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Note from the editor

The last issue of GMT was themed around the imminent general election; if a party championing the noble causes of careers guidance and employability excellence were ever to put candidates forward, that issue would be the perfect manifesto!

Fast forward three months into the first totally Tory administration in eighteen years, and if there has yet to be an epochal transformation of the HE landscape, the sector is still high on the policy agenda.

In this edition we address the most contested themes in this summer’s HE, skills and careers agendas. Just days before writing this note the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the axing of student maintenance grants. This unfortunate situation for social mobility has been compounded by the news of the falling numbers of applications in UK universities this year — as data published by UCAS earlier this month shows. This makes for much uncertainty — or at the very least heralds the beginning of a transitional period. So, where do we go from here?

We start answering this with the help of a fascinating insight into the student experience, the new zeitgeist of HE — a wonderful story told by Brian Hipkin, Dean of Students at Regent’s University.

Next, The Bridge Group’s Director Nik Miller puts contextual data in graduate recruitment into practice, showcasing the value of industry/HE collaboration in the race for graduate talent.

Jane Artess, now Principal Research Fellow at ICeGS, takes this issue’s careers baton with a look into different theories about IAG. Her wisdom is, as always, priceless.

Keith Herrmann, Director of Employability and Careers at the University of Surrey and convenor of the Careers Alliance sets out the case for a national careers strategy in a mighty polemic.

Prospects’ Jayne Rowley reports from the degree fraud frontline, followed by an article from Professor Francis Green outlining his research on establishing a new indicator of graduate employment. This is a piece of very important new research which I am delighted to guest in GMT.

Finally, I am delighted to introduce our very own Hannah Goldwyn-Simpkins who sets out in her wonderfully balanced article the way to a fairer internship culture.

As ever, our regular HEA employability update can be found on the back cover.

Aphrodite Papadatou
GMT Editor
• ‘Does Cost Matter?’: A new report shows that higher tuition fees in HE distort the choices poorer students make. Research undertaken by the National Education Opportunities Network (Neon), involving nearly 1,500 year 13 students from eight different areas of the country applying to university this year, showed that those from lower participation neighbourhoods were 20% more likely to choose to study near to home, and to live at home while studying, than those from the highest participation neighbourhoods.

www.educationopportunities.co.uk

• HE sector stands by for battle over fees, cuts and Europe: A UUK declaration was issued in May about the stepping up a gear of the campaign in the months to come. Get all the latest news at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

• Times Higher Education parent company acquires UniJobs: The acquisition was described by Rob Grimshaw, TES Global’s chief executive, as a significant investment in a ‘dynamic sector that is undergoing rapid growth across both the developed and developing economies.’ www.timeshighereducation.co.uk

• BIS stands by its skills promise: Sajid Javid, the new BIS Secretary, indicated that apprenticeships, jobs and youth training would remain priorities as some of the media questioned the long-term future of the Department.

www.gov.uk

• Skills Outlook 2015: The OECD publishes their biggest report so far on how well countries are doing in raising basic skill levels among young people and which saw the UK ranked 20th out of the 76 core countries surveyed. (Hong Kong-China, Estonia and Korea came 1st, 2nd, 3rd.)

• The Guardian University Guide 2016: launched in May, the guide ranks all the universities in the UK and helps students to find the undergraduate courses. Coventry enters the Top 20. www.theguardian.com/education

• High Fliers: headline-grabbing new report keen to show that the new crop of £9,000 tuition fee-paying graduates is ‘more focused on salaries’ to pay off debts. Find out more at www.highfliers.co.uk

• Overseas branch campuses become ‘low priority’ in internationalisation strategies: European universities refocus on student mobility and strategic partnerships, says European Association for International Education. Learn more at www.eaie.org

• Importance of colleges: The 157 Group of colleges and economic modelling specialists (EMSI) put out a report demonstrating the economic importance of colleges to learners, communities and taxpayers. Download the report at www.157group.co.uk

• Demand for teacher training courses falls: Latest UCAS figures show that there has been a 12% drop in demand for such courses over the last year. www.ucas.com

• London Calling: Business firm London First and PwC crunch the numbers and calculate that international students bring a net benefit of £2.8bn a year to UK GDP. www.pwc.co.uk/internationalstudents

• GTI Postgraduate survey: TARGETPostgrad Postgraduate Study and Funding Annual Survey 2015 results published. Amongst other things it finds problems of the past two years persisting — the top two reasons for not enrolling on a postgraduate course were the same as in 2014 and 2013: the cost and the lack of funding available. You can view the report at www.agcas.org.uk

• UCAS: Growth in applications for UK universities has slowed ahead of the lifting of student number controls in England this autumn. UCAS data published in July show that 673,040 people applied to study FT undergraduate courses at UK HE institutions by 30 June, the final cut-off point for the main application route. This news comes in tandem with the axing of the maintenance grants for students in George Osborne’s Summer 2015 Budget. www.ucas.com

• And finally... a very proud moment for us at Prospects: our degree fraud service was very much present in ‘Going Global’, the inaugural speech of incoming Minister of State for universities and Science Jo Johnson. Read the article on p13 and for more information contact Keiron Tobin at k.tobin@prospects.ac.uk
THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: A shift in the zeitgeist

BRIAN HIPKIN

Brian Hipkin, Dean of Students at Regent’s University, Vice President of AMOSSHE, and academic anatomises ‘The Student Experience’ in theory and practice and with reference to its present centrality to HE policy making.

A confession

I am a sociologist. I have no shame, only a lingering pride. I have been ‘thinking outside the box’ and looking at the ‘bigger picture’ all my working life; it is second nature to me now. I have always been fascinated by the ‘whys’ and ‘whens’ of society. Higher education has been a big part of my life so I thought it was about time that I applied a few ‘whys’ and ‘whens’ to what is undoubtedly the zeitgeist of UK Higher Education – the Student Experience.

Of course, students have always had experiences. I had a few myself. Until recently, however, these experiences remained at the level of the individual, rendered incapable of measurement, comparison and ‘improvement’.

The introduction of tuition fees in 1998 saw the end of the student grant (which saw me through my undergraduate degree). Much has been written about the impact of the introduction of fees into the UK undergraduate market but one side effect has remained largely unnoticed: for the first time a UK undergraduate student, their family and the public at large, could put a monetary value on a university education. Prior to this, the value of going to university was a ‘good in itself’ a ‘rite of passage’ undertaken by middle-class (largely), white (largely) school and college leavers.

If I had any rationale to become a sociologist it was certainly not in order to get a good job. Indeed, the only advantage of having a sociology degree when you were unemployed was that at least you could understand why!

The rise of the Student Experience

A degree carrying monetary value is but a short step into a world where students are customers and the perceived quality of their student experience is part of their return on investment. It is not without significance that the rise of the Student Experience as an agenda at many universities and its landing with a large and ominous thud on the desk of a newly retitled ‘PVC Student Experience’ coincided with the build up to the arrival of the first £9,000 undergraduates.

The run up to the introduction of the £9,000 could have been different. The Government seemed to decide by default that the issue of student debt was inevitable and that the answer lay in the provision to the general public of the means of measuring ‘value for money’ – which after all is the acceptable face of debt.

It is very rare in the world of HE to be able to say that ‘I was there’ when it comes to Government decision making, but in 2011 I attended a meeting at Westminster chaired by Simon Hughes who had been given the task of developing what we now call KIS (Key Information Set) data. His vision was that parents of 15 year-olds would sit around the dining room table and use this data and have a rational discussion about the best University course to choose. Although many may question the words ‘sitting’, ‘rational’ and ‘15 year-old’ all being together in a single meaningful sentence, it was clear that data driven decisions were to be central to the Government’s approach.

A complex formula

The Student Experience has always been a ‘will-o-the-wisp’ concept. I have tried to reduce it to a formula:

**Individual preconceptions + reasons for choice + interactions with people, systems, buildings and the unknown x every student x every minute of every day spent as a student both on and off campus.**

Today it is the National Student Survey (NSS) score that stands in for such a complex formula. Whilst it is now almost universally agreed that the NSS is far from perfect, it is without doubt the big beast of the world of student experience matrices. The battle to move up the league tables has not only cost universities millions in investment but many people their jobs. It could be argued that the organisation that has indirectly benefited the most from the NSS is Apple, as it is normally one of their products that is offered to encourage students to complete the survey.

Indeed it is hard to ignore the Behemoth that is the NSS – it dominates the Student Experience landscape! However, I would encourage a peek around the side of this monster to look at things from a student’s perspective and to understand the ‘gap’ that often exists between perception and reality.

Mind the gap

One such gap is in how the structures of our university are viewed. You only have to click onto any university website to see how the departmental structure of that institution is mirrored in the organisation of its website. Despite the fact that restructuring is second nature now in HE, one thing tends to be constant and that is the existence of silos. We may alter their shape, move some down the road a bit and stick a different label on them but HE is still resolutely constructed from silos. Students don’t know or even care (why should they?) about our administrative divisions – for them the organisational structure of their university resembles the wide flat plains of the Serengeti! They view the strangeness of our organisations as if we were a giant one-stop shop: they will ask or seek help or information from anyone walking past them on campus and have a reasoned expectation that that person can answer all their questions.

Whilst the student experience is now both front and centre of our marketing of HE, it is still portrayed via photos of sun-dappled students sitting al fresco. Such images
often share the prospectus page with pen portraits of students and employability statistics. Although there is of course nothing wrong with these images, they can be only fleeting moments of a student’s experience.

Perhaps there will always be a gap between the perception and the reality of the student experience. This gap, however, is swiftly becoming a chasm as the Millennials march towards our campuses. It has now become a truism that we are educating our students for jobs that don’t yet exist, but using a university system that was designed, organised and conceived for a different age is not the right way to meet this challenge.

Universities are based pedagogically and organisationally on a linear model of traditional study where ‘learning’ is achieved sequentially and is designed to be realised over a semester or other artificially defined time period. This is a system that we can administer, timetable, measure and report on. It is a rhythm that we build our loan, fees, grants and leave systems on.

**But is it how we learn?**

I know that I did not learn to ride a bike or to swim in incremental steps. I had good days and bad days and when I got it, I got it.

In HE we have suffered little of the ‘disruptive’ power of technology in its social media form. For many, MOOCs are just marketing exercises and are often portrayed as the anathema of the student experience. (Try telling that to Open University students who consistently rate their institution very highly in the NSS!)

The disruptive power of technology in its online learning form lies in the fundamental challenge it poses to the linear traditional study model that is in the DNA of our universities. Put simply we don’t learn in a straight line. Some of us race forward, stumble over some ideas and concepts, pause, get back on our bikes and race forward again. Learning cannot be contained in a prescribed time period. Going at your own pace, with support from time to time, co-operating and at times competing with others seems from experience to be a more natural way of learning, something that seems to stick better, something that we can build on, develop our creativity from, something that cannot be contained by the traditional structures of our universities.

**Learning from the Millennials**

Technology and social media are not tools for the Millennials. They are a way of life. They are the portal through which they experience life, a life that is mediated by social media, not a life that is mistaken for ‘real’ life. For a while now students’ experience of ‘life’ has in part been delivered to them via Apple or Samsung. However, it is the part that is least connected to what goes on during their time on the campus. Universities are simply too slow and too cautious to keep up – we are often seen sitting on the side lines waiting for perfection or the pace of invention and adoption to slow down so we can make ‘wise’ investment and strategic choices as to how we engage in this social media world.

Yes, students are customers but not as a sociologist would recognise them. They have grown up in a consumer society – one in which a university education has always had a monetary value and a tangible ‘finished’ product that they can go out and get at a desired salary level.

Students will choose a university for a wide range of largely non-academic reasons and although the impact of fees has drawn their attention to location and employability statistics, choice is still heavily impacted by their friends and by word of mouth. Once they have arrived the vast majority will stay. These are not the behaviour patterns of the fully formed customer.

**The zeitgeist of today**

It must be more than fifteen years ago that I had a conversation with a colleague about the nature of the relationship between a student and their university. I have always remembered their analogy and it is, if anything, truer today than it was then. Students should, she told me, treat university like a gym. You pay your membership and if you follow the rules you will get the benefit.

Zeitgeists do not just appear, they have a history, a back story and indeed a life span. Sociology not only looks backwards to understand, but sometimes when it is feeling strong enough it can help us catch glimpses into the future.

The Student Experience will not always be our zeitgeist. If I am asked to rewrite this piece in two or three years’ time we would be talking about our new Zeitgeist in UK HE: Retention...
PUTTING IT IN CONTEXT

NIK MILLER

In the race to access the best talent and to support social mobility, some employers are introducing additional contextual information to their recruitment processes. Director of The Bridge Group and independent consultant, Nik Miller provides an insight into the ways in which employers and higher education practitioners can collaborate to create a strong evidence base for contextual recruitment. The Bridge Group is a leading charitable policy association advocating social mobility.

What is contextual recruitment?
Contextual recruitment processes consider additional information about candidates’ historical or current circumstances, to inform filtering criteria, and appropriate adjustments that might take place at the application, assessment and interview stages. It is not a tool to effect positive discrimination, and should be one approach within an overall recruitment strategy to identify candidates who will deliver the best job performance. For example, an employer may make judgements about an applicant’s prior attainment in the context of the circumstances it was achieved. It can be unhelpful to place too much confidence in school grades as a predictor of future performance, since not all applicants have had an equal opportunity to demonstrate their potential through these qualifications. As an indication of future performance, school grades might usefully be considered in the context they were achieved, rather than solely against other candidates, whose educational experiences will vary from the tragically disadvantaged to the magnificently privileged.

A balanced approach
Recruitment is an exercise in identifying and understanding signifiers of future performance; contextual information can support this process and has important implications for higher education careers services. Correspondingly, it is important that employers recognise the limitations of contextual recruitment and, where it is mismanaged, the possibility for it to do more harm than good. Employers should ensure policies and processes for contextual recruitment are robustly designed and implemented. Fortunately, there is a great deal of established practice, and an evidence base, to which we can turn.

Learning from higher education
As part of its annual series of policy seminars, The Bridge Group has hosted a number of open events on contextual recruitment during 2015, and we will publish guidance on this subject shortly. In our work with employers, we emphasise that there is much to learn from the HE sector, where the practice of contextual admissions is now commonplace (with many institutions receiving in excess of 50,000 applications per year). Many universities use contextual information as part of their admissions strategies. These locally designed programmes are built on common principles, but respond to the individual circumstances of each institution. See, for example, the Schwartz report (2004), the work of www.spa.ac.uk and the range of published institutional approaches, e.g. available on the websites of the University of Manchester and the University of Nottingham.

In considering the use of contextual information in university admissions, we also highlight a worrying contradiction in the system. Consider, for example, the disadvantaged student who is admitted to university on an ‘adjusted offer’ (i.e. minimally lower A-level grades than typically expected, because of the circumstances in which their results were achieved) and graduates with a 1st class degree. The barrier to progression is overcome at university entry, only to reappear in the form of employers’ minimum A-level grade requirements.

Guidance on best practice in contextual recruitment
Our guidance advocates five aspects of effective practice: interrogating the existing pipeline to inform practice; securing commitment internally; designing evidence-based approaches; strategic and operational integration; and consistent communication. The guidance will be available shortly, free of charge, on the Bridge Group’s website.

It is critical that employers implement contextual recruitment as an embedded aspect of a wider strategy for accessing talent, and promoting social mobility. The use of additional contextual data is not a panacea for achieving diversity and should be used to complement and enhance existing recruitment processes. We advocate the use of contextual recruitment in principle, but are concerned that it should not be approached as a standardised exercise that can be universally applied – not least because aspects of the Human Rights Act dictate that a policy of contextual recruitment should be reasonable and proportionate; disadvantaged or underrepresented groups must be identified correctly; and measures should not be applied so rigidly that discretion is fettered.

Building the evidence base
Employers should begin by interrogating their recruitment pipeline to inform practices, i.e. diagnose the situation, before concocting policy solutions. Colleagues leading on contextual recruitment may wish to know the following, to develop an evidence base to underpin their approach to contextual recruitment:

- What is the correlation between recruits’ background characteristics (e.g. socio-economic background/university/attainment) and performance in the firm?
- Are there particular aspects of the recruitment process where a disproportionate number of applicants are unsuccessful?
- Are there different patterns in recruits’ characteristics in particular business areas or office locations?
- Are there particular universities/university courses where the firm recruits higher numbers of recruits from e.g. lower socio-economic groups?
This evidence base should inform the rationale, and specific approaches, for contextual recruitment, and provide the intelligence required to leverage internal support. The analysis should also interest careers services, offering insights into the progression of their students, adding to the existing evidence to inform careers services, and the way in which they are targeted on campus.

Cohort sizes may mean that achieving statistical significance in the analysis is problematic, even in larger multinational organisations. For this reason, and for the important purpose of peer benchmarking, we are encouraging employers to pool their data to enable greater insights. This would additionally enable us to compare recruitment pipelines across different sectors, to gain greater insights into which interventions (from employers and careers services) yield positive results to support social mobility.

Identification and adjustment
In order to effectively introduce contextual recruitment, employers require a dependable system for identifying applicants whose circumstances trigger a response, i.e. who will be targeted? This requires access to the relevant external data sources, ensuring that they are clearly understood internally and there is the capacity to process them effectively. We advocate a standard measure to be used across organisations to identify socio-economic disadvantage, to promote consistency in the methodologies used to analyse recruitment pipelines, and in the subsequent flagging of disadvantaged applicants. There are also practical challenges associated with integrating systems for flagging applicants, which are likely to impede progress for some organisations. To account for high volumes of applications, employers need to establish processes for flagging applicants that integrate with existing processes and platforms.

It is important that contextual data used to support recruitment processes is valid, verifiable and reliable. Some of the data collected in current recruitment processes is self-reported and not easy to independently verify – e.g. parental experience of higher education, or being a recipient of free school meals. There is some debate on this subject, and much good work being undertaken in the sector. We recommend that employers use verifiable information, and encourage the use of the contextual data outlined below.

• **The school or college at which the applicant completed their KS5 qualification.** The average levels of attainment at the school against local authority average, and the candidate’s relative performance against the norm in the school/college. To ensure that the data used to inform the educational indicators is valid and reliable, it should be based on three years of school performance data where available.

• **The applicant’s (last) postcode during the completion their KS5 qualification.** The extent of disadvantage revealed by the relative ranking (and associated quintile) of the applicant’s postcode against POLAR3, IDACI, and IMD.

The question of who to flag (the trigger) is simpler to address than the question of what should subsequently be done (the action). There is little existing practice to aid in identifying effective adjustments that are applicable across sectors. We encourage employers to consider the most effective practices in light of their pipeline analysis, and to ensure that these practices are professionally and consistently applied, individually implemented and transparent. We are working with organisations to explore this area, and practices may include reduced grade expectations in school attainment, support with preparation for assessment centres, alumni mentoring opportunities, or adjustments in the awarding of points in appraising applications (for example, recognising that more disadvantaged students often have to undertake paid work and may therefore be less likely to e.g. be president of a campus society).

Evaluation and communication
Employers are also partnering with the Bridge Group to evaluate the impact of such adjustments, and to ensure that benchmarking (against time and, where possible, against similar organisations) is in place from inception. The main purpose of evaluation and monitoring is not to hold employers accountable in achieving specific targets (we advise against quotas or targets for flagging/recruiting applicants from particular backgrounds). Rather, evaluative models are designed to highlight effective adjustments, to guard against ineffective practices, and to support the development of an evidence base to inform work across sectors.

Alongside adopting robust approaches for contextual recruitment, it is also important that these approaches are communicated effectively to internal colleagues and external stakeholders, including university careers services. Employers should introduce consistent and clear communication with internal stakeholders on the rationale, use and impact of contextual recruitment. All recruiters, applicants, and careers services should be clear on what contextual data is used, when it is used, and how it will be used.

Applied robustly and within a carefully considered process (that also invests corresponding resource to promoting effective transition into the organisation), the use of contextual information in recruitment can be an effective tool to help identify applicants with greatest potential to perform highly in the job. It also presents exciting opportunities for increased collaboration between careers services and employers, in designing and evaluating models of contextual recruitment (targeting and adjusting), and in sharing data to help grow the evidence base to inform careers services and recruitment strategies.

Colleagues who are interested to engage with the Bridge Group’s work in this area are invited to connect with us via the website: www.thebridgegroup.org.uk
MORE THAN A GOOD CV

JANE ARTESS

We know students get jobs when they have job-tailored CVs, oodles of relevant work experience and interpersonal skills fit to charm the birds from the trees. But as anyone who trained as a career professional knows, there is more to careers than a good CV. Jane Ar tess shares her wisdom on constructing holistic and meaningful approaches to career guidance from different theoretical strands. Jane is currently Principal Research Fellow at the University of Derby’s College of Education (iCeGS).

Ideas about career development are drawn from various subject disciplines, notably psychology and sociology. Psychological theories are arguably of the greatest significance in terms of volume and impact upon the work of career professionals. Here, we consider three strands: differential, developmental and behavioural.

**Differential** approaches to career guidance presume that individuals possess different traits, qualities, interests and that the object of career support is to match students to the ‘best fit’ courses or jobs. Its appeal to common-sense perceptions is very strong; it seems implausible that individuals would choose occupations for which they were not well matched. Differential approaches require that the qualities of both individuals and occupations can be accurately measured, and that those qualities are sufficiently enduring to make the match effective over time. An underlying assumption of a differential approach is that subtle changes in occupational requirements and individual characteristics can be accommodated but that significant change in either requires re-assessment of the match.

The purpose of career support here is to assist individuals identify their qualities and interests, alongside an assessment of labour market requirements. Awareness-raising is achieved using the exploration of (work) experiences, social or cultural activities and educational achievement, together with interest inventories, aptitude or psychometric assessments. Analysis of labour market requirements is made on the basis of systematic surveying and reporting of employing organisations.

Career support can be delivered via the curriculum or via one-to-one interactions and in both settings there is concern about achieving ‘realistic’ decisions, with students encouraged to choose from options identified on the basis of their educational attainments and labour market opportunities. The career professional’s role is as an expert, impartial mediator, central to the process that guides the client into the ‘best fit’ training or educational opportunity or job. Change in aptitudes, attainments and job requirements locates differential approaches predominantly in the present; theorising that could accommodate development of a future perspective challenges the basis of differentialism.

**Developmental** approaches to career decision-making hinge upon dual notions of ‘change’ and ‘readiness’. That individuals mature and change appeals to common-sense ideas about personal and social development. Key writers portray career development as phased with increasing levels of vocational maturity emerging as individuals pass through the stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and mature adulthood. Vocational maturity is associated with readiness to make career decisions and take career-related action as a result. Developmental theorists take account of individual differences by mapping individuals along a continuum of vocational maturity. Change is implicit but bounded by a sense of progression between stages in typically linear fashion. So a child’s aspiration to become a pop star might be viewed as indicative of being at a ‘fantasy’ stage whilst a young adult’s aspiration to the same might be viewed as ‘tentative’ or ‘exploratory’ if accompanied by participation in a pop band or direct experience in the music industry.

The career practitioner’s role is to assist in the identification of a phase or stage of development and to provide interventions aimed at ‘moving the client on’. Counselling techniques are frequently used with particular emphasis being placed upon the interpersonal skills of the practitioner in negotiation with the student and on the basis of the perceived stage of development. This facilitates a student-centred approach which is differentiated and can be delivered in curricular as well as individual settings. The provision of career support within a developmental approach is less likely to be dependent upon finding a match with the labour market and indeed may become separated from it.

**Behaviourism** has been used extensively to inform career guidance practice. Here the basic tenets of stimulus-response, action and reinforcement have been applied to account for how career decisions are made. This approach emphasises that career interests and aptitudes are shaped not only by direct experiences but by the actions of others and by the individual’s interpretation of their own and others’ actions. A personality theory known as ‘social learning theory’ has been used in career decision-making to describe how individuals acquire ‘self-observation generalisations’ (or self-awareness) and ‘task approach skills’ (or problem-solving abilities). Social learning theory reveals how knowledge about self (both learned and genetic) is integrated with information that is provided via reinforcing feedback. For example, self-observation generalisations might be reported as,

‘People from my course don’t usually do that sort of job...’ or ‘I have always been very active, I am told, since I was a child – that is probably why I enjoyed work experience in the building company’

Role models and iconic representations of occupations are learned and reinforced in particular social contexts and are said to become powerful influencers of career decision-making. Reinforcement of stereotypes are described as socially
derived (from exchanges with family and peers, the media) and the rational and irrational association of characteristics. For example:

‘I wouldn’t want to do an office job – office jobs are boring …’ or ‘Public life is full of people who cannot be trusted – everyone knows that politicians make promises they don’t intend to keep’ or ‘Social work appeals to me because social workers help people in trouble.’

The task of the career practitioner is to assist the client to test out whether previous social learning is accurate and to locate career motivations and goals. Practitioners might use counselling techniques together with provocation and challenge, to encourage clients to develop and extend their knowledge, for example, ‘how do you know all office jobs are boring?’

The use of social learning theory and other behavioural approaches has been opposed by those who view the stimulus-response-reinforcement model as simplistic and failing to take account of the capacity of the client to process, interpret or reflect upon information about themselves and employment and educational opportunities. Critics of behaviourist stances have been prominent amongst educationalists and sociologists.

If psychological theorising emphasises individual cognitive and individual-in-group responses to the task of selecting a career focus, then sociological theorising emphasises the impact of social, economic and cultural environments on the way individuals and groups understand and act.

A fundamental reason for using sociology as a means of understanding career development is that the actions of individuals are bound to a context (or society) that can be described independently from the actions of any one individual. Sociological descriptions of career choice are significantly influenced by ideas about social class and mobility and some authors see social structures as ascribing workplace relationships; i.e. where occupations are allocated rather than chosen. When described in this way, the passivity of behaviourism is eclipsed by the oppression of social structures. Labour markets (or ‘opportunity structures’) are part of wider social organisations and perceived as largely beyond an individual’s control.

Sociological perspectives have been critiqued for their inability to accommodate the agency of individuals and groups as a part of the dynamic reality of participation in real communities.

Career support here is aimed to enable the client to appraise and review his/her ‘world view’ and to assess their own beliefs in relation to factual data about labour market opportunities and probabilities. A major task of career education and guidance is to support adjustment to and accommodation of available opportunities via the use of validated, accurate information. The skills of counselling would be required to help reconcile individuals’ perceptions as they navigate often prolonged transitions into and through complex labour markets. Like other approaches, career support can be provided in both curricular and one-to-one settings.

Rationality: The belief that career decision making is rational underpins much government policy for career education and guidance in England. The inclusion of rationality is plausible and apparently desirable; few of us would claim to make irrational decisions about something as important as choice of occupation or course of study. However, there are writers who describe the emphasis on ‘technically’ rational decision making as misleading claiming that rationality is only possible to understand when in-depth knowledge of the individual (their aspirations, motivations, constraints, values and beliefs etc.) are understood as a whole. What might appear rational in one set of personal circumstances can be viewed as wholly irrational given another set of circumstances. Some authors have argued that ‘technical rationality’ should be replaced by ‘pragmatic rationality’ as it more aptly describes the compromises, shifts and changes that individuals undergo in reaching important career decisions.

Career adaptability conceptualises career development and transition as a process of adaptation, rather than linear development. This approach owes much to theorising known as ‘career construction’ which promotes different approaches to careers guidance interventions for individuals described as ‘actors’, ‘agents’ and ‘authors’ and demonstrates a model of career construction counselling that focusses on enabling the student to explore how her/his own career thinking has been constructed.
WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT GENERATION?

KEITH HERRMANN

‘The bald truth is beyond comprehension – if the levels of youth unemployment remain unchanged over the next decade, it is estimated that the net cost to HM Treasury will be approximately £28 billion’. With this time bomb in mind, Keith Herrmann sets out the case for a national careers strategy and explains how the Careers Alliance’s #futurealent campaign is bringing together employers, industry bodies and HE practitioners to deliver nationally co-ordinated action.

Keith is Director of Employability and Careers at the University of Surrey and convenes the Careers Alliance pro bono.

A report by the UKCES2 on youth unemployment titled ‘Precarious Futures’ confirms concerns about labour market opportunities for future generations. It explores the complexities of education to employment transition that mean that the job prospects for many young people have deteriorated alarmingly. These findings are echoed in a report by McKinsey3 on education to employment transition in Europe which found that the European Union has the highest youth unemployment rate of anywhere in the world apart from the Middle East and North Africa. In 2013, almost a quarter of young people in the EU labour market were unemployed4. Even though the UK comes out better than many of its European competitors in the McKinsey report, there remain a number of challenges.

Structural issues with the labour market are exacerbated by a number of paradoxical observations about employer demand for talent. Put simply:

- There are many reports from employer organisations about the severe skills shortages and skills gaps they are experiencing5.
- Notwithstanding the demand, employers can’t seem to find the talent they need, especially for STEM skills6.
- Employers seem to be also saying that many young people, including graduates, lack work experience7.
- Employers want to actively engage with education, but find it very difficult to get into schools and colleges.

Making the first steps onto the jobs ladder is a major challenge for young people leaving school, college or university. Although improving, we know that only one in four employers offer work experience placements to young people in education and just 15% of employers have or offer apprenticeships to young people. The latest DLHE figures show that graduate unemployment is markedly down. Looking closely at the data, though, we see that part-time students make a significant contribution to the reduction in graduate unemployment8. Structural changes in the labour market mean that young people are competing with older and more experienced workers, who have been forced to trade down for the lower and mid-level jobs that young people would normally take.

From a young person’s point of view, career management challenges are significant and not just about career choices – they are also about subject choices, qualification choices, and routes into employment, or further/higher education. As regards helping young people making informed choices, the government has presided over a fundamental erosion of career guidance. The result of this is neatly captured by CBI Director General John Cridland9, who recently said: ‘We know careers advice is on life support in many areas, as schools struggle with the statutory duty... Businesses need to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in...’

Despite the value of employer involvement in schools10, the Government cut funding for the Education-Business Partnerships (EBPs) and Connexions which both provided brokerage between business and schools11. The Government also removed the statutory duties on schools and colleges for work-related learning (including work experience) and careers education, consequently reducing the mandated space available for such school/employer links within the curriculum12. In their place schools have had to take on new statutory responsibilities with no money.

A Pearson report showed a quarter of state secondary schools reporting less careers provision at their school in 2012/13 than in the previous year. Particularly sharp falls were reported in work experience (down 14%), careers

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4. Eurofound. 2012. This report estimates that the cost to the European Union of youth not finding work is enormous: one estimate puts the annual cost of the NEET population — in terms of both direct costs and lost output — at €153 billion in 2011.
12. The Education Act 2011 also removed the statutory duty for schools to provide careers education, and work-related learning (WRL) was removed by statutory instrument in August 2012.
libraries (down 12%) and individual careers counselling (down 9%)\textsuperscript{13}.

The reality is that addressing youth unemployment and smoothing the education to employment transition for young people at the necessary level of scale can only be achieved where all the actors involved understand the need for partnership working, recognise their distinctive and complementary contributions\textsuperscript{14} and ensure greater co-ordination of effort at a local level within a ‘national organising framework’. The Gatsby Benchmarks\textsuperscript{15} provide a useful overarching framework for this.

The development of a national strategy for careers

Careers policy has suffered from an excess of initiatives and too little strategy. This has been wasteful and has seen multiple, often short-lived, projects. It is important that the new Conservative government announces a national strategy for careers in England. This should be lifelong and available to all people in England, and it should harness and enhance existing practice rather than reinventing the wheel.

It is vital that the government brings leadership to the wide range of initiatives that have a bearing on education to employment transition. There are considerable opportunities for cost savings in the public investment in career support. At present there is spending on careers provision from the following Departments: Education; Business, Innovation & Skills; Work and Pensions; and Justice. The development of a national careers strategy could help to increase the efficiency of public investment in career support. A key component of this would be to view a reconstituted National Careers Service as a universal service and thus the core delivery infrastructure for all career-related programmes.

There could also be better links between many of the current schemes and initiatives:

- The commitment to invest approximately £300m a year to secure three million more apprenticeships.
- The £22m National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) scheme managed by HEFCE to encourage more young people into higher education (HE)\textsuperscript{16}.
- Universities and colleges are investing about £600 million through their access agreements to improve access, student success and progression.
- Numerous national employers, professional bodies and Sector Skills Councils support careers programmes to raise awareness about their industry or profession.
- The UKCES is managing the allocation of some £250m in matched funding to Strategic Industrial Partnerships to deliver investment in skills development in key industries\textsuperscript{17}.

Securing our future talent

‘Fixing’ the current labour market shortages in the here and now is not enough. The Royal Academy of Engineering’s report\textsuperscript{18} on “Jobs and Growth” forecasts that the UK economy will require 830,000 professional scientists, engineers and technologists over the next decade alone. There is a long-term skills issue that must be addressed by bringing education and training and the labour market closer together.

The Careers Alliance, which is made up of more than twenty of the country’s largest skills and education organisations, reports that the inputs from employers and careers advisers need to be integrated into well-planned careers programmes in schools and colleges. It is in the education system, the very source of our future talent pipeline, that considerable investment is needed to address our long-term future talent requirements. Hence the reference above to a national careers strategy, much stronger integration across government departments, local government and the many initiatives mentioned above. The current position of fragmented funding and no national careers strategy cannot be reconciled with the needs of the country’s long-term future economic security.

The Careers Alliance has launched a #futuretalent campaign\textsuperscript{19} backed by more than 70 employer organisations.


\textsuperscript{14} Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance (2014). The Roles of Employers and Career Professionals in Providing Career Support to Young People in Schools and Colleges (Briefing Note 13).

\textsuperscript{15} See http://www.gatsby.org.uk/GoodCareerGuidance

\textsuperscript{16} The NNCO involves 200 universities and colleges and will reach 4,300 secondary schools and colleges.

\textsuperscript{17} See weblinks to the Science Industry Partnership http://www.scienceindustrypartnership.com/home/ and Energy and Utility Skills http://www.euskills.co.uk/careers. Both provide careers information and access to employment opportunities and training for young people in schools, colleges and universities.

\textsuperscript{18} Royal Academy of Engineering (2012). Jobs and growth: the importance of engineering skills to the UK economy. London.

\textsuperscript{19} See the CSSA #futuretalent campaign at http://careersalliance.com/future-talent-campaign/. The statement contains supporting quotes from leading business people, trade unions, the student movement, and a wide range of skills and education representative bodies. There are also case studies of how employers are working with schools, colleges and careers adviser organisations to provide an integrated approach to career development support for young people in schools and college.
Employers and the Careers Alliance are calling for collaborative action between professional careers advisers, employers and schools and colleges in providing careers advice and guidance to young people by:

- Highlighting the importance of careers education and guidance in schools and colleges.
- Framing employer contributions as part of professionally managed careers programmes and not as ad hoc initiatives.
- Affirming that, working together within a planned careers programme, employers and career professionals can provide far more effective help to young people than either could do on their own.

The #futuretalent campaign challenges current government policies by highlighting the importance of collaborative action in career guidance. This contrasts with the government’s latest Statutory Guidance to schools which has emphasised contributions from employers and people in jobs to inspire and motivate young people in schools and colleges about the world of work, but makes insufficient reference to the role of careers advisers, nor explains how such links between employers and schools and colleges can best be brokered.

The establishment of a Careers and Enterprise Company funded by the DfE is a welcome development to foster local brokerage between employers and schools and colleges and support capacity building in schools. However, it is inadequately funded and leaves unanswered the question about the role of the National Careers Service which has a similar remit to support schools and colleges.

A strong partnership between schools, colleges, the careers sector and employers is needed even more now given the recent announcement by the Chancellor George Osborne about dramatic funding cuts to education and skills in the Summer Budget Speech. The announcement about converting student maintenance grants into loans could have a negative impact on young people’s willingness to go to university. Given these developments, there is a greater urgency for employers to work with the careers sector to bring visionary leadership to driving closer collaboration between employers and schools. Employers should stand up for the careers profession and the efforts being made to professionalise the sector, help schools implement their statutory responsibilities and ensure that young people are better equipped to make informed careers choices and understand the world of work.

We invite employers and industry bodies to join the Careers Alliance #futuretalent campaign to ensure we achieve a significant step-change in how we prepare young people for the world of work.

www.careersalliance.com
FAKING IT

JAYNE ROWLEY

Since the Higher Education Degree Datacheck (HEDD) was launched four years ago, an unprecedented amount of data on degree fraud has become available, Jayne Rowley, Business Services Director at Prospects shares some of the emerging trends and explains why it is vital that employers properly check candidate verifications.

HEDD was developed to tackle the growing problem of degree fraud by providing a secure online service that would make validating higher education qualifications quicker and easier. We have fulfilled more than 66,800 verification requests, of which 4.7% have been classified as ‘unverified’ – that’s more than 3,140 people submitting incorrect information to would-be employers. And that’s only those we know of.

Whether those candidates were deliberately out to deceive or simply made a mistake is harder to prove, although if the certificate they provided is fake or tampered with, it is indisputable. In an earlier survey we found 31% of graduates knew someone who had lied about their qualifications, which they put down to a competitive jobs market.

Degree fraud in practice
High profile cases make headlines. Subject embellishment was the issue for Yahoo chief Scott Thompson, who claimed a Bachelor’s degree in ‘computer science and accounting’ on his CV. He had only achieved the accounting degree and subsequently resigned.

Thompson had previously held an executive position at PayPal, and here lies another issue. Just a fifth of our checks are on those who graduated in the 1990s or earlier. Someone could build a career based on a 20 year-old lie, which is repeatedly overlooked as new employers assume academic checks were made previously.

The escalating number of degree mills is exacerbating the situation, with thousands of fake degree certificates in circulation.

In the second quarter of 2015 we added 12 more bogus institutions to HEDD giving a current total of 189 on the database, with every month bringing more to our attention.

Employer impact
While many businesses invest in sophisticated application tracking, assessment centres and psychometric testing, few check qualifications with the institution, so most degree fraud goes undetected. From a survey of 100 employers, a third took CVs at face value without requesting degree certificates. Of those who did, 76% assumed they were legitimate and 32% accepted copies.

We have unearthed some clever, and some not so clever, tricks to forge certificates, from falsified institution names – the University of ‘Wolverhampton’ (spot the absent ‘p’) and Manchester University (the ‘University of Manchester’ is genuine) – to cut and pasted grades or signatures, which are scanned and often countersigned by notaries attesting to have checked the original. Bear in mind that it is as easy to fake a notary stamp as it is to fake a signature or seal.

(Wolverhampton recently resurfaced as ‘Warnswick University’. It has the same stolen information from the genuine University of Wolverhampton website and a service to verify its fake certificates. A new header and a few new stock pictures can’t disguise it and they have missed one of the references to Wolverhampton on the site.)

Many of us want to believe that people are telling the truth, so we place our trust in references, applications and interviews. But some people are unscrupulous and looking to take advantage. If someone is lying about their qualifications we have to question their overall integrity as a potential colleague.

What is being done?
Awareness of the risks of fraud is increasing and employers are becoming more vigilant. In June 2014 HEDD processed 2,447 enquiries. For the same period this year (based on data from the same institutions and not those that joined in the intervening period) we handled 2,941 enquiries, a 20% increase.

Fraud affects employers, graduates and the reputation of UK higher education institutions. Recognition of the scale of the problem came in June this year when HEDD and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) launched a new service to proactively address issues concerning bogus institutions and the misuse of the word ‘university’ as well as to tackle the related area of degree fraud.

The new service aims to reduce the burgeoning number of unaccredited institutions by increasing prosecutions through investigation and awareness-raising.

Jo Johnson, Universities and Science Minister announcing the project at the Going Global 2015 Conference in London, said: ‘Such action is in the interests of all legitimate providers and genuine students because it will help protect the reputation of the UK as a provider of high-quality education.’

Bogus providers will be targeted by HEDD and perpetrators found to be masquerading online as genuine with degree-awarding powers will be added to the database of bogus institutions. HEDD will investigate who owns the websites and where they are hosted, liaise with Trading Standards and other enforcement bodies, including those overseas, to prosecute and force closure. A HEDD fraudline (0845 077 1968) has been set up for advice or to report dubious organisations.

A toolkit is being developed to support genuine UK HE providers who find themselves victims of copycat websites and an awareness campaign will provide clearer guidance on the surrounding issues.

www.hedd.ac.uk
The following article by Francis Green and Golo Henseke presents a new classification of graduate employment, based on those roles where ‘a substantial portion of the skills used are normally acquired in and around a tertiary education. In this article, we explain how we developed a modern classification of ‘graduate jobs’ that takes into account how jobs have changed, using evidence about the skills actually used in jobs.

‘A graduate job’ classifier for occupations is potentially useful for human resource researchers, careers advisers and practitioners. It can also be used, in conjunction with official labour market statistics, to illuminate how the graduate labour market is changing.

Below we take a look at how the graduate labour market has fared in the years since before the 2008-9 ‘Great Recession’.

Classifying graduate jobs
Our aim was to devise a classifier applied to 4-digit (‘unit group’) occupational codes, which could be utilised alongside any data where respondents’ jobs have been coded to this detail.

We define a ‘graduate job’ to be one where ‘a substantial portion of the skills used are normally acquired in the course of higher education, its accoutrements and its aftermath.’

Through this focus on skills used, our definition differs from most others that simply define graduate jobs as the ones that most graduates do, or have traditionally done. The exception is the study by Elias and Purcell (2013), where the same concept, based on the skills used, is deployed. They classified unit groups as graduate or non-graduate through a forensic examination of job titles, making expert judgements about the type and level of skills used.

Where we differ is in the use of statistical methods and survey data, rather than expert judgements, to derive the classifier. We used the Skills and Employment Survey series, which are nationally representative sample surveys, collected at intervals of 4-6 years, of employed individuals in Britain aged 20-60 years old (although the 2006 and 2012 surveys additionally sampled those aged 61-65).

The surveys sampled working people in England, Scotland and Wales, interviewing them in their own homes. We derived from the responses a ‘graduate generic skills index’, comprising indicators of the use of high-level literacy skills, high-level professional communication skills, high-level self-planning skills, supervisor responsibilities, use of specialist knowledge, and the requirement to develop new skills and knowledge.

We also used data on whether the job required high or advanced computer usage, and long prior training. These measures were then combined, using a statistical procedure (the linear probability model) with data on whether respondents reported that a degree was essential to do the job, and whether this was also true in similar jobs.

This produced a single average score, for each of 353 unit groups, that captured the intensity with which the job required graduate-level skills.

The final stage in the classification was to use a further statistical method (k-means clustering) to separate out the unit groups into two (more homogeneous) clusters: one with high scores, the other with low scores. The former we then defined as being ‘graduate jobs’.

What does the resulting classification – which we term SOC(HE)2010_GH – look like? As one might expect, all occupations in the major group ‘Professional’ are graduate jobs. Among ‘Managers, Directors and Senior Officials’, the large majority of occupations are graduate jobs, but there are a few exceptions, such as restaurant managers, and managers/directors in retail and wholesale.

Occupations in the ‘Associate Professional and Technical’ group would traditionally not have been counted as graduate jobs,
but it is here that the new classification really does its work: it tells us which of these are using high-level skills and classifies these as graduate jobs – examples are graphic designers and insurance underwriters.

Two further examples are legal associate professionals and human resources and industrial relations officers: these are not classified as graduate jobs in Elias and Purcell (2013) but our data suggest that they should be.

Others – for example, police officers (sergeants and below) - are non-graduate. Within both this major group and among Managers, there are also a few jobs which, in the late 1990s, had been non-graduate, but which appear to have been upgraded to become graduate jobs by 2012: examples are farm managers, and air traffic controllers.

There are also a few rare occupations where we did not have enough observations to be sure where they should be classified.

For our full list of graduate occupations, readers can consult Green and Henseke (2014). Overall, the classifier indicates that some 40% of jobs in Britain were graduate jobs in the period 2006-2012.

This proportion is somewhat greater than the 35% that are found with the classifier of Elias and Purcell (2013) for 2011/12, mainly because a few more unit groups among ‘Associate Professional and Technical’ occupations have been classified as graduate.

Of course, any classification is only as good as its predictive and analytical power.

We have tested the ability of SOC(HE)2010_GH to predict wages, opportunity to use one’s own skills, and job satisfaction. SOC(HE)2010_GH turns out to be as good a predictor as, and in most cases better, than all other classifiers.

**Britain’s graduate job market since 2007**

One can use SOC(HE)2010_GH to study the graduate labour market in recent years. Until the middle of the 2000s, labour market analysts had been relatively sanguine about the prospects for graduates.

Based on past outcomes, at least, the premium for going to university -- the better employment prospects and higher pay -- seemed to be holding up on average, as it had done for at least two decades (Machin and McNally 2007).

The main cloud on the horizon lay in the finding that there was an increasing ‘overqualification’ among graduates, with more working in low-skilled jobs and receiving a greater penalty (relative to their peers in graduate jobs) (Green and Zhu 2010).

This cloud also loomed large in the writings of some of those looking to the future, where a world of deskilled jobs is said to await the average graduate, with the spoils of rich and fulfilling graduate work confined to a highly talented few (Brown et al. 2011).

Nevertheless, until the late 2000s the average premium for graduates remained steady and high, even if the risks of overqualification were increasing.

With the onset of the financial crisis, it must have seemed very bad luck to be graduating in 2008 at the end of a long tertiary education.

Students who had finished a year earlier would have had a chance to get established in the labour market, but many 2008 graduates feared the well-known ‘scarring’ effects that can damage prospects for the long term (Gregg and Tominey 2005).

As economic stagnation continued, subsequent cohorts would have to contend also with a large rise in university fees in 2012. Young graduates suffered increased unemployment alongside other young adults (UKCES 2015).

Under these circumstances, we might expect to find that more and more graduates were taking refuge in non-graduate jobs, thankful at least for some employment but potentially dissatisfied by their inability to utilise their skills fully.

Set against this pessimistic outlook, however, the number of professional and managerial jobs in Britain has risen in recent years (UKCES 2015), a continuation of its long-term rising trend. Perhaps this trend would have been enough to counter-balance the negative concerns engendered in the recession?

Figure 1 (on the next page) shows what happened between 2007 and 2014 with both the number of graduate jobs and the graduate labour supply. Between 2007 (1st quarter) and 2014 (1st quarter), the number of graduate jobs (held by those aged 20 to 65) grew by 13.6% from initially 10.01 million to 11.59 million jobs. The rise corresponds to a slightly larger increase of 17.6% in the total hours worked in graduate jobs.4

Over the same period, however, the number of graduates in the labour force surged from 9.55 million to 12.58 million, an increase by 31.5%. This rapid rise comes, in large part, from the fact that newly qualified graduates each year far outnumber those retiring.

Thus, despite the rise in the number of jobs over this seven-year period, the number of available graduates has risen faster. Before 2009 (2nd quarter), in aggregate there were fewer graduates than graduate jobs; after that time the balance moved increasingly towards there being an apparent excess. On the face of it, then, the news for the aggregate graduate labour market is less than promising.
A look behind these aggregates, however, reveals a more encouraging picture for graduates, at least for now. In Figure 2 is plotted the proportion of graduates who are employed in non-graduate jobs (that is, ‘overqualified’ for their jobs).

In this diagram ‘recent graduates’ have received their degree less than three years ago and are not older than 34 years, while ‘experienced graduates’ are defined as having graduated more than three years previously or aged over 35.

We see that, unsurprisingly, a lower proportion of experienced graduates are overqualified. Most tellingly, however, there appears to be no great trend over the period, despite the interjection of the ‘Great Recession’.

Even with the aggregate surge in graduates, in 2014 some 71% of experienced graduates were working in graduate jobs, the same proportion as in 2007.

The reconciliation of these contrasting trends is found when one considers what jobs non-graduates have been doing. It is quite common for non-graduates – especially older ones – to be employed in graduate jobs, having acquired skills through work experience and other channels.

But the practice has been becoming less common; thus, over the same 7-year period that graduate overqualification has remained steady, there has been a substantial decrease in the proportion of non-graduates doing graduate jobs from 34.7% to 26.8%.

Thus some of the graduate jobs that graduates have been taking up are those that have been previously done by non-graduates.

Although this means that the labour market has held its own for graduates, the picture for non-graduates has deteriorated.

Conclusion
Many analysts refer to the notion of a ‘graduate job’, but the traditional notion no longer serves its purpose in an era of mass higher education. We have derived an indicator – termed SOC(HE)2010_GH – based on skills use data and using statistical methods, which is adaptable to changing times and applicable to any set of data where occupations are coded in detail.

Applying it to the period since 2007 in which the number of graduates has been rising rapidly at 4% a year, we find that in 2014 still more than 70% of experienced employed graduates were working in graduate jobs.

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1 In this paper, by ‘graduate level’ we mean ‘NVQ level 4 or above’. This therefore includes qualifications from certain BTECs, HNDs and undergraduate diplomas, through undergraduate first degrees (much the largest group) to doctorates. For a list of qualifications groups, see Office for National Statistics (2013).
2 For a more detailed account of our classification methods, see Green and Henseke (2014).
3 The name of the classifier will alter next time the occupational coding system is upgraded, something which happens roughly every decade. The classifier would also change as and if any jobs are up graded over time, which can be detected through successive skills surveys.
4 This estimate assumes that the graduate job classification remains unchanged over this seven-year period. But over a longer period, some jobs get upgraded, others downgraded. Our estimates for a longer period suggest that a small degree of net upgrading would have taken place; hence the real growth of graduate jobs is probably slightly higher than our estimate.
Note: The break in the series occurs at the point when the occupational classification system was changed.

References


THE INTERNSHIP DEBATE

HANNAH GOLDFYN-SIMPKINS

‘Intern employment culture in the UK is characterised by a ‘laissez faire’ attitude. While employers still think it is reasonable to ‘hire’ unpaid interns, while we continue to see unpaid internships advertised online and while the Observer reports on HMRC dragging its feet on national minimum wage enforcement for interns (Observer, 2015), the unpaid Internship debate is set to continue.’ Reporting on a subject matter she is passionate about, both on a personal and professional level, Prospects’ very own Hannah Goldwyn-Simpkins stakes out a positive egalitarian argument as the paradigm to which we must all aspire.

Proof that unpaid internships are a barrier to social mobility has resulted in calls for all interns to be paid, but there is a residual anxiety in some quarters that enforcing a salary by law would restrict the number of internship opportunities. With recent research showing that many smaller companies are not hiring interns (Interns Project, Intern Aware/Yougov, 2015) it is clear that there is still work to be done.

The unpaid internship debate

The first time I delivered a workshop on internships to a group of mainly SME employers, a member of the audience loudly disagreed with my statement that employers must pay their interns. We played out the well-rehearsed debate across the lecture theatre: he claimed he couldn’t afford to pay and students or graduates would want experience without remuneration. I argued that unpaid internships are largely illegal and unfair on interns who cannot afford to work for free.

In my job I engage in the unpaid internship debate daily. I talk to students doing unpaid work who had not realised that they should be paid, or an employer trying to advertise unpaid work who soon realises that restricting access is bad for their business. I am glad to say that the absolute argument in favour of unpaid interns that I encountered in my first workshop represents a small fraction of my experience working in this sector.

A cultural shift

The general acceptance in later workshops in favour of paying interns is a testament to the shift in internship culture over the last three years. A cultural shift such as this one can be hard to measure. Therefore, let us turn to the case study of the Graduate Talent Pool to analyse this further through recruitment processes. Graduate Talent Pool is a jobs listing website specifically for graduate internships. It was set up in 2009 by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills in partnership with Prospects as an emergency measure to tackle graduate unemployment in the wake of the financial crash.

In 2010, 50% of the internships advertised on the website were unpaid or expenses-only positions. But as a result of media pressure and the campaigning efforts of Intern Aware, in 2011 Graduate Talent Pool began to assess the quality and legality of the positions advertised. With the introduction of quality assurance policies the number of unpaid internships plummeted to just 3%. This led the way, with jobs boards Monster and Total Jobs following suit. Better still, in 2015 the decision was made to advertise paid internships only.

The debate is no longer a debate

It is a strange contradiction – the unpaid internship debate should no longer be a debate. The facts are simple and widely known: unpaid internships are unfair for young people, bad for business and dire for social mobility (Milburn, 2012). Indeed, the Sutton Trust calculated that an unpaid internship in London costs the intern £926 per month (Sutton Trust, 2014). As a result, sectors in which entry-level jobs have been replaced by unpaid internships (media, law and politics to name a few) are restricted to only those students and graduates who can afford to pay this fee for work experience.

Although a gloomy story to tell, the fact we have reached this clarity of argument is something to be proud of. We have seen a shift in culture as interns challenge their employers over pay (Hudson v TPG Web Publishing Ltd, 2011) and politicians criticise the practice rather than taking on unpaid interns (Independent, 2015). This is not to say that the task is complete. Graduate Talent Pool still turns away 15% of the adverts submitted to the site and it is estimated that there are 20,000 unpaid interns working in the UK (Sutton Trust, 2014).

Internship culture in the UK is still in flux and it is essential for careers professionals, advertising websites and campaigning groups to educate UK plc that as well as the ethical question, unpaid internships are bad for business as they prevent employers finding the best person for the job. We have come a long way in the last three years but the next three years must see more than a continuation of challenging bad practice. The next step will be to encourage the growth of internship opportunities, and that growth must come from SMEs.

Large companies are making use of the internship model

Having worked with a range of employers, from the Civil Service to a one-person start-up, it has become clear that employers of all sizes can use the internship model as a way of hiring graduates. However, certain organisations do it more effectively than others. While larger companies have been more successful in embracing the internship model, small and medium-sized enterprises are yet to realise the potential that internships offer for their recruitment needs.

The true extent of this has only recently been revealed: 83% of smaller businesses have never hired an intern (Interns Project, Intern Aware/Yougov, 2015). The recent Interns Project has shown that larger companies are far more likely to offer internships than smaller companies, with 52% of large companies having hired an intern, compared to 44% of medium sized companies and 16% of small companies.
As larger companies are more likely to offer internships, such opportunities are also more likely to lead to long-term recruitment. The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey 2012/13 reveals that graduates working in larger companies were more likely to have first found out about their job as a result of ‘already having worked there (including on an internship)’ than graduates working in smaller companies.* The proportion of graduates who first found out about their job as a result of already working at the organisation were: 18.3% working in large companies (250 employees or more), 13.7% of graduates working in medium sized companies (50 to 249 staff) and 15% in small companies (1 to 49 staff).

**SMEs can do more to recruit interns**

Here is the business case – interns are a low cost and low risk way for companies to attract and retain graduates. Just as large corporations use internships as a way to bring in potential employees and test the fit, the SME recruiters we work with say they hire interns for the very same reason. Yet, the clear disparity between larger and smaller companies demonstrates the potential for SMEs to capitalise on this recruitment method more effectively in the future.

Interestingly, graduates working in small companies were most likely to have first found out about their job through ‘personal contacts’ (23.3%). Therefore, using internships as a recruitment method would allow SMEs to employ better candidates for the job, judged on their ability and fit with the company, rather than on their personal networks. It is also worth mentioning, from a job seeker perspective, that an internship in an SME often offers greater scope for progression and the opportunity to develop a wider range of skills. So, while smaller companies may not currently be offering internship opportunities, this is not to say that they do not want to.

**Complex laws and bad press are not encouraging internship growth**

Currently, internships represent a ‘grey area’ in UK employment law. Internships are covered by the National Minimum Wage Act when the intern is undertaking the role of a ‘worker’. This requires the employer to know what constitutes a ‘worker’ and things get even greyer around student placements and charity sector volunteers. The complicated laws represent an attempt to widen opportunities. However, the argument that there would be a decrease of opportunities if internships were to be more tightly legislated fails flat in light of the 83% of small businesses that do not offer internships under the current system.

For a small organisation without an HR team, it is little wonder that complex laws and a poor media image may put smaller companies off hiring interns. Indeed, the public image of internships has been overwhelmingly negative, with Owen Jones stating that ‘Unpaid internships rig the system’ (Guardian, 2014) and the Observer recently reporting ‘Interns “forced to wait months” for minimum wage inquiries’. (Observer, 2015). Without taking away from this important campaign, it is worth observing that such a dominant narrative neglects the fact that internships have a positive effect too.

**What next?**

As long as intern employment culture continues to be unregulated in UK law, the campaign against unpaid internships will continue to present this employment culture as restrictive and unfair. In practice, those of us working in HE, careers advice and recruitment can strive to encourage internship growth by offering SMEs support to attract students, to sell their opportunities and encourage a positive image. In order to move beyond the unpaid internship debate we must reframe the discussion and begin to celebrate the fact that a quality internship is a vehicle for social mobility.

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*From a sample of UK domiciled, first degree graduates working in the UK six months after graduation.

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HEA Embedding Employability Strategic Enhancement Programme 2014/15
There are currently 37 higher education providers across the UK participating in this programme. Details of all the 37 projects can be accessed at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/project/10885

New research: Transnational Education and Employability Development published by HEA June 2015
Research suggests that employability development in the curriculum is less widespread in transnational education (TNE) programmes than in UK domestic programmes. Transnational education and employability development by the Careers Research and Advisory Centre and led by Dr Robin Mellors-Bourne shows that the development of employability in the curriculum is most closely aligned with UK provision at international branch campuses but rarely visible in partnership arrangements, although the position is likely to be better where the partner is an established university. Read the report https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/11038

The Career Adapt-ability Pilots Project Published by HEA June 2015
Graduates are likely to experience a series of transitions and will need to adapt to different circumstances and work contexts. Savickas (1997) identified adapt-ability as the readiness and resources to cope with transitions and traumas, and a recently developed inventory uses a four-factor structure to measure this concept. This report details a project that aimed to integrate the concept and its accompanying measurement instrument (The Career Adapt-abilities Inventory) into the career development and employability activities of six HE institutions. The six pilot studies explored the use of the inventory in relation to work placements; mature learners; targeting interventions towards particular student groups; exploring its potential as a vehicle for institutional change; and as a ‘standalone’ online resource. You can access the report here https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/11115

HEAR: HEA partners with The Student Room (June 2015)
The Higher Education Academy (HEA) and The Student Room have launched a campaign to help students at participating higher education institutions to better understand and engage with their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). The HEA has also created a dynamic video designed to help students think about their own activities so they don’t overlook their extra-curricula achievements. The video is available on the HEA and The Student Room website. Currently, 90 universities and colleges are implementing or planning to implement the HEAR. This includes 32 institutions who have already issued 427,000 HEARs to students – and this number is increasing every year

Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum (May 2015)
The HEA’s Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum project recently published five discipline specific practitioner guides for embedding equality and diversity into learning and teaching experiences and environments.

HEA/HEPI 2015 Student Academic Experience Survey (June 2015)
When asked to rank the importance of three characteristics of the people who teach them, a higher proportion of students rated staff having been trained in how to teach (39%) and having professional or industry expertise (44%) as the number one priority, than staff being active researchers (17%). Access the survey here https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/11156