynamic way in which we gain knowledge and experience we would uncover behind the mask of our traditional administrative assumptions a whole new world of student experience – a new world that for the sake of generations past and future we simply must explore.
Who wins the rat race? Social justice and the graduate labour market

Tristram Hooley

Tristram Hooley, Professor of Career Education and Head of ICeGS at the University of Derby, presents the case for a serious injection of ethics and politics into careers guidance practice.

The rat race has been fixed
“Even if you win the rate race, you’re still a rat”.
Lily Tomlin

We often hear that we are in a ‘war for talent’. The language of war certainly makes graduate recruitment sound more exciting but it has some negative connotations. War has winners and losers and those who lose end up dead or damaged. Is this really the best metaphor?

For me, the graduate labour market isn’t really a ‘war for talent’. It is actually a rat race and what is more is it is a rat race in which some rats get to start from a very different place on the track than others.

There is a lot of research that shows that the graduate labour market operates in ways that are far more about preserving privilege than they are about supporting meritocracy and social mobility. Graduates from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely to enter the professions (Macmillan et al., 2013) and they earn less and don’t progress as fast once they get jobs (Anders, 2015).

Gordon (2013) explores the reasons for social inequality in the graduate labour market. He argues that those who are more privileged are more likely to achieve at school and attend a better university and that they also have more money, better networks and greater understanding about how to get on with employers.

It is not just class that makes a difference to graduates’ labour market outcomes. There is evidence that race (Rafferty, 2012), gender (Chevalier, 2011) and a range of other factors also have an impact. The war for talent is clearly not a fair fight. The rat race has been fixed.

I am not the first person to notice the unfairness in the graduate labour market. The Association of Graduate Recruiters booklet Don’t Miss Out On The Best sets out a range of strategies that employers can adopt to make their recruitment more fair. It highlights the ways in which things like unpaid internships, relying on networks for recruitment and targeting a small number of elite universities further enables the privileged to succeed.

Should we politicise careers advice?
While employers are talking about inequalities within the recruitment processes, careers services are less sure about how to respond. It is easy to feel that talking about inequality is too political and that it may lead to disillusionment and fatalism amongst students.

Careers work is traditionally about raising aspiration, fostering resilience and operating within the structures. Is it really right to start talking to students about whether the structures are fair and right?

In a recent lecture (Hooley, 2015) I argued that careers professionals need to become much more political. Much of this is about fulfilling our duty to tell the truth. If the graduate labour market is unequal there is nothing to be gained from pretending that this isn’t the case.

Careers work needs to offer people a chance to understand the opportunities and the barriers that are in front of them. These are different for different people and your class, race and gender matter alongside other factors.

If we can help people to understand how political and economic structures work we will actually be empowering them to navigate their way through these structures.

I think that we also need to go beyond this and to encourage people to ask more fundamental questions about how the graduate labour market works and whose interest it works in. Why do some jobs get paid more than others? Why do some companies only recruit from certain campuses? And perhaps even more importantly, what do these companies do and why? Our career choices have ethical and political components that need to be acknowledged.

This is not to argue that it is the job of a careers service to preach the gospel of Jeremy Corbyn. If we become the servants of a political party or doctrine we will lose credibility with students fast.

However, we do need to give students the tools and knowledge to critically examine labour market structures. At the moment we end up selling the rat race and the war on talent to students even though many of us have doubts about the way that this frames career decision-making.

A race or a journey?
Bill Law (2008) makes the point that we can think about career either as a race or as a journey. In a race we work against each other trying to win. In a journey we can co-operate for the best mutual outcome. He argues that we need to move away from a focus on racing and encourage more journeying. He also notes that although we can pause on a journey for a race, we can’t stop a race for a journey.
Careers work runs the risk of framing people’s careers in ways that are ultimately destructive for them and for wider society.

For many in the careers profession Carl Rodgers’ (1995) description of self-actualisation as ‘the mainspring of life… the urge which is evident in all organic and human life – to expand, extend, become autonomous, develop, mature’ (p.35) describes what they are trying to achieve. This focuses on enabling people to reach their potential and express their humanity.

An excessive focus on winning the rat race offers an alternative vision that is best expressed by the 1980s slogan ‘he who dies with the most toys wins’. ‘Fetishising the accumulation of wealth and power in this way can have some negative social consequences as it delegitimises focusing on relationships, public service and helping others.’

Labour market information provides a good example of this kind of framing. It provides us with certain kinds of information (qualifications, salary, promotion prospects) that tend to frame our career decisions as a race. It doesn’t typically provide us with other kinds of information that might frame our decision-making differently (for example the social and environmental impact of the job or information about the happiness of those that do this job).

Facts are never just facts as they always convey meanings of one kind or another. There is a strong case for broadening the range of facts that we give people.

**An emancipatory framework**

I have developed a framework for thinking about career education and guidance that will allow us to address some of these questions of social justice and move us away from being cheerleaders in the rat race.

The table above sets out this framework. It is based around five key learning areas that could be used to structure a radical or emancipatory career education programme. It identifies a key question related to each which we could be encouraging students to ask.

### Learning areas

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<th>Key questions</th>
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<td>Exploring ourselves and the world where we live, learn and work.</td>
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<td>Examining how our experience connects to broader historical, political and social systems.</td>
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<td>Developing strategies that allow us individually to make the most of our current situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing strategies that allow us collectively to make the most of our current situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering how the current situation and structures should be changed.</td>
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**References**


Association of Graduate Recruiters (n.d.) Don’t Miss Out on the Best: Your Guide to Social Mobility in Recruitment. London: AGR.


I think that this framework could provide a way forward for practitioners that would be practical in a range of circumstances, could be squared with professional ethics and which would not need to be immediately threatening to those in power. Implementing such a framework would require us to do career education in HE differently.

It would need us to make cross-curricula links, connect with the traditions of student unionism and student activism and encourage students to be critical about the opportunities that are most obvious to them.

There IS such a thing as society!
Careers services have an important role to play in linking students up with graduate employers.

But, brokering this connection does not prepare someone for a career. It is only when we prepare people not only to get a job, but also to keep a job, to know how to operate within a job and ultimately to think about when to quit a job that we are really doing our job.

Careers work is not about managing recruitment processes, it is about thinking about work, its place in your life and its place in the world.

We should be inviting trade unionists, campaigners and whistleblowers to talk to our students alongside recruiters and CEOs. This is a more complete career education and one which supports social justice and good citizenship.

The challenge of careers work is that it needs to maintain both a practical and an ethical position. Our students need concrete help in finding jobs that can allow them to pay off student loans. However, they also need to know that kowtowing to power is not the only way to achieve this.

As workers and as citizens we have power that we can use to get what we want both as individuals and for our society. This is an important aspect of work and career that is often bypassed by conventional careers work.

A more political radical conception of career education and guidance will require us to change our practices and challenge our assumptions.

We will have to broaden our focus on individuals and recognise that sometimes the best outcome for an individual can be achieved through collective endeavour.

We will also have to recognise that the position of careers workers as brokers between students and graduate recruiters is an extremely challenging one.

It is not our job to police the behaviour of recruiters, but neither is it our job to legitimise this behaviour.

The unequal nature of the graduate labour market only serves the purposes of the privileged. Its construction as a desperate rat race frames students’ career decision-making in unhelpful and socially destructive ways where nothing is valued except winning.

We need to take a step back and offer students the opportunity to think more critically about their career and the contexts within which they might pursue this career.

If this means that they choose to leave the rat race or to challenge its basis then we might end up with a world with fewer rats in it.
Prospects has been at the forefront of graduate labour market research for more than 40 years, with unrivalled insight into what graduates do, where they go and what their motivations are.

We use this intelligence to guide and inspire career choices that enable graduates to make the best use of their skills and deliver high-quality applications for recruiters through more targeted and productive campaigns.

For more information please get in touch with our team on 0161 277 5200 or email enquiries@prospects.ac.uk
The graduate jobs market saw significant improvement in late 2014 and the early part of 2015 - but is this improvement set to continue? Charlie Ball, Head of Research at Prospects, mines the data and surveys the terrain.

The picture for 2013/14 graduates
The employment rate for graduates after six months was up on the previous year – 76.6% of graduates were working or combining work and study, against 75.6% in 2012/13. Unemployment fell a full percentage point, from 7.3% for 2012/13 graduates to 6.3% this year. And the majority of graduates who were in work – 68.2% – were in professional-level employment, up nearly two percentage points from 66.3% the year before.

In all, 199,305 UK domiciled graduates from 2013/14 were known to be in work in the UK six months after graduation, up by 11,225 from 2012/13. 135,980 graduates were known to be in professional employment – up by 11,280 on the previous year, meaning that the number of graduates entering jobs below professional level fell in both percentage and absolute terms. The basic figures demonstrate that conditions for new graduates improved through 2014. This is supported by data from the Government’s Annual Population survey showing that the economy added 309,700 new jobs at professional level in 2014 – this is before any consideration on the number of jobs taken by graduates who replaced previous employees. The evidence suggests that the jobs market for graduates is well on the road to recovery.

Full-time and part-time graduates
8% of graduates with known destinations had studied part time, and their outcomes were different to those who had taken full time degrees.1 Part-time graduates had higher employment rates and lower unemployment and further study rates than their full-time counterparts but it was the full-time graduates whose employment and unemployment figures improved the most between 2012/13 and 2013/14. Outcomes for the two groups became closer.

Types of work
199,305 UK-domiciled graduates from 2013/14 were in work in the UK six months after graduation, the largest number on record. Four professions saw more than 500 more graduate entrants last year – nursing, business project workers, marketers and HR and recruitment professionals. All of these roles require a degree. The market as a whole saw growth in the number of entrants to jobs at professional level, and most professions saw increased entry. The largest falls in numbers of graduate entrants were in sales and retail roles, and in routine office work. These positions do not usually require a degree, although many office workers reported their employer asking for a higher education qualification. Another fall in numbers was found in medical practitioners – a concern considering that data from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Employer Skills Survey suggests that there was a shortage of qualified medical practitioners². Besides medical practitioners, other roles seeing a reduction in graduate entrants included architecture, quantity surveying, and geology – and not all of these falls can be attributed to lack of employer demand, as surveying is another area with evidence of shortage.

The average salary for a graduate from 2013/14 working full time after six months was £20,637. Finance managers and senior professionals, officers in the Armed Forces, engineers, health professionals (which includes dentists, doctors and pharmacists), pilots, health service managers and production managers all averaged over £25,000 as a starting salary.

A graduate job?
A lively debate continues over exactly what a ‘graduate job’ is, or what ‘graduate skills’ are. This debate has been put into clearer focus by Government proposals for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to assess the quality of university teaching. An important proposed cornerstone of the TEF is to be a system of assessing if students get good quality jobs. At present, there is no clear conclusion as to what a ‘graduate job’ really is or how to measure it properly. Is it a job where employers ask for a degree? Is it a job where degree holders use the skills in a degree? Is it merely a job done by a graduate? The solution currently used in higher education is to use a classification system for jobs and to class all those falling under the ‘professional’ banner as being ‘graduate level’. The current system works reasonably well but has a number of important issues. Some jobs – such as shopkeeping – are classed as being ‘professional’ when a degree is unlikely to be needed for them, whilst others, such as financial office work or veterinary nursing, are not considered ‘graduate level’ when a degree is usually or always required.

There are two simple ways of using destination data to examine if a job requires a degree or not. The first is using jobs classified as ‘professional level’, as mentioned above. This gives us a figure of 68.2% of employed graduates in professional employment³. The second way is to ask graduates if they felt that they needed their degree to get the job that they were in – 63.6% of employed graduate respondents to that question felt that their degree was required or conferred an advantage in getting employment⁴. Although it is difficult to find an exact figure for the proportion of graduates who were in roles that needed a degree, it is certainly a comfortable majority of graduates – and this only six
months after leaving university. And with the jobs market for graduates better than it has been for some time, these figures are set to improve.

Further study
The proportion of graduates going into postgraduate study on completion of their first degree tends to fall when the economy improves, and the experience of the 2013/14 cohort was no exception. 17.6% of first degree graduates from 2013/14 were either studying solely or taking a course as well as working after six months, down from 18%. Nearly half (46.2%) took a taught Masters qualification after graduating, with the most popular subjects being psychology, management, sports science, social work, business and English literature. Another 18.6% of those taking a further qualification went into teacher training, or increased.”

What is in demand?
As the economy continues to recover from recession, graduate skills are in greater demand. In July 2015, the Bank of England commented on the previous month’s labour market, saying: “Recruitment difficulties had edged up and were at levels last seen during 2007, having broadened recently across a wide range of skills, levels of experience and occupations. For example, reports of a scarcity of experienced middle and senior managers had become fairly common. … In consequence … apprenticeship, graduate and school-leaver recruitment programmes had been either maintained or increased.”

In August, the Bank stated: “Shortages were pronounced in IT, engineering, construction trades and property-related skills, professional services, HGV drivers, and middle/senior management.”

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Employer Skills Survey examines those vacancies that employers found difficult to fill due to lack of applicants or skills and found that a number of jobs, such as nursing, production engineering, software development and programming, financial and business analysis and consultancy and recruitment roles saw widespread shortages, and that there were also shortages in civil, mechanical and design engineering, in web design and IT project management, in medicine and in procurement and that depending on industry and location, employers found that other professions such as marketing and retail management could be hard to recruit into. The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), the industry body for employers of graduates, found that on average 5.4% of their member’s vacancies in 2014 were not filled, rising to 11.1% for energy and utility vacancies and 11.8% of IT and computing vacancies. The evidence is strong that there shortages of graduates and a demand for graduates in many sectors of the economy.

The future outook
The outlook for graduates in 2015 is as good as it has been since 2007. Recent indicators suggest that the rate of improvement may be slowing, but there are few signs that the economy is about to enter another downturn and so we can be reasonably confident that the next year or two will see a period in which the jobs market for graduates will be relatively good. Demand for graduates is likely to stay high, there will be sectors which grow so quickly or have such a high need for graduates that they may find it difficult to fill all their available roles, most graduates will get jobs quickly, and most of those jobs will require a degree. The story of the jobs market is one of constant change. New companies rise, using new technologies and creating new jobs. Other jobs change dramatically or disappear. A university education remains the best way to equip workers with the skills to adapt to the rapid technological and economic change that will shape the workplace of the future.

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1 Data from Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education 2013/14, HESA 2015
2 Data from UKCES ESS 2013. New data for 2015 will be released in the autumn
3 Sample size: 199,905 respondents. Data comes from 2013/14 DLHE
4 Sample size: 174,530 respondents. Data comes from 2013/14 DLHE
7 See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukces-employer-skills-survey-2013
8 AGR Winter 2015 Survey. Share of vacancies unfilled. AGR members employ over 1.5 million people and hire over 22,000 graduates.
How does living in a remote and rural community impact on higher education choices and subsequent career pathways? In the literature surrounding higher education and graduate employment an assumption seems often to be made that all students regardless of location have equal access to opportunities.

Rosie Alexander, Careers Manager at the University of the Highlands and Islands, presents us with an exclusive insight into her ongoing doctoral research study of the pathways of rural students from Orkney and Shetland.

Introduction
Research shows that there are geographical differences in the provision of higher education (HEFCE, 2015) and the availability of graduate jobs (Ball, 2011). It also shows that not all students are equally able to migrate to access these opportunities, with migration rates varying according to a range of individual differences such as human capital, gender and ethnicity (Faggian, McCann and Sheppard, 2007a, 2007b, 2006). Finally, employment outcomes for graduates may be associated with different migration patterns (Ball and Higgins, 2009; Ball, 2015).

In an ongoing project I am concerned to consider some of these issues in relation to two very specific rural and remote places – Orkney and Shetland Islands, which are two groups of islands situated off the north coast of Scotland, each home to approximately 21,24,000 people. As part of this research I have been considering the statistics from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey for full-time first degree students originally domiciled in the islands for the period 2008/9 - 2012/13, and in this article I will present some key features of this data, each presented by theme.

Entry to HE: Location
The DLHE data demonstrates that students from the islands show a clear preference for the universities that are geographically closest. The most popular university is Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (attracting 13.96% of students), with Edinburgh the second most popular (13.02%) and Aberdeen the third (11.14%).

The University of the Highlands and Islands (with campuses in Orkney and Shetland) shows a reasonable level of popularity (6.31%) – having a comparable popularity to the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, which are over twice UHI’s size.

This is important because although research has shown that location is a key consideration for all students (Purcell et al, 2008) in rural and remote areas the impact of location may be even more marked.

So, for example, whereas students based in Edinburgh or Glasgow have the choice of three or more institutions within their own city, and many more within a couple of hours’ travelling time, for Orkney and Shetland students, there is only one choice locally – the University of the Highlands and Islands. In addition, Aberdeen being the main port for ferry travel to the islands may give this city a disproportionately large draw.

Entry to HE: Subject choice
The courses that students from Orkney and Shetland choose to study are relatively comparable to the national averages. However, it is notable that Creative Arts and Design and Education appear to be relatively more popular, and some subjects that appear less popular are Languages, Computer Science, Social Studies, Medicine and Dentistry.

Because numbers are small it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these statistics. However, it may be that there is a relationship between the local labour market and subject choice. So, for example, the creative industries sector is a key sector in the Highlands and Islands (Skills Development Scotland, 2014) whereas the islands have lower than average employment in sectors like finance and insurance (Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2014a, 2014b). Therefore it is perhaps unsurprising that creative arts and design are more popular subjects, and business and computing are less popular subjects in the islands than nationally.

Graduate destinations: Location and employment
In terms of destinations of graduates originally from Orkney or Shetland six months after graduation, the statistics show location continues to be important, with almost 40% of students (whose location is known) living in Orkney or Shetland (38.57%). Aberdeen remains a popular destination after graduation (with Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire accounting for the location of 13.93% of graduates of known location). However, overall graduates are more dispersed geographically, with for example, just over 14% of graduates whose location is known living elsewhere in the UK (other than Scotland) or internationally.

These patterns show that graduates are typically more mobile than students, but also that a significant proportion return to,
or stay in their home locations. The high level of students returning to or staying in the islands is important to note as it suggests that patterns of migration may be more complex than simply representing a ‘brain drain’ from rural and remote areas.

**Graduate destinations: Employment**

Overall, graduates from Orkney and Shetland have destinations comparable to national statistics. However, graduates who live in the islands after graduation appear to be more likely to be in non-professional work.

In 2011/12 - 2012/13, 71.01% of students from the islands were in professional-level work compared to 69.2% of graduates from all Scottish HEIs (HESA, 2015c\(^1\)). However, only 66.67% of Orkney and Shetland graduates living back in the islands were in professional-level work.

A similar pattern is observable in the statistics for 2007/08 - 2010/11, with professional-level employment of Orkney and Shetland graduates generally being comparable to the national average (at 66.15% compared to 66.53% nationally) but with lower levels of professional employment for those graduates living back in the islands (55.91%).

Again, there is a potential relationship with the local labour markets of the islands which have lower than average rates of employment in professional and associate professional and technical occupations (Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2014a, 2014b).

In terms of the jobs undertaken by graduates, limited patterns can be observed because of the low numbers of students in each employment sector. However, it is perhaps notable that about half of those graduates from 2011/12 - 2012/13 who worked as teaching professionals were living in Orkney or Shetland six months after graduation (eight out of sixteen) and almost half of nursing and midwifery professionals (11 out of 24). This suggests that some graduates may choose subjects based on a planned return to the islands, and may help to explain the popularity of education as a subject choice.

**The role of gender**

In addition to the patterns noted, the statistics indicate some interesting patterns in relation to higher education and gender. Firstly, there is a very marked gender division in uptake of higher education, so in the five year period covered by the DLHE data, 36.38% of graduating students from Orkney and Shetland were male, and 63.62% were female.

This compares to national figures for 2013/14, which show 54.7% of full-time first degree graduates are female and 45.3% are male (HESA, 2015b). The gender division is even more marked for graduates who choose to return or stay in the islands after graduation – with 74.07% of those living in Orkney or Shetland six months after graduation being female.

Therefore women are more likely to enter higher education, and those entering higher education are also more likely to return to or stay in the islands.

The reasons behind this pattern are no doubt complex but the local labour market again may be significant, with both islands having above the national average employment in the male dominated sectors of agriculture, forestry and fishing, construction, and transport and storage, and having a greater share of employment in skilled trades (which do not typically require higher education qualifications) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2014a, 2014b).

It is potentially the case that for men career routes on the islands after school are relatively strong, whereas for women there may be fewer perceived options available locally straight from school.

However, given the marked pattern of return in teaching and nursing professionals and the fact that these are female dominated professions it is possible that for women career routes after school may be more commonly perceived to involve a period of study ‘away’ before returning.

**Conclusions**

The data we have discussed shows some potential ways that student and graduate journeys may be impacted by rural and remote location. However, this brief statistical overview also raises a number of areas for further research including:

- Analysis of how variables such as gender, subject choice, career choice and migration may be interrelated and how they may interact.
- Analysis of the motivations and perspectives of individual students understanding why people make the choices that they do.
- Analysis of some of the differences (in terms of student choices) between rural and remote places like Orkney and Shetland as well as similarities.

Through qualitative interview based research with graduating students from Orkney and Shetland, my current research project will address some of these questions.

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\(^1\) Percentage calculated on the basis of data taken from HESA (2015c) Table 4a – Occupation of full-time first degree leavers.
SUPPORTING YOUNG TALENT ENTERING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

LYDIA LEWISON

Lydia Lewison, Schools Policy and Engagement Manager at Creative Skillset, presents insights from Creative Skillset’s latest creative media workforce survey and introduces their new careers portal, Hiive, which aims to break open the creative industries for all.

“It’s not what you know but who you know” has long been a truism when it comes to getting into the creative industries. It was reinforced earlier this year when Creative Skillset released its latest industry research: the Creative Media Workforce Survey 2014. With close to 5,000 respondents from across sectors and regions, it was the largest survey of media professionals of its kind and it gave us a unique insight into the people who make up the creative industries and what their working life is like.

Findings from the 2014 Survey
More than half of respondents (56%) had found their current job through informal recruitment methods, up 10% since 2010, and just under half (48%) have done unpaid work at some point in their career, with just one in a hundred of the creative media workforce coming into the industries through an apprenticeship route. Only half of respondents had received any training at all in the 12 months prior to survey, Freelance staff were especially poorly served.

For the first time this year we also asked about the socio-economic background of people working in the creative media industries. The results showed that 14% of respondents attended an independent and/or fee-paying school (compared to 7% in the wider workforce). The number of people with disabilities in the creative media industries has remained static for 12 years at 5% against 11% across the wider working population.

This paints a fairly gloomy picture of a closed sector of the economy with issues around training and open recruitment. However, that is not the full picture. The creative industries are the fastest growing in the UK, meaning skills shortages have employers yearning for new talent.

There are significant rewards for those with the determination and passion to succeed. According to the workforce survey, the average income across the workforce in 2014 was £33,900, a rise of 6% on 2010. To put these figures into perspective, the creative media industries workforce earn 24% more than the mean average income of the UK working population (which is £27,271). It is important to note, however, that the average income varies considerably from sector to sector – highest average in VFX (filmmaking, visual effects) and lowest in Cinema Exhibition.

Work experience
As many as 41% of the creative media workforce undertook work experience before their first job. Getting work experience early on is the best way to develop skills, to get to grips with a professional setting and to make industry contacts. Employers often say they are looking for experience over qualifications.

It is important, however, that young talent is not taken advantage of when offering their time for free. Creative Skillset has developed guidelines for work placements that give an indication of what work should be paid for and the kind of experience that a work placement should offer in order to make it worthwhile. You can find out more at www.creativeaccess.org.uk and the Creative Employment Programme at www.ccskills.org.uk

We are giving 16 to 24 year olds the opportunity to make the direct engagement with employers that they need to start building their experience with Open Doors, a series of events that inspire and inform young people about career opportunities in the creative industries and connect creative businesses across England to new talent.

With industry insight, networking, creative briefs and the opportunity to secure work experience placements at top creative businesses like Framestore, UKTV, Radiant Worlds and Mother, these events are invaluable for anyone embarking on a creative career.

Work experience is not confined to the workplace – technically minded creatives can simply start work in their own space and in their own time. Creative Skillset has teamed up with experts from across the creative industries to develop a range of free online courses to help professionals to enhance their skills: from maths for games to digital storytelling, fashion to film, animation and VFX.

Hiive
We know that 56% of our young creatives find out about their current or most recent role through informal recruitment methods. For us, this is the most important statistic of the survey. Narrow closed networks are still the majority route into the creative sector, at a time when the need for more talent is clearer than ever.

This is why we developed Hiive www.app.hiive.co.uk

Hiive is a professional network for the creative industries, targeted at companies, course providers and
professionals at any stage in their creative career. It is a professional networking site, a digital community of collaborators from the creative industries across the UK. Since its launch in March 2015, Hiive has grown to nearly 40,000 users, 12,000 courses and more than 2,000 employers including the leading lights from fashion and textiles, visual effects, broadcasting, animation, film, publishing, advertising, marketing communications and the performing arts.

Hiive allows professionals, employers and educators to tap into the UK’s collective industry insights. It is also a brilliant platform for young creatives to tell the community about themselves and to showcase their talent to employers by pulling in all their work from across the web into one big showreel.

The creative industries are an increasingly freelance sector: 30% of respondents to the workforce survey identified as freelancers (up from 28% in 2010) but with significant variations across sectors, rising to as high as 90% freelance in film production. So it is essential that new entrants have a mechanism for showcasing their skills.

Hiive allows users to check out vacancies, find a creative training course or join a ‘swarm’ – discussion forums that can help get the answers to certain questions, put people in touch with each other and possibly provide the trigger of a name or a person that could open a door. It also has examples of open source software in Hiive Careers Swarm which can help take the search to the next level – and if a swarm doesn’t exist for what you’re looking for, you can start your own.

Hiive is also now home to Trainee Finder, a matching service for employers and trainees in film, high-end and children’s TV, games, VFX and animation, giving new entrants their first step on the career ladder.

**Ticked Courses: The media degree comes of age**

The workforce survey reports that in our industries 51% of those educated to degree level hold a creative or media degree, up from 37% in 2010. This rise is evidence of the growing power and reputation of creative and media degrees.

Creative Skillset advise anyone thinking about doing a vocational creative degree to ‘Pick the Tick’ from our website. Graduates from Ticked courses are three times more likely to be employed in a job relevant to their degree than graduates from other creative courses, and less likely to be unemployed than other university graduates. Graduates from Ticked courses can badge themselves on Hiive and employers can search specifically for ticked graduates.

The Creative Skillset Tick is a quality mark indicating the courses and apprenticeships best suited to prepare students for a career in the creative industries.

For a course or apprenticeship to be awarded the Creative Skillset Tick, it has undergone a rigorous assessment process conducted by experts working in the creative industries. They will only award the Tick once those courses and apprenticeships have forged the strongest links with industry.

The professionals from creative companies will have influenced the course curriculum and seen that the skills and theory taught are relevant and equip someone for a career in that field. This ensures that the courses keep up with the rapid pace of change in the industries, and that students benefit from using the latest technologies and working with industry throughout their studies.

You can read the full Media Workforce Survey 2014 report at www.creativeskillset.org and delve deeper into differences between sectors. Creative Skillset’s Employment Census of the Creative Industries, with rich insight from employers, will be out at the end of the year.

Please share the good news about Hiive – it’s free to use and could be a real signpost for those on the pathway into the creative sector. Join Hiive for free at www.hiive.co.uk

For more information about what Creative Skillset does for the creative industries and how it can help inform education, training and career choices visit www.creativeskillset.org

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WHEN WORK EXPERIENCE EMPOWERS: A CASE STUDY

LOUISE COOPER

Louise Cooper uses qualitative evidence from the social media campaign #TakeUSwithyou to assess the value of summer placements. The wealth of experience that these students are tapping into between their studies speaks to the sheer power of work experience to help students develop their skills and shape their future. Louise is Placements Officer at the University of Sheffield Careers Service and co-ordinated the campaign.

#TakeUSwithyou is the campaign we started in summer 2015 at the University of Sheffield Careers Service. It followed students from the University around the world, capturing snapshots of their experiences.

The intention was to gather data from students embarking on summer placements and to establish on what scale students were engaging with this form of work experience. If successful the survey would uphold or refute some employability ideas, providing current and up to date employability information that could be built on and give us a new direction for how we work with students undertaking placements.

The survey was sent out on the 13th July 2015 and within the first 24 hours, almost 150 students responded. The results were overwhelming. The quantity of responses exceeded our expectations and as we interacted with these students on Twitter, it was their determination, ingenuity and passion that has prompted us to pause and reflect on what we offer our students and, more importantly, what students offer the world.

The rise in student fees
When Lord Browne recommended in 2010 that students pay £9,000 for each year of their degree compared to the £3,290 previously set, the responses of students and graduates as well as those working in higher education were passionate.

Actions against the rise in student fees reached a peak in November 2010 at the NCAFC (National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts) march in London. Concerns grew that higher education would become a luxury for those that could afford it and that for many, a university education would be completely out of the question.

Higher education institutions waited nervously to see how the increase in fees would affect student admissions. Plans and strategies were put in place to ensure that those who could not afford a higher education could still access it via bursaries, sponsorship and widening participation schemes. Whilst attention was dedicated to making higher education fair and equitable, did we predict the impact on those who were already intent on coming to university and making a huge financial sacrifice? Would it significantly change their behaviour?

The Impact on students
In September 2012, the first set of higher fee paying students commenced university, accumulating a potential debt of £44,035 under the new system (compared with £24,754 under the old system (Crawford and Jin, Payback time study, IFS 2014)) and an interesting pattern began to emerge.

Historically, first-year students have been relatively low attenders at recruitment fairs. Similarly, the number of students in their first year making careers service appointments has been moderate. Since 2010 at the University of Sheffield, first-year students have doubled their attendance at some recruitment fairs. In Law, first-year attenders now make up 32% of all students compared to 18% in 2010. Additionally, in the last four academic years there has been a 50% rise in the number of first-year students making appointments with the Careers Service. We have increased headcount of the numbers of careers advisers available to see students but with the best will in the world, we only encourage students to make appointments, they are not a compulsory part of their course.

Students in their first year of study are engaging with the idea of employability more than ever before and investing in their future.

Findings from the survey
#TakeUSwithyou revealed that of all students who responded, 23% of all those on summer placement are first-year students, ranging from 18% in science to 26% in engineering subjects. Graduate recruiters would do well to sit up and take note of these statistics as many of their current experience schemes exclude first years.

There are many benefits of ‘pipeline recruiting’ where organisations engage with students early on in their studies. Coupled with the growing intent of first-year students to find work experience, it would be sensible for recruiters to offer many more taster/open days for early year students throughout a variety of industries.

The survey of students confirmed a number of employability trends which have been in existence for some years. Nearly four times more engineering students responded that they were undertaking summer placements than students in arts and humanities subjects, who predictably had the lowest number of students on placement. Twenty per cent of students questioned in the survey travelled overseas for their work experience, again unsurprisingly a large proportion of these students were non UK
Disappointingly, although we continue to oppose unpaid internships and The University of Sheffield Careers Service have strict guidelines stating which unpaid internships can be advertised, 22% of our students on summer placement referred to their experience as ‘unpaid’. If the amount of unpaid internships was disappointing, the varieties of unpaid placements were unanticipated and did not dominate in arts or creative industries.

As we expected, unpaid placements in journalism, animal welfare and charities did feature in the survey but it was the large number of students who had sourced short periods of work experience in well-known large organisations that was the major surprise.

Although disappointed in these employers, I don’t think the majority of these unpaid experiences have come from a place where employers are seeking to take advantages of students. More so, it has come from wanting to be of assistance to these determined and strong minded students who want to experience the industry they long to be part of. We should be inspired by these students, who are dedicated to pursuing their ambitions even it doesn’t pay.

#TakeUSwithyou also revealed that numerically there are as many students undertaking unpaid placements in science subjects as there are arts and humanities. However, proportionally, the low number of students undertaking summer placements in arts and humanities equates to a staggeringly high 57% of all placements undertaken by arts and humanities students being unpaid. Creative schemes such the SEED fund offered by University of Arts London which combines arts students with enterprise funding or the University of Sheffield’s PAS scheme which offer a bursary to postgraduate students undertaking placements with local SMEs, offers some hope of the way forward for students who offer value to industries, short on paid opportunities.

The ‘speculative’ application – or is it ‘unpaid’?

Unfortunately what report did allude to was that unpaid placements may be more common amongst students who had sourced them through personal networks and through family and friends. More than half of the students who classified their placement as ‘unpaid’ had used personal contacts in their search.

I put myself in both the shoes of the student asking a relative for the opportunity to work for them or the family friend being asked to provide work and wonder at what point the subject of payment gets raised? Who is doing who the favour?

A quick survey of popular websites advising how to write a ‘speculative application’ endorses the suggestion that ‘speculative’ means ‘unpaid’. There are no mentions of including a price per hour. Careers services have delivered the social media, LinkedIn and networking training: we now need to follow this up with a heavy dose of negotiating skills.

Pride in these inspiring young people!

The value of this survey does not lie in quantitative data but the qualitative responses from students. Our students are excited by the prospect that they could take their skills learnt from their degree and apply it to a real world setting.

From the student who wanted to engage with different cultures and underprivileged children, to the student who had chiroptophobia (fear of bats) and would be testing sonar equipment at 2.00 am to track different species, I felt quite humbled by the challenges these students were setting themselves. I was also inspired by their motivation to contribute to something bigger than themselves; the future of additive manufacturing, transport master plans and the preserving and reporting of historic monuments.

#TakeUSwithyou has shown us that our students are creative, innovative and hardworking individuals. I feel a sense of pride to be associated with these students, who are communicating and spreading the word that they are from Sheffield. Their words and pictures are filled with the passion of their experience, from cement factories in Malaysia to train tunnels in London, and this passion is infectious.

These students are accruing debts of £40,000 and are frequently working on an unpaid basis to get a foot in the door. They are willing to be part of something much bigger than themselves and a desire to add their learning to assist the world around them. They deserve their ‘graduate career’ and I for one, will strive to help them get it.
Introducing the revised framework for embedding employability (2015)

- In 2013 the Higher Education Academy published Defining & developing your approach to employability: A framework for higher education institutions (Cole, D & Tibby M). Since then more than 50 higher education institutions have engaged with this tool at a range of levels from piloting at a programme level to fully embedding this approach at an institutional level. In 2015 this framework was refreshed and can be downloaded at www.heacademy.ac.uk/frameworks-toolkits/frameworks
- The underpinning process that was central to the 2013 publication has remained the same and in addition, a range of features regarded as vital considerations in developing effective approaches to employability, are highlighted - see list below.
- The four-stage central process aims to support curriculum planning. Through dialogue and engagement with this process, institutions and individual programmes/discipline areas can create their own ‘model of employability’ which can be used as a rationale and benchmark to map current provision against.
- Full details of the underpinning process can be found in our employability toolkit pages at www.heacademy.ac.uk/download/embedding-employability-he-tools

Employability communities of practice

- The HEA is seeking to establish new communities of practice related to employability. In the first instance we will establish groups related to the ten areas of embedding employability:
  1. Attributes and capabilities
  2. Specialist technical and transferable skills
  3. Knowledge and application
  4. Behaviours, qualities and values
  5. Enterprise and entrepreneurship
  6. Career guidance and management
  7. Self, social and cultural awareness
  8. Reflection and articulation
  9. Confidence, resilience and adaptability
  10. Experience and networks

These ten areas are each defined within the three core employability values of inclusivity, collaboration and engagement. If you would like more information or are interested in being involved please email us directly at employability@heacademy.ac.uk specifying your full contact details, your current role, which group you would be interested in joining and your specific area of interest if appropriate.

We very much look forward to working with you in the future.

Doug Cole
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Higher Education Academy