

Stop and Measure the Roses

How university careers
services measure their
effectiveness and success

Aminder K Nijjar
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Further Dialogue

To discuss any aspect of this research or to contribute to the next research phase contact the researcher/author

Aminder K Nijjar:

Blog: <http://aminder.wordpress.com/>

Email: aminder.nijjar@yahoo.com

This report is available at:

www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/research_reports.htm

<http://aminder.wordpress.com/>

Foreword

The pressures towards accountability in terms of impact measurement are now pervasive in all publicly-funded institutions and all professions. They can be seen as a threat or as an opportunity; as threatening professional standards and treasured practices; or as providing an opportunity for defining clearer goals and demonstrating effectiveness.

In the case of higher education careers services, these pressures are being exerted at a time when the services' traditional concerns are being linked to strong institutional agendas. Most universities are now developing institutional strategies for employability and for related agendas such as enterprise, employer engagement and personal development planning. These are linked to external pressures on the institution as a whole, in terms of its own accountability. In the development and implementation of these strategies, careers services have the opportunity to play a much more central role in their institution than previously. But only if they grasp the accountability nettle.

Aminder Nijjar's report is an invaluable resource for careers service staff, and for those with overall responsibility for employability within institutions, in meeting these challenges. It provides a review of the current state of practice in a sizeable number of services, and sets a baseline for further development work. It thereby increases the chances that the threats will be managed, and the opportunities seized.

Tony Watts
National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling
Cambridge

How do I know my service is doing a good job? And what constitutes a 'good job'? These are questions I have pondered a lot over the last few years in the context of my university's 'better management' project. Adopting the best principles of reductionism (the phrase of the moment in my university is: keep it simple) and a client-centred approach, I have concluded that there are really only three core considerations:

For students: did the careers service help me get a job?

For employers: did the service help me recruit good students?

For my university: did the service 'improve' graduate destinations?

Of course not everything can be reduced to metrics and I know there is much more to my service than these three things. Nonetheless, if I want my service to thrive and prosper, I believe future business planning will need to demonstrate impact in one or more of these three areas.

With this in mind, I welcomed the opportunity to take part in Aminder's research project, which will help us all to develop a richer picture of management practices in HE careers services. I look forward to phase two of her research, which I anticipate will help me in the development of my service's performance management framework.

Dr Robert Partridge
Director Careers Service, York University

Executive Summary

This report investigates the ways in which some UK university careers services measure their effectiveness and success. It presents findings from interviews with twenty university careers service directors, three university senior managers who include the careers service within their portfolio, two representatives of UK graduate recruitment and training organisations and one careers service director from a USA university.

The purpose of the research is to encourage discussion and analysis of the need for, and use of, key performance indicators in UK university careers services.

Following are the headline findings:

1. Participant careers service directors and senior managers clearly view performance measurement and management as a topic of high importance and one that is attracting considerable attention within universities.
2. The Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) results are the most prominently cited measure currently used by senior managers. There is however, extensive debate around this issue, from questioning its suitability as a central measure of careers service effectiveness, through to examples of how it has helped to enhance the role and reputation of the careers service.
3. Other widely used measures are frequently based on traditional careers service practices. The most frequently cited are measures of activity volumes and evaluations of these activities. Whilst useful for demonstrating levels of activity and satisfaction, they do not often show the impact of these interventions. This is something many participants would like to see developed, but for which they perceive a range of challenges.
4. Newer measures are also being developed focusing on the current agenda (e.g. enterprise, employability) and other, sometimes informal measures pertaining to issues that are becoming increasingly important (e.g. in service profile and public relations).
5. The range of concerns felt by participants include: the perceived difficulty in expressing or clarifying the value and effectiveness of careers guidance and other careers related interventions.
6. Many of the participant university careers service directors have ideas and plans for how they intend or would like to address these issues. Some have been able to make progress in implementing their ideas: these often involved further research (e.g. international exemplars, good practice in demonstrating impact), information (e.g. in relation to more sophisticated management information and student data), training (e.g. specialist training for service directors) and support (e.g. facilitated networking and benchmarking groups).
7. UK graduate recruitment and training organisations suggested that a more business-oriented approach by careers services would be highly appreciated by recruiters, as would an understanding and supporting of employer needs.
8. The US university careers service included in this research has a strong sense of mission and purpose, which seems to underpin what they do and relates to their sense of greater ease with performance measurement.
9. Participants acknowledged the extensive contributions the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) has made, particularly around the development of practice. Many are looking for the organisation to take a more active role in relation to issues of leadership and strategy, providing greater support for careers service directors and other service managers.
10. Performance management and measurement is evidently an area where further work is urgently needed. There is an awareness of relevant issues, a desire to make progress and a sense of the direction this should take.
11. The researcher recognises the need for further research into this area as demonstrated by the findings, and will therefore be working with a range of institutions to develop performance management tools, techniques and frameworks for higher education careers services in 2009.

1. Rationale for Research

Firstly, why is the title 'Stop and Measure the Roses'?

For this report, I have used the word 'Roses' because my experience of careers services is that they do lots of good work and can make a real difference but they may not always recognise this themselves or communicate it as effectively as they could do to others (particularly those external to the careers service/guidance community) ; 'Stop' because I believe it is important for the profession to make time to reflect on itself and its practices; and 'Measure' because I think careers services could potentially benefit from further analysis of the ways in which they articulate to others exactly how they add value to their institutions.

Before undertaking this research, my belief was that in order for careers services to flourish in the future, it is in their interests - and that of their students and institutions - for them to be comfortable with, and confident about, accountability and demonstrating value as everyday activities: as higher education institutions become more

competitive, university senior managers (e.g. vice-chancellors) seek evidence of a good return for their investment. This should mean that careers services are regarded as contributing to the current and future success of the universities by whom they are resourced. Having now undertaken the research I still hold this view.

The topic of key performance indicators can be challenging, even controversial, sometimes provoking forceful responses; at times questioning some of the assumptions and values that underpin the careers profession. Consequently, a number of participants have expressed strong views, which I have sought to capture. This report however, is in no way a personal criticism of any individual, careers service, management structure, university, or other organisation; it is intended to help facilitate dialogue about what I regard as a crucial issue that careers services have faced for many years, but is now becoming increasingly urgent.

2. Project Aims

This research has four aims:

1. To collect information about the key performance indicators currently used by university careers services.
2. To gain an insight into the expectations of senior managers responsible for these careers services.
3. To discuss the 'need' for university careers services to have measurable outcomes, if indeed this 'need' does exist.
4. To consider how university careers services conceptualise their effectiveness and success.

3. Introduction

This is a qualitative investigation seeking to identify issues relating to UK university careers services measuring their effectiveness. It includes data contributed by twenty directors of careers services, three senior managers who include the careers service within their portfolio, two UK graduate recruitment and training organisation representatives, and the director of a United States (US) university careers service.

As detailed in the report, this research includes a diverse range of universities by location, type and size.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has been pursuing better regulation in higher education for a number of years and is now holding “higher education institutions to account for the funds we distribute to them [higher education institutions], through a new accountability process linked to our assessment of institutional risk... The general direction of travel in higher

education is toward better and more cost effective regulation”. (HEFCE 2007, p.2)

With this business model increasingly driving university management, vice-chancellors are expecting a rate of return from all parts of their university within a defined time frame, which includes the careers service. As a result, careers services are under increasing pressure to be able to demonstrate their value and contribution in a more robust way than previously.

The imperative for services to show how they are meeting the current policy agenda – at both governmental and institutional levels – is clearly gaining more attention from many drivers. This research explores responses made to the challenge by a range of careers services, their plans for the future and what they believe would help them to demonstrate their impact more effectively.

4. Context

As higher education (HE) itself continues to undergo significant changes, university careers services have attracted considerable attention and certainly more than they have been previously accustomed to. The proverbial 'Cinderella service' is now being asked and expected to make a significant contribution to new institutional drivers. This section covers key contexts against which this research is set: government-driven agendas for HE, moves towards service modernisation and more business-oriented models of delivery, evolving student expectations, and the seemingly inherent difficulties in demonstrating the value of careers guidance.

As noted most recently by Watts and Butcher (2008), current careers service developments have been informed by four externally-driven agendas: employability, enterprise, personal development planning (PDP) and employer engagement. These have led to new, additional roles for careers services, sometimes taking a more prominent or even leading role in these initiatives. As institutions develop their own responses to these challenges, careers services are becoming more diverse in their structures, range of functions and approaches.

Similarly, government has sought to drive modernisation programmes through many publicly funded services and promote more business-oriented models of management and service delivery. Often this involves tensions between established service traditions and the demands of new agendas. Within university careers services this can, for example, be between the impartial guidance traditions of many careers staff's professional training versus the new prominence of measures such as Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) performance. This reflects the debate between 'business modernisers' and 'professional guardians' previously identified by Watts (2005). Other organisations and professions e.g. Connexions (DfES 2003) have been encouraged to adopt evidence-based practice as a means to facilitate the adoption of new working methods and priorities.

Students' expectations of HE and of careers services are also changing. With the introduction of tuition fees,

students and their families are becoming more discerning (CHERI 2008) like "consumers" seeking "value for money" (Foskett, Roberts and Maringe 2006) from their investment. Representative bodies are also commenting on what students might like to receive from careers services (National Student Forum 2008).

A further key factor relates to the ongoing difficulty in measuring and demonstrating the value of careers interventions. Whilst career guidance seems generally accepted as a "worthy good" (Watts 1999, p.12) in itself, existing systems for measuring its actual impact are generally seen to be less than adequate (OECD 2004). Evaluation and measures of satisfaction may be established higher education careers service practices, but measures of impact or quantifiable outcomes are less common. Work has been done in other sectors of the wider careers profession: for example, adult guidance services (Brett, Costello, Gration, Hughes and O'Brien 2008), Connexions (e.g. their 'Key Steps' models), and Education Business Partnerships with their outcomes model of evaluation. University careers services seem not to have any such widely shared and accepted approaches yet.

Moving beyond measures of specific activities, Hughes and Gration (2006) developed a conceptual framework (based on the work of den Boer, Mittendorf, Scheerens and Sjenitzer 2005) which could be used by the profession to develop a set of careers service key performance indicators (KPIs). At this stage, much work still needs to be done to develop a new performance measurement and management framework reflecting the current HE careers service agenda.

This research is set against a backdrop of new high-profile agendas with more demanding expectations of careers services. Simultaneously, the university careers profession is finding that some of its long-held underlying assumptions are being questioned. This seems to be creating additional tensions which are yet to be resolved, and are further compounding the difficulty of tackling these new agendas.

5. Methodology

Given the complexity of the subject matter and the aim of gathering rich data, a qualitative, semi-structured interview methodology was used. Whilst effective in capturing relevant issues and exploring the topic in greater depth, time and resource constraints affected the sampling strategy.

In total, twenty UK higher education institutions took part in the research. These were selected by:

- Country: England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
- Regional location (north and south, by county);
- University size by full-time undergraduate student numbers;
- University type: seven were 1994 group universities, seven were new universities, and six were Russell group universities.

The participants consisted of:

- Twenty directors of careers service;
- Three senior managers to whom the careers service directors report to;
- Two UK graduate recruitment and training organisation representatives;
- One director of an American university careers service.

Initially, an email (Appendix 1) was sent to selected careers service directors. Those who were interested in participating were sent a follow-up email with the participants' brief (Appendix 2) and an interview was arranged. Six additional directors expressed interest in the research but felt unable to contribute as they said that they are currently grappling with this issue of performance measurement.

5.1. Interview Format

A semi-structured one-to-one interview format of approximately one hour was used in order to allow a comparison between responses, as well as a level of freedom in which respondents could give their wider opinions. The interviews were conducted between May and November 2008 and each interview was recorded and then transcribed. Interview questions were framed to enable exploration of common topics; the researcher

asked further follow-up questions to enable participants to comment more fully on matters of particular interest.

5.2. Question Framework

1. What key performance indicators does your senior management within your institution use to measure your careers service's effectiveness?
 - What are your views on these indicators?
2. What, if any key performance indicators does your careers service use to measure its effectiveness?
 - What was your decision to use these particular indicators based on?
3. What, if any are the implications for your careers service in relation to the outcomes of these measurements? (e.g. increase/reduction in budget)
4. How do you personally define effectiveness and success for the careers service?
 - How does this relate to how effectiveness and success is defined within your institution?
 - How does this relate to how individuals and organisations outside of the institution consider your careers service's effectiveness?
5. What are your main challenges in measuring and articulating your careers service's effectiveness?
6. What support or information would help you to measure your careers service's effectiveness? (E.g. from within the institution from senior management and externally from HECSU, AGCAS).
7. Do you have anything else you would like to add in relation to how careers services conceptualise and articulate their effectiveness and success?

5.3. Coding of Data

A grounded theory-based approach was adopted (Glaser and Strauss 1967). After reading and reviewing the data (transcripts), the researcher identified recurring categories and allocated a code for each. These categories were refined to reflect the analysis (e.g. additional topics that were discovered during the analysis and grouping categories together where there was a high degree of overlap). A random sampling of the coding was undertaken by an independent person. The frequency of occurrence of each category was noted and the results

tabulated. Data and comments were then drawn from the transcripts and used to build the findings in the report.

5.4. Report Structure

The findings are presented in three sections:

- 6. Key Performance Indicators Currently Used
- 7. Issues and Challenges
- 8. Ways Forward

Each section is broken down into a series of themes. Each of these begins with the key factors identified by participants, followed by particular examples of practice or specific issues and finally summary comments.

5.5. Terms and Nomenclature

Due to the sensitivity of the research and researcher's agreement with participants, the data is presented anonymously. Where differentiated, participants are referred to as 'directors' (for directors of careers services) or 'senior managers' (for senior managers who include the careers service within their portfolio). Initially the researcher had anticipated breaking down all the results by university type. Analysis of the data however, showed there was a great degree of commonality in terms of the issues being addressed and this breakdown was no longer seen as useful. Where reference is made to types of institution in the findings, it is done so only when particular comments seemed to come primarily from specific university types or was related to the university type.

During the research, participants refer to inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes to describe what their service does (e.g. inputs, processes) and the impact this has (e.g. outputs, outcomes). However, they sometimes do so with a slight difference in meaning or emphasis. This is also reflected in the literature, where a range of definitions exist. Often there is considerable commonality, but differences remain.

Hughes and Gration (2006, p.4), provide examples of inputs, processes and outputs:

- Inputs include numbers and characteristics of service users, number and types of staff to deliver the service

and resources (e.g. time, finance).

- Processes include the content of the services provided and the quality assurance of the management and delivery of these services.
 - Outputs include user satisfaction levels, dimensions of user personal development and percentages of users progressing into employment, education and training.
- Hughes and Gration (2006) do not identify outcomes as a specific element of their framework. DfES (2003a) include examples of inputs and processes, albeit in a more extensive form. Rather than outputs though, they identify outcomes as the third part of their framework. They describe these as including performance measures and success criteria, reporting arrangements and accountability arrangements. This difference between outputs and outcomes is a key theme in the research and an issue of concern to participants.

5.6. Writing Style and Use of Tenses

Much of this report is written in the present tense, with certain exceptions (e.g. when reporting on what participants said during the interviews, when referring to actions that have already been taken) and makes extensive use of direct quotes from participants. There are two main reasons for this approach:

Firstly, this is a subject of great personal interest to the researcher, as described in the research rationale. This report is the first stage in developing a set of tools, measures and frameworks to help enable HE careers services to demonstrate their effectiveness. This report informs the researcher's pre-understanding (Gummesson 2000) and is part of the ground-laying, pilot work (Coghlan and Brannick 2005) which will support the next stage, working collaboratively on an action research (Reason and Bradbury 2005) project with a number of institutions during 2009. As noted in recent literature (e.g. Burgess 2006, Fisher and Phelps 2006, Davis 2007), such work can be of considerable significance to developing practice in a range of professions (e.g. education, healthcare management, Coghlan and Brannick 2005) but does not always fit easily with more conventional approaches to writing.

6. Key Performance Indicators Currently Used

This section considers key performance indicators (KPIs) currently in use by participant careers services. While the coding generated a number of themes, these were grouped into four broad categories reflecting their underlying emphasis:

- 6.1 DLHE and League Tables
- 6.2 Activity Volumes
- 6.3 Satisfaction Levels
- 6.4 Other Performance Indicators

In addition, section 6 also considers another two factors emerging from interviews with participants:

- 6.5 Individual Performance
- 6.6 Process of Setting Performance Indicators

Services are clearly grappling with the issues surrounding KPIs: many have a range of measures in place but are often considering their value in the changing HE environment. The most commonly mentioned measure was the DLHE, which is therefore discussed in its own section. A wide range of other measures (e.g. in relation to activity volumes, or satisfaction levels) were also cited: they are classified and presented in the ensuing sections.

6.1. DLHE and League Tables

DLHE was unquestionably the most frequently and prominently cited indicator. There is considerable debate about how it is used in general and its relationship to careers services specifically. A range of approaches were described by participants and some approaches are considered more appropriate than others. Many participants raised a variety of issues, from questioning its validity, or even whether it is any kind of key performance indicator (KPI) at all, through to examples of how emphasis on DLHE performance has significantly raised the profile and strengthened the role of the careers service.

Across all of the universities, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) employment KPI (DLHE) - which feeds into the league tables and therefore a university's positioning - is having a major impact on the prominence of the employability of students in universities and the careers service's role in this. Overall, there is a sense that performance on DLHE is a university wide responsibility; however, the level of ownership across the university

varies considerably and the careers service has been drawn into the centre of focus.

There are mixed feelings about DLHE being used as a student employability KPI. Several careers service directors sought and continue to ensure that the careers service is distanced from, or is seen as having very little responsibility for the results, because of the multitude of factors affecting the results that are outside of the careers service's control. A director from a new university commented how they *"don't want to be blamed if they [DLHE results] go down"* and therefore avoids taking too much praise when the DLHE results are good. A director from a Russell group university stated: *"...It's one of the few things that I'm held directly responsible for collecting and reporting in the university..."*

A director of another new university referred to how DLHE has given their careers service a lot of credibility and leverage, and the director of a 1994 institution referred to how they would only be happy to use DLHE as a measure if careers education is embedded in the curriculum and all other causal factors (e.g. academic grades, economic trends) are also considered.

The majority of participants (directors and senior managers) do not regard DLHE results alone as a measure of the effectiveness of their careers service, as they appreciate that the DLHE results are affected by a wider range of factors than just the activities undertaken by the careers service; with the students' teaching departments they think arguably having a bigger influence. However, in eighteen of the twenty universities, the careers service is regarded as responsible for the collection, recording and presentation of the DLHE results; for making informed recommendations to the university; and for undertaking activities that improve the results as much as possible.

In all cases where the careers service director is leading the debate on DLHE results and forwarding suggestions and implementing actions within their university, the perception of the careers service is reported as having improved. In addition, within some services it was reported that *"...some of the activities careers service staff engage in are affected by their awareness of the importance of DLHE in a manner that was not the case*

five or ten years ago...” Examples of this include a concerted effort amongst careers staff to develop relationships with ‘The top 100’ graduate recruiters, and to coach students for careers fairs. This is largely due to the increasing reference within the university and nationally to league tables.

Some directors are using the DLHE as means of encouraging implementation of career development learning within academic departments. A few directors are analysing the DLHE results by academic schools and then drawing up partnership agreements with each/certain school(s). How well a school is doing (in terms of DLHE results) is linked to how careers service resources and initiatives will be allocated in the coming year, as demonstrated by one director’s comments: *“We try to put remedial action in to support... where a school may not be doing so well”*. This has been well received by the institutions involved.

DLHE, the National Student Survey, league table results and similar kinds of statistical indicators are viewed by participants as poor KPIs of the careers service because they reveal only part of a bigger picture and the context in which the indicators are viewed can determine how they are interpreted. There is uncertainty amongst participants about how much an employability indicator or league table in a newspaper actually reveals about the effectiveness of a careers service within a particular institution; the careers service is only one (in some cases small) part of the institution and it does not necessarily reach everybody.

There is a feeling amongst some directors that taking the DLHE as the measurement of employability is oversimplifying the complex career decision-making process in students. Other reasons given for DLHE being an inadequate measure include graduates taking time immediately after graduation to navigate the graduate labour market, taking any job after graduation in order to pay off debts, and taking a gap year after graduation. However, the DLHE and league table positions of the institution are the most frequently cited senior management imposed measure because they are measurable and used across the HE sector.

While undoubtedly controversial, emphasis on DLHE is bringing more attention to participant careers services. Regardless of perceived flaws, the measure seems likely to remain a key focus of attention. Participants were able to

identify positive benefits of this emphasis and examples cited seem to reinforce the benefits of the careers service pro-actively engaging with the DLHE in ways that go beyond collection and presentation.

While DLHE was the most widely cited indicator, careers services use a variety of other indicators: many of these have an established history within careers service practice and are often measures of either activity volume or evaluation and feedback focusing on satisfaction levels. These form sections 6.2 and 6.3 and include many measures that are in widespread use. A number of other measures are used less widely, some being newer developments in response to recent shifts in careers service roles and these are presented in section 6.4.

6.2. Activity Volumes

Measures of activity volumes are some of the most frequently quoted methods used to measure careers service effectiveness. These are presented on the next page, categorised by frequency of reference. Those in the high frequency category tend to be well-established measures relating to what might have been historically considered ‘core’ careers service functions. Those in the medium and especially the low frequency category tend to relate to newer careers service activities and to date only seem to have been adopted by a limited number of participant services (with one exception).

Some directors feel that these methods of measurement are not necessarily measures of effectiveness or success but perhaps more measures of *“busyness”*; at the same time some stated it would be fair to conclude that if numbers are high in these areas, then the activities are regarded as helpful and useful, even though this inference may be *“unscientific”*. A few directors referred to how some of their activities give their institution competitive advantage, for example high profile employability initiatives and engagement with major graduate recruiters.

Activity volumes in general continue to be widely used as performance indicators, and new activities are also being measured using the same methodology (measuring by activity volumes). Issues remain over whether they truly demonstrate effectiveness. They are however, likely to form a part of any wider performance framework, given the desire to *“see the numbers”* described by some directors as prevalent amongst university senior management.

Table 1: Measures of Activity Volumes cited by Participant Services

| <p>Frequency</p> | <p>Activity type (identified by participants and listed alphabetically)</p> |
|---|--|
| <p>High (cited by 11 or more services)</p> | <p>Career development programmes in academic schools (especially accredited modules)</p> <p>Careers fairs</p> <p>Employer presentations</p> <p>New employer contacts</p> <p>Number of times targeted by recruiters</p> <p>Particular types of graduate recruiters (in relation to student preferences and/or senior management’s preferences for links with high profile graduate recruiters)</p> <p>Short and long guidance appointments</p> <p>Students attending events</p> <p>Visitors to careers service</p> <p>Visits to careers service</p> <p>Visits to employers by careers staff</p> <p>Workshops</p> |
| <p>Medium (cited by 5 -10 services)</p> | <p>Students on (overseas) placements</p> <p>Students on volunteering placements</p> <p>Students on work experience projects</p> <p>Students registering for and completing the university’s skills award</p> <p>Vacancy numbers</p> <p>Waiting times (student)</p> |
| <p>Low (cited by less than 5 services)</p> | <p>Activity embedded within academic schools (in one service this is a specific KPI for careers advisers)</p> <p>Individuals taking part in institutional enterprise initiatives</p> <p>Jobs created through enterprise initiatives</p> <p>New business start-ups</p> <p>New businesses surviving more than 12 months</p> <p>People receiving entrepreneurship training</p> <p>Proposals for new initiatives/ideas/innovations/projects</p> <p>Proposals that have successfully attracted funding</p> <p>Types of students engaging with the service (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, subject area, year group, level of course)</p> |

6.3. Satisfaction levels

This section details the methods used by participant services to evaluate and seek feedback from stakeholders as these are regarded as KPIs by the directors.

All of the careers service directors referred to the great efforts they place in ensuring the provision of high-quality services and activities, which is maintained and improved through extensive evaluation and pro-actively seeking feedback from stakeholders. Again these seem well-

established as careers service practice; however, a number of participants noted that these activities tend to focus on satisfaction and that this is not the same as demonstrating the actual impact of their interventions (this is discussed under Issues and Challenges).

The table below details all of the methods cited by participating directors for undertaking evaluation and seeking feedback.

Table 2: Evaluation and Feedback Methods Identified by Participant Services

| Internal to University (in participants' own words and listed alphabetically) | |
|---|---|
| Students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups and questionnaires • From non-users (cited by one careers service only) • Institutional satisfaction surveys • On events (e.g. to inform future practice) • On publications • On the careers service website • Via a form, two weeks after the guidance interview • Who have had a guidance interview – follow-up 6/12 months to check on progress and gain insight into the impact of the guidance interview |
| Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From careers service staff (e.g. regarding staff welfare) • How requests to the careers service are dealt with • Informal measures such as comments from staff across the institution (e.g. There is a sense that some academic schools have numerous expectations because, "<i>their HEFCE money is top-sliced to fund us</i>".) • On the careers service website by website experts • Views of Careers Steering Board/Committee |
| External to University (in participants' own words and listed alphabetically) | |
| Employer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer board • Events • Level of satisfaction with the careers service |

Careers service directors infer from the levels of popularity and satisfaction that users must derive some benefit; for example, an, "...*immediate feel-good factor*..." feeling amongst users as stated by one director, and echoed by another thirteen directors. One director commented on how the benefit may not always be the same as the user expected, for example a student may see a careers adviser believing they need to deal with one issue and subsequently find they need to address other issues in

addition or instead. In turn this may have an impact on the user's satisfaction of the service.

Again measuring satisfaction levels seems to be a well-established practice which is continuing and being applied to new activities. Whilst seeming to be of value, there is still a question as to the extent to which this method contributes to the measure of effectiveness. Whilst it does attempt to determine the perceived value of the

intervention, this can focus on the extent to which people enjoyed the activity (“... *the immediate feel-good factor* ...”), rather than identifying the specific value it has added. Although a few directors referred to this feeling as a potentially viable goal in itself. As with activity volumes, satisfaction levels are likely to be part of any future more integrated performance or effectiveness framework/s.

6.4. Other Performance Indicators

Directors also mentioned a range of other methods used to measure their effectiveness. Some (e.g. Matrix

accreditation, or surveys) are relatively widely used. Others like profile, relationships, innovation and income generation, whilst not new as issues in themselves, are now starting to be used as measures of effectiveness in some services. At times these measures are set within the careers service as informal targets and at other times as specific formal targets. A number of these are either new measures, or still in some form of development in most of the careers services in which they are being used or developed.

Table 3: Other Measures Identified by Participant Services

| Themes (listed alphabetically and as classified by researcher) | Measures Identified by Participants High = cited by 11 or more services Medium = cited by 5 -10 services Low = cited by less than 5 services |
|--|--|
| Careers service staff | High: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual planning and evaluation days with careers service staff • Training and development Low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views and welfare |
| Income generation | Low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Element of self-funding • Targets |
| Innovation | Medium: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New aims, ideas and innovations • Successful bids and awards |
| Profile | High: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High profile events • Quality of relationships (internal & external to the university) • Reputation Low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers service featuring in a journal or newspaper • Production of an annual report and how it is received |
| Quality measures | High: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarking (to comparator/high reputation institutions/services) • Careers service review (internal and peer careers service) • Matrix (re)accreditation Low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual business plan • Charter Mark/Investors In People |
| Relationships with academic schools | High: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum development • General involvement in academic schools Low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultancy role for schools • Evaluation of modules in which careers service staff teach • Internal undergraduate degree programme quality measures • Partnership agreements with schools • Real life activity in modules (e.g. work-related learning) • Teaching and learning plan |
| Surveys | High: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HESA employability indicator (DLHE) – graduate level jobs • International Student Barometer • National Student Survey Low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AGR survey • High Fliers survey |

6.5. Individual Performance

This section has a slightly different emphasis. During the interviews, a small number of services made reference to individual performance indicators for directors and careers service staff. This was in addition to the more activity and service wide level indicators detailed in 6.1 to 6.4.

Several careers service directors referred to how their university is introducing performance management systems for managers such as themselves; in three universities these were already in place and in the remaining institutions it was felt that this development is on the horizon. In one Russell group careers service, careers advisers have their own key performance indicators relating to processes and outputs across a whole range of activities, which they are appraised against and can merit pay awards. This particular careers service is seeking to introduce a similar approach with some of the other posts within the service.

Whilst less frequently cited, participants made reference to individual performance indicators for directors, and staff more widely becoming part of future integrated performance frameworks within institutions (with varying degrees of formality and links to remuneration packages).

6.6. Process of Setting Performance Indicators

As already evident, a wide range of methods are used to measure careers service effectiveness: DLHE, volume measures, satisfaction levels and a variety of other approaches. In addition to the measures themselves, participants also commented on the methods used to develop and set these measures. These are presented and discussed in this section.

All of the directors have the opportunity to input into the formal measures against which their careers service is measured, although the actual level of involvement varies considerably. This is partly due to the positioning of the careers service within the reporting structure, the time the director feels they have outside of operational matters and the director's own confidence and level of pro-active engagement with agendas in their institution. Many of the views expressed are similar to one director's comment: *"...We inform senior management of what we think is important for the coming year rather than the other way around; and they accept that..."*

Notwithstanding, directors commented on how, when measuring effectiveness, their senior managers tend to

focus on statistics such as the league tables and DLHE as well as anecdotal impressions and the visibility of the careers service's activities and engagement across the institution.

Specific targets are not stipulated by senior managers and all participants refer to there being no direct ramifications for non-achievement of targets; instead discussions between the senior manager and the director take place where there may appear to be a shortfall.

Eighteen directors believe measures of effectiveness will increasingly become formalised because of senior management's growing use of measurement through targets. There are mixed feelings about this: some regard this as helping to clarify the university's expectations of the careers service; others expressed trepidation at this creating a 'number crunching' culture that does not appreciate the complexities of the plethora of careers service activities. In some services there is also resistance amongst some careers service staff, especially careers advisers who are still very attached to one-to-one guidance.

In addition, amongst some directors there is apprehension about imposed targets: at the time of writing none of the universities had yet taken this step. In half of the careers services, the directors set annual priorities, which are then linked to careers service team and individual objectives. Several directors referred to a recent, current or upcoming restructuring and increasing expectation from within the university, for all departments across the university to become more focused on how they contribute to the university's priorities.

With greater financial transparency, each academic department will see how much is spent on their university's careers service (as well as other departments). All the directors referred to this being positive in that colleagues can see the very good value for money the careers service provides. In some cases challenges also arise, as indicated by one director's view that academic departments in their university had been known to ask: *"... 'That's a lot of money, what do they [The careers service] do for us?' ...This is where the 'professional expertise' is of paramount importance"*.

Two Russell group university directors referred to their university having introduced institutional KPIs and in both cases the careers service was involved. Numerous other

institutions are currently working on developing KPIs. These KPIs, such as improved employment destinations are highlighted as important priorities for the whole university. The resultant questions of how the careers service is going to contribute, how realistic the targets are and what time frame is involved is discussed between various departments (including the careers service) within the university. There appears to be a preference for setting aspirational yet achievable targets.

Most careers services produce an annual report that is then tabled at appropriate committees (e.g. Careers Board, Learning and Teaching Committee), with a view to the careers service operating and planning within the wider university agenda. The level of analysis of the annual report and especially forward planning varies greatly between institutions. This perhaps is linked with the fact that over half of the directors referred to the senior management in their university as being uncertain or unclear about appropriate KPIs for measuring their careers service; for example “...members of the university will say whether the careers centre is effective or not...but without saying ‘it should look like this’...”

In terms of the process of setting KPIs within the careers service itself, all of the directors feel that every member of careers service staff plays a part in making their service effective and therefore involve the staff. All of the directors believe that defining effectiveness and being able to articulate what effect their careers service has on the future of their students, are key factors in developing the service but can also develop their university as a whole.

Financial pressures and a more business-oriented management model mean universities are seeking areas to reduce costs and/or reposition their internal investments so departments – including the careers service – have to justify their existence and the money the university spends on them. A few careers service directors have acquired extra resources from within their institution by illustrating the benefits of investment into their department, such as increased visibility to the external business world, which can affect graduate employability and therefore the university’s positioning in the league tables as well as the university’s general reputation amongst recruiters.

7. Issues and Challenges

In addition to identifying measures, participants commented on the issues and challenges they face in applying them. These are identified in sections 7.1 to 7.6:

- 7.1 Difficulties in Measuring and Articulating Effectiveness
- 7.2 The Impact of Resource Limitations and Competing Expectations
- 7.3 Ownership
- 7.4 Role of Senior Management
- 7.5 Nature of Students
- 7.6 Perception of Careers Service

Measuring effectiveness, particularly in terms of impact and demonstrable contribution (whether at the service-wide level or at that of an individual programme/intervention) has historically been considered challenging. Yet there is a growing pressure for services to illustrate their effectiveness and the debate is being revisited as existing measures have been, or are being reviewed, and new ones being developed.

Other frequently raised issues are the ownership of measures and the role of university senior management in the evaluation process. In addition, several other issues were raised: how perception and public relations can impact upon services and the nature and make-up of the institution's students.

7.1. Difficulties in Measuring and Articulating Effectiveness

All participants expressed the difficulties in measuring and articulating effectiveness: eighteen of the directors and all three senior managers said that they find measuring and articulating the careers service's effectiveness extremely challenging, and in fact was one of the main reasons for participating in this research. Comments included:

"...I don't have any good management information at the moment, I'd like [to have this information]..."

"...It's so difficult to measure the cause and effect of what we do and I don't think anybody has..."

Participants' concerns are that they are measuring inputs and processes rather than outputs and particularly, outcomes – and that careers services cannot compel students to engage and make 'good' career decisions (and therefore cannot be held ultimately accountable for DLHE results). As illustrated by one director's comments:

"...[we] struggle to find effectiveness...the default option

tends to be one of two things: either statistics (league tables, employability statistics), or anecdotal; impressions that senior management tend to pick up on".

One senior manager feels: *"There is no evidence, no proper research into the direct value of one-to-one interventions with students, yet we invest a huge amount of time maintaining one-to-one delivery. It does have its uses but if there's no evidence of what it does, how can you compare it with other forms of delivery? But to be fair there is a general lack of research about impact".*

Most of the directors commented on how measuring the effectiveness of guidance is the most challenging area of all; in their view, the satisfaction can be captured by numbers, feedback and anecdotes but the long-term effectiveness of the guidance cannot. (In principle it can, but this raises the question of what is the most relevant way to collect and present this type of information so that it can be used to show effectiveness). The use of statistics as a measuring tool is a theme picked up on by others; these directors both commented on the measures they are currently using:

"They're quite process based and they make some assumptions: they're useful data in that they tell us on an operational level how we're doing in comparison to last year. What they don't do is tell us very much about whether the services we're offering are still relevant or fit for purpose".

"Is it a key performance indicator or just data analysis?"

A number of directors referred to how their university has at one time or other, employed a consultancy company to undertake an institutional benchmarking activity with a view to creating meaningful KPIs. However, in each case the company has found this difficult to accomplish for a number of departments – including the careers service – on a cross-institutional basis because of the different configurations at each university.

Most directors mentioned how Matrix has helped them reflect on their practices, but has not equipped them with robust KPIs that are needed to provide hard evidence to others: as one director stated:

"...Even where there is support for our careers service from the person to whom we report, translating that support into money is something different".

Another director noted *“I think there is a desire to connect funding more tightly to performance, but because we don’t have a sense of what good performance is, at the moment there’s been no attempts to do so”*.

When articulating effectiveness, a significant part of the problem for directors is showing the rest of the university that careers service interventions are bringing about change in students’ career development and decision-making (which could then be ‘legitimate’ reason for being more accountable for the DLHE results).

“...It’s difficult to get people to understand that guidance is a good thing; even if they do it’s difficult to measure impact. I would look at measuring effectiveness in terms of not necessarily being able to measure the effectiveness of our intervention, but possibly being able to measure the effectiveness of our ability to get that message [that guidance is a good thing] across...” Fifteen of the directors expressed their fear of failure and concerns with accountability. Within these services, the directors feel that their careers service is measuring productivity rather than effectiveness.

Many directors indicated some uncertainty in the validity of developing a performance framework too tightly linked to simple numerical indicators: reducing a complex frame of service activities down into a series of numbers may not be an effective approach of facilitating an institution to manage and make decisions about their careers service. Articulating and genuinely demonstrating careers service effectiveness is a challenge and is clearly seen as an important issue for future research and development by participant directors.

7.2. The Impact of Resource Limitations and Competing Expectations

An expansion or reduction in resources is a challenge that all participants have had or are currently having experience in, but coupled with that is how to effectively use those resources to hand. As also noted recently by Watts and Butcher (2008), several careers service directors referred to the disparity of resources and lines of communication between different university types. As a measure to differentiate their offer, one director of a Russell group university referred to how their provision of one-to-one guidance in particular is being marketed to potential university applicants as one of the benefits to attending a Russell group institution. Most of the services analysed felt they have limited resources for the number of priorities they are contending with, which can at times

be conflicting: an example of this is trying to attract international recruiters whilst also developing and maintaining links with local recruiters as part of the university’s international and regional agendas.

The term ‘resources’ is used to identify a number of elements: IT systems, staff, physical spaces, technical equipment to name a few. These can be within the control either of the careers service or of the university: joined-up IT systems (across the whole institution) are a challenge to some careers services because they know that other departments have student data that could be useful to the careers service, but they do not have readily available access to these systems, thereby making it difficult to record, track and analyse student engagement and market the careers service as may otherwise be possible.

Another example cited by participants is the changing goalposts in public policy; there is limited money attached to a stream of funding (e.g. volunteering, enterprise) but when the funding runs out the careers service is expected to continue the activity. This then exerts further pressure on existing resources and on directors who must then manage the expectations of stakeholders.

Many participants identified the difficulty in separating effectiveness from expectation and satisfaction. Similarly, a number identified supply-and-demand and ‘students versus university staff and employers’ perspectives as a challenge, particularly around managing respective stakeholder expectations, which could at times conflict. From a director, *“On a personal level I find all this quite difficult. There’s no clarity about what the expectations are”*.

Pressure on resources already seems an everyday fact-of-life for careers services. Given the current policy environment, institutional pressures, student expectations and current economic climate, these pressures seem only likely to increase. This further supports the case for the development of strong performance frameworks, which can facilitate service development and improvement, and strengthen HE careers services’ position when competing for their share of institutional resources.

7.3. Ownership

Another common theme rising from participants responses is where the ownership and accountability for measures of performance resides. This is manifesting itself in different ways: careers services’ relationship with their

respective institutions is at times in a state of flux, which creates a range of tensions and challenges.

Whilst performance measures were frequently agreed between directors and university senior management, a number of potential tensions were identified. Stakeholders may each have a specific emphasis, for example, one director noted that *"guidance is central and the foundation of the service"*. This view was shared by a number of others. It was felt some academics expect the careers service to *"...deal with employability..."* which goes against the view participants hold of employability being an institutional responsibility. At the same time many senior managers were reported to focus on the institution achieving a good DLHE return and responses in the National Student Survey and International Student Barometer, which again the participants believe they contribute to, but should not be held overly responsible for.

Several directors commented on the impact of relationships with other departments and schools in the university. For example, one noted that academic schools look at what has worked well and *"...reward or penalise us in terms of their engagement. So that had a resource implication for us and access to the curriculum. The difficulty is they make more space, we've got to fill it and then we'd like to pass some of that cost on, but there's not a direct causal link between that and DLHE so it's very hard for them to justify why they should invest that money"*.

Another director noted potential difficulties when the careers service sets a target for working with departments, when the departments do not share similar expectations. *"Unless the university says to departments 'you are going to be measured by these metrics like satisfaction with embedded careers provision or destination data, or penalised if it fails', then I can't see departments investing. It's complex to say 'please let us in because that's our key performance indicator for us to measure ourselves' and then once you're in say 'can you pay us?' although there are elements for which they do pay"*.

A further issue for some directors arises when a successful department may want to deliver the service themselves rather than fund the careers service. For example: *"One department thinks they are bringing in lots of money because they're brilliant at research and they don't like it going to services such as ours, they think they should be able to spend it. If I was in that position bringing in millions*

I'd probably feel the same". Also, *"Most departments are fine, but one department feels 'give us the resource and we'll do better'"*.

Other participants considered the issue more broadly. Several commented on how the nature of careers services and guidance could impact upon target setting: services are provided but students - for a range of reasons - may not wish to act on the inputs they receive, even if they are relevant and well-delivered. One senior manager commented, *"What's tragic is if a student wants a job and can't get one then we've failed them; but if they want to spend the year without a job doing something else, I believe they've got the right to do that"*. Participants felt any performance measures should take account of differing students' aspirations, preferences and plans and try to allow for the fact that a careers service can only be accountable for the interventions it delivers, and it is less able to influence, let alone dictate student response to these interventions and whether students pursue proposed courses of action.

Another facet of ownership seems to be the tension between accountability, autonomy and responsibility, as one director put it, *"One of the first disadvantages of having closer senior management guidance and steering is that I'd be held accountable"*. Identifying a further difficulty, another director explained, *"The difference we make feels like hearsay, even though we refer to reports. It's difficult to say this is the difference we're making to people – I feel that we make people feel good and it's a feel-good intervention by acknowledging achievement and helping them to aspire to their potential. And some people have never had anyone believe in them, so to try and measure that is I think one of the difficult things. But the secret and importance for me is that I continue to sell the concept of it and try to refer to research where it exists. I find people buy into that... but whether it's that specific bit [careers intervention] that helped you – that's the challenge to be able to say 'this is the difference we are making'"*.

While many participants are wrestling with these issues, the director of one new university careers service described the strategies they have developed to manage these difficulties. Drawing on other experiences and networks, they described how they have taken to viewing their service as a small business with them self as its managing director. They felt this shift of mind-set has helped them to re-conceptualise their role more in line with current challenges.

Part of this involved shifting the way they took to gathering and presenting evidence of their impact and linking this to other institutional agendas. *“With the difficulty and importance of trying to provide evidence... that’s why I introduced a research post in my department and how difficult it was to get that post through... and I think other [directors need] to acknowledge the importance of providing as much evidence as possible of the impact you make and the contribution to the learning and teaching process, and the importance of the integrated work that we do with the academics; and I think by employing an academic and researcher who’s part of the staff, that’s certainly raised our profile and provided us with a platform from which we can gather much more methodologically sound data, from which we can provide argued cases for resources and effectiveness”.*

A number of participants also commented on the value of careers service staff conducting research, which has been extensively promoted by AGCAS (e.g. Dane 2006, Greer 2000), although they commented that due to limited resources they are not always able to allow staff time to undertake such research. Others noted the value of local as well as national research in influencing decision-making within their institutions.

Ownership is a complex, multi-faceted factor impacting on careers service effectiveness. This runs from ownership of responsibility and accountability for performance indicators at the institution-wide level through to careers service directors and careers service staff to more profound questions around the ownership of the guidance process itself at an individual level. As noted though, individual services are working with these issues and finding ways forward, that may be of use in other institutions.

7.4. Role of Senior Management

As discussed, the difficulty in establishing what an effective careers service might look like and how it might be measured contributes to the difficulties experienced by senior managers in setting meaningful performance targets for their careers services. All three senior managers are keen to receive informed guidance on KPIs for careers services and hoped this research may help towards that aim, as they are looking at efficiency in the organisation; and therefore evidence that is specific and measurable is needed.

As one director noted: *“I don’t think the senior management of this university has a very good sense of how we are performing or the impact of our work and they don’t really have a sense of what the impact should currently be. Part of the work I’m currently doing is to try and give them some ideas about how they might measure our effectiveness for the future”.*

A few directors and one senior manager referred to their university’s lack of long-term planning and the difficulties this creates in departments such as the careers service being able to forward plan and allocate resources accordingly, whilst one director of a Russell group university felt they have started to gain a much clearer idea of their priorities by becoming a *“...mission critical unit...”* within the university.

One of the senior managers referred to how their senior managers have *“...a more selfish institutional agenda... Competition against co-operation and the tradition of careers services being all about caring for the student, is no longer the environment we work in”.*

Another factor for consideration is in relation to whom senior management appoint in the leadership of the careers service itself. One director of 1994 group university said, *“Looking at careers service effectiveness, there’s an issue about the effectiveness of directors of careers services and what it is you need to be able to do to be effective... I have concerns about the talent pool coming through and seeing some appointments made deliberately outside the careers fraternity, which bring in other desirable attributes, sometimes with a dangerous level of ignorance about what elements the job involves. Conversely you get people put in the position or find themselves in a position who lack the confidence or the vision... to influence the institutional agenda”.*

A few other directors also mentioned the demands of the role of the director and the importance of having strong leadership for the careers service.

Senior management’s role in the effectiveness of the careers service is clearly of importance to participant services. The methods and requests identified by participants, as included in Section 8 and Appendix 3 will help to address some areas of concern.

7.5. Nature of Students

A number of directors identified the nature of their students as a factor. This was primarily around two dimensions: how it may affect the DLHE performance and how it may inform potential appropriate measures of effectiveness for their service.

For example, entry qualifications, diversity, background, motivation levels, academic grades and aspirations were all mentioned as factors that could impact on the future career prospects of their students. Some directors felt these factors are not sufficiently accounted for when senior management are relating the DLHE results to the role and effectiveness of the careers service.

Others felt any potential measures of effectiveness should include an element of “value added” and factor in recognition of an institution’s student profile. Given the varying make-up of students across different universities, it was argued that an effective service in one institution could look different, and have a different focus, to a careers service perceived as effective in another. The type of students an institution attracts is regarded by the directors as a key factor in how well the students do, which some felt is largely unacknowledged by senior managers when they consider the DLHE results or the impact of the careers service on the institution’s ratings.

While participants identified the need for more robust measures of effectiveness, and that these are suitable for benchmarking purposes across institutions, there also seems to be a desire that any such measures also make account for varying student profiles.

7.6. Perception of Careers Service

Issues relating to the perception of the careers service were cited by all participants; particularly given the increased attention employability is receiving at a national level. This covers a range of areas from perceptions of careers services as a whole at a national level, through to perceptions of senior managers and other departments within the university, and branching into related topics like reputation and the impact this could have.

While a small number of directors identified that public relations was not something that comes naturally to them, eighteen out of twenty referred to the importance of reputation management and the general perception of their careers service because of the political nature of universities.

One director noted: “*The downsides to the importance of this public relations role are the time it takes and the need for continual ongoing efforts – the reputation is much easier to be damaged than to be built ...*” One of the senior managers also drew attention to this issue: “*Once you’ve gone down that line of losing reputation, it’s very hard to retrieve it and certainly that’s true of the situation here*”.

Reference was also made to historical perceptions of the careers service (e.g. “*Worthy, but perhaps not critical*”, “*Cinderella service*” and a “*tendency to undersell its contribution*”). Building on this, some directors questioned whether there is a clear, shared understanding of the careers service brand amongst services themselves, as well as the wider stakeholder community.

In an effort to address this, a few directors referred to work they had done with external consultants to develop their brand and marketing. Similarly, a number of participants reflected on the steps they had taken to continue the active promotion of their service (e.g. building links with academics and with employers).

Participants also referred to the positive impact public relations and reputation could have on their service. Several directors, for example, noted that any awards or recognition they achieved were welcomed by senior managers. The impact of awards and positive publicity for the careers service was described as playing a key part in raising their profile and credibility. In some cases the careers service has been highlighted as a key player in raising the university’s profile outside the immediate HE community, which senior management has welcomed.

The director of one Russell group university service noted how, given that they have enjoyed a widely recognised good reputation, they had largely been left alone by senior management. The director reflected this could be a mixed blessing, as sometimes it could be tempting to rely on the strength of one’s former accomplishments. Whilst key external developments are rapidly taking place: they are conscious of the need to not “*get left behind*”. They consider that the reputation they enjoy is based on historical perceptions and may not reflect their current performance against the demands of the new agenda. They also noted that sometimes this positive reputation could in fact make it more difficult to instigate change internally, without some sort of disconfirming data which more robust performance measures may provide.

Several directors also described how they make comparisons with other universities and careers services with a good reputation as identified by the director or senior manager. Sometimes this leads to the development of links and collaboration between different directors, which are found to be very beneficial.

Participants noted a further facet of the reputation of the careers service is the impact it can have on careers service staff: when the perception is positive, staff can feel good about what they do; however, when the view is not as positive, staff can feel de-motivated. This was described as more acute when the careers service is blamed for things they believe they don't have direct control over, such as pre-entry guidance, or the DLHE when academic

departments are not actively involved with career development learning. Again, directors feel this is another skill set they need for their job; managing reputation and expectations within their services as part of any change management needed to meet the new agenda. Perception and reputation and the ability to manage them seem to be becoming increasingly important issues for participant services. For example, the lack of a clear, shared understanding of the careers service brand may contribute to the difficulty in getting a clear message across regarding the value a careers service can provide. Similarly, reputation management presents directors with a range of complex issues to tackle in their interfaces with various stakeholders (e.g. students, senior management, staff and employers).

8. Ways Forward

Participants identified a range of methods to move the performance and effectiveness agenda forward. This includes: the research, information, training and support identified by careers service directors and senior managers; an international example from the US HE careers service which seems to be much more confident about performance management; input from two UK graduate recruitment and training organisations; and how directors and senior managers would like AGCAS to support the challenges of this agenda of measuring effectiveness.

These are presented in sections 8.1 to 8.4:

- 8.1 Research, Information, Training and Support
- 8.2 A US Perspective
- 8.3 The Recruiters' Perspective
- 8.4 AGCAS

8.1. Research, Information, Training and Support

During the course of the interviews, participating careers service directors and senior managers were able to identify a wide range of research, information, training and support that they felt would enable them to make progress. In a number of institutions, work has already begun on some of these topics; in others it is planned.

There are other elements (e.g. specific pieces of research, training, support) that participants would like to be picked up by researchers and supporting organisations (e.g. AGCAS, HECSU).

Directors identified a range of additional methods they would like to use or see developed to help towards better performance management:

- Agreed proportions of users from schools within the university;
- Partnership working with departments across the university;
- Fit-for-purpose technology in order to record and track students and graduates;
- Investigating the effectiveness of quick queries/careers guidance appointments with careers advisers;
- Resources for long-term research into graduate destinations (e.g. longer than the 6 months currently provided for DLHE).

Most participants are very keen to develop their knowledge and practices in relation to managing and measuring effectiveness; one of the main barriers for them not doing as much as they would like is due to time constraints. With all the responsibilities and daily operational issues they have to contend with they feel they cannot afford the resources (e.g. staff time, software) to tackle this issue in any depth. With this in mind, the overwhelming majority readily listed areas and topics they would welcome further information and help with.

A complete list of participants' ideas (preferences and wishes) for further research, information, training and support are detailed in Appendix 3.

Table 4. Research, Information, Training and Support to Facilitate Future Progress Identified by Participants

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| <p>Information</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of applications made to recruiters and success rates broken down by university • Systematic collection of data on students outside of the DLHE survey |
| <p>Research</p> | <p>Careers service benchmarking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of good key performance indicators for careers services • Performance measurements used by careers services • The international context: learning from leading university careers services in Australia, New Zealand and USA • Final year students' preferred methods of interaction • High profile careers-related reports <p>Internal institutional factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability • Senior managers' expectations • Guidelines that can be presented to universities who are considering changes in structure <p>Performance management and measurement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of good practice in articulating effectiveness • What constitutes reliable and viable key performance indicators • What key performance indicators are being used within universities • The job market • The value and impact of guidance, career development learning, careers activities and advisory work |
| <p>Support</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal support network with other directors, e.g. peer-mentoring • A more powerful steer towards employability and careers education in subject benchmarking in the institutional audits and subject reviews by the Quality Assurance Agency <p>Within institution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with institutional politics • Efforts towards bridging the academic and administrative divide • Senior management support and guidance |
| <p>Training</p> | <p>Topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Dealing with big egos”</i> • <i>“How league tables work”</i> • <i>“How to manage your boss”</i> • <i>“How to keep senior management happy”</i> • Public relations and reputation management • Relationship management within organisations • Leadership development course e.g. similar to head teachers |

8.2. A US Perspective

Early discussions with participating careers service directors made reference to seeking to learn from exemplar institutions in other countries (Australia, New Zealand, USA were cited). Seeking to act on this feedback, the researcher made contact with one of the cited US HE careers services.

Looking at elements of their approach to measuring effectiveness, it seems that US careers services also carry out many of the activities and measures described by participating UK services. For example, quantitative

measures of activity volumes are in place, as are various qualitative instruments relating to satisfaction. Similarly, they have a destinations survey, conduct focus groups, produce an annual report, benchmark against other institutions and conduct peer reviews.

One key dimension that seems to make a difference is their outlook to performance management, which appears to correlate with their approach to having a very clear mission and sense of purpose for their careers service in relation to their institution. As the director noted, *“Our core mission is to create employment opportunities for*

students ... and this is vital". In this service, the debate about the role of the careers service (e.g. the tensions between the emphasis on the employability agenda and the league tables versus the underlying principles and assumptions of impartial careers guidance) seems to not be as much of an issue as in the participating UK careers services. This was markedly apparent in the director's view of their institution's DLHE survey equivalent; the careers service director associates the DLHE results as one of the careers service's performance indicators (rather than as an imposed unwanted measure), and in fact seemed surprised at the idea of the careers service not wanting to be directly associated with DLHE results.

This clarity of mission and focus was reported to underpin the careers service's plans and activities and to impact upon the development of a careers service brand that is communicated to students, academic schools and employers. It also informs measures of effectiveness and expectations of the service from various stakeholders. Another key difference relates to the US careers service emphasis on learner outcomes. The imperative to demonstrate impact as well as satisfaction also seems more strongly established than in many participating UK careers services. Specific examples include doctoral students conducting outcome-related careers research (e.g. *"...in relation to career planning classes..."*) which is then publicised and used to inform developments. The service also conducts a regular, needs-based survey of non-users to inform its future development. There are still issues the careers service director is seeking to address though, such as demonstrating the longer term impact of careers service interventions.

This is a contrast to the following responses from two UK directors. The first is from the director of a 1994 group university, *"It's a simple question ['what's the rationale for your careers service's activities?']; I don't think it's an obvious question because people don't often ask it. Speaking honestly, a lot of it is based on tradition..."* and the second response from the director of a Russell group university: *"One thing that's a challenge is what are the core messages of the careers service? Careers services across the country give all sorts of messages, and sometimes none"*.

It must be noted however, that only one US university careers service was included in this research and in order

to gain a more in-depth understanding, further research would be necessary (and will be conducted by the researcher). In addition, the wider culture of US universities in comparison with UK universities and public policy may also need to be considered.

None the less, the clarity of mission and emphasis on impact in the US careers service was reported as helping the service gain the same attention as other departments in the university. The value it can contribute to the institution was stated to be appreciated and the service is expected to deliver accordingly. A few UK university careers services have adopted or are adopting similar approaches for certain aspects of their work, but this appears to be the exception rather than the norm.

8.3. The Recruiters' Perspective

The representatives of the two UK graduate recruitment and training organisations included in this research believe that one of the most important aspects of careers services measuring their effectiveness is for them to have a clear set of metrics and to be aware of how these are affected by who the careers services see as their clients or customers (students, academic staff, employers). Both organisations stated that the graduate recruiters with whom they work judge the careers services by how business-like they are in their relationship with them: *"An appreciation of the recruiter's agenda really helps... speed of response, easy contact, access, decent reception arrangements, good communication systems, decent facilities, all contribute to the sense that the careers service is being run efficiently and effectively"*. Both felt the relationships between recruiters and careers services outweigh the league table rankings when it comes to graduate recruiters selecting which careers services to work with.

One of the representatives stated that *"...the careers service vision is important and should be aligned with the university's mission. I think too much is made of the independence of the guidance process..."*

The other representative noted that recruiters do sometimes question the lack of evidence of the benefits of guidance or students' skills development through interventions (be they delivered by the careers service or otherwise). Given the employability agenda, the impact of DLHE positioning and the employer engagement agenda,

this sends a clear message to careers services, supporting the need to develop more sophisticated effectiveness measures which are clearly articulated.

8.4. AGCAS

The role of AGCAS was referred to by two of the senior managers, both graduate recruitment and training organisations and most careers service directors, acknowledging the organisation's strengths, the challenges they see for the future of the university careers profession and how they would like to see AGCAS address them.

Several directors referred to how AGCAS provides superb support, training and information for practitioners and is excellent at facilitating networking. Participating careers service directors felt that AGCAS is not as strong in terms of providing leadership or strategic direction. Many participants think HE careers services are at a turning point and are looking for the professional association to adapt its role to reflect this. There is no one universal view as to what form this role might take.

The directors quoted below represent the spectrum of views expressed about AGCAS, from maintaining its current interests, through adopting a more strategic orientation, to AGCAS questioning the fundamental assumptions of the guidance profession. All the directors are very aware of the issues challenging the HE careers service profession. All those referring to AGCAS acknowledge the extensive contributions AGCAS has made, but many felt the organisation needs to carefully consider how it responds to the challenges facing the profession.

One director said, *"I think what AGCAS does it does well, however it is too broad as a representative group as it's representing two extremes plus everything in the middle, which is not very helpful"*.

Another director felt, *"...If you were looking at strategic and leadership advantages, there isn't the support available through the professional body...AGCAS doesn't offer that and probably there's never been a greater need for a professional body to be addressing that particular challenge"*.

A third noted, *"I think the whole thing needs looking at, it's out of time, out of date. It's neither one thing nor another now. I think there's more cutting edge research out there, such as educational psychology... many careers services have a very pastoral culture but the world's changed radically and I think AGCAS is institutionalising"*.

Another director, however, advocated a different strategy, *"In my mind AGCAS is much more about guidance, careers information, careers advice; that's where its strength is and that's where its focus should remain"*.

When considering what they would like from AGCAS, several directors, mainly from new universities and the 1994 group expressed a desire to see the organisation provide the same high level of support for directors that it provides to practitioners. An example being *"...I think AGCAS as a profession needs to be ready to listen...Perhaps ...where practitioners are able to challenge and voice their opinions so that's seen as a healthy thing. So it comes out as constructive engagement... and for careers service directors, they need development, structured opportunities, to have downtime and reflect and learn from each other"*.

Senior managers also contributed to the debate: *"...AGCAS has always been based on sharing practice and I suppose they would...say 'We're passionate about our work, we believe careers education is a power for good and makes a significant economic contribution to the world'. But in reality if you think the reason that it's less cohesive than it used to be is because this AGCAS drive to professionally move careers forward has become less important from the institutional point of view... and careers services recognise this"*.

AGCAS has already provided a lead previously in responding to challenges relating to demonstrating the value of careers services (Porrer and Perrett 2007). The organisation has the knowledge, experience, position and opportunity to play a leading role during this time of transition. AGCAS has risen to many challenges over its forty year history and is regarded as an exemplar at an international level (OECD 2004). In addition, the organisation is regarded as invaluable for university careers service staff in their everyday delivery and developments.

9. Conclusions

Participating careers services are clearly aware of the need to have more measurable outcomes that demonstrate their effectiveness and many have begun to work on this. Careers services seem to be good at recording and evaluating activity and satisfaction, but more work needs to be done on demonstrating impact. It can be difficult to measure effectiveness and university careers services are by no means the only organisation for which this is challenging. However, other members of the wider guidance family (e.g. Nextstep, Learndirect, Connexions, Careers Scotland, Careers Wales) have been able to make progress which HE services may wish to draw on, as have HE careers services in other countries (e.g. USA, Australia). Potential learning could also be gained from other professions in areas such as training and development and information services amongst others.

In addition to measuring specific inputs, Hughes and Gratton (2006) have identified the building blocks of a performance framework, as again have other guidance and non-guidance organisations using established management techniques such as Balanced Score Card and software like Excelsior. It is vital for careers services to work with senior managers in their institutions to prove that investment in the careers service adds value to the institution, thereby presenting a business case for continued investment.

This approach comes with its own challenges, such as making a public commitment and the potential of possible sanctions in the future for non-achievement of targets. However, there is little evidence to show this to be the case and in fact pressing reasons for careers services to respond proactively to the challenges of the current agenda (Watts and Butcher 2008).

Based on the services participating in this research, too few careers services have yet developed the ability to demonstrate clear, sustainable value for their work, which many of the careers service directors themselves are all too aware of. Much has been achieved in terms of careers services raising awareness of their services, developing their range of activities and attaining high satisfaction levels: all of which are very important, but no longer enough in themselves.

Measurement may also be difficult due to the variety of activities a careers service may provide, the level/s of current support they have within their institution and the necessary resource investment for performance measurement and management. Despite these difficulties, measurement in terms of KPIs can no longer be an afterthought; instead, wherever possible measurement needs to be incorporated as part of the everyday work of a careers service. Senior managers expect best value through reliable KPIs. Measurement is in fact now a priority: inputs, outputs and processes, whilst essential, are no longer the main focus; measuring and articulating the outcomes is vital as these refer to the impact (and value) the careers service has to the university.

Similarly, performance management and improvement needs robust management information. Many participants noted how they are constrained by the limits of their current systems, which are not sufficient for the increasing demands being placed upon the careers service. In several instances where significant progress is being made to meet the new agendas, enhanced management information systems and personnel skilled in their use were cited as important contributing factors.

There also seems to be a need for careers services to be more confident and assertive in relation to accountability. This can be a challenge; however, the major likely benefit is that it has the potential to bring credibility. If measurement processes can be strengthened and the careers service activities articulated accordingly, greater understanding and respect for careers services and their work is likely to be an outcome. While the quality of each activity is still paramount, it is also necessary for careers services to be able to show they have robust systems and frameworks that withstand external scrutiny.

A couple of initial key questions careers services can ask themselves in relation to performance measurement are: What did the activity (e.g. fair, new vacancy, CV check, guidance interview) change? What should the 'ideal' careers service in my institution be achieving?

This approach of questioning the purpose and working on evidencing the value of activities may challenge some of the historical and cultural characteristics of the careers profession. Also, it may seem an arduous process for some based on the data from this research. With this in mind, university careers services collectively may wish to address how they are going to respond when traditional guidance principles and values seem challenged by the 'new' agendas.

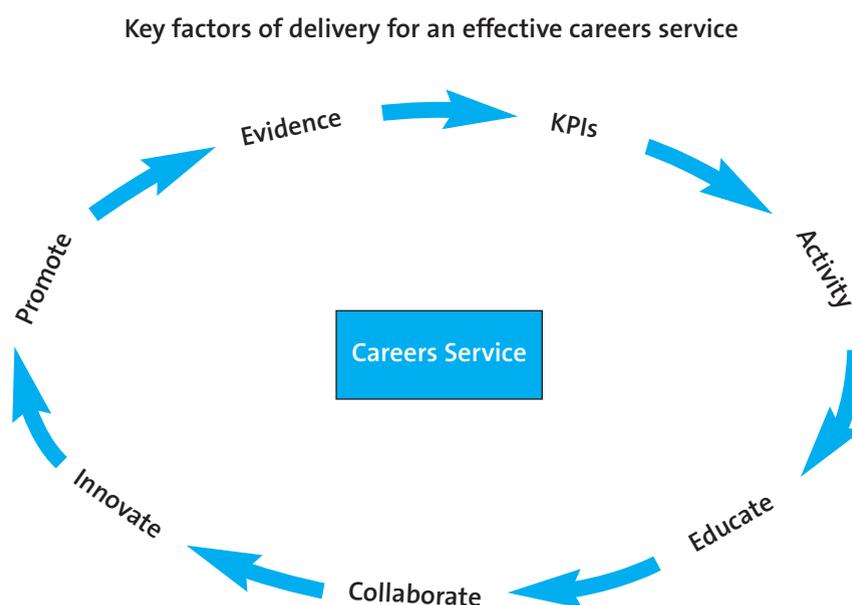
Again, other professions and organisations have grappled with these issues of performance management, accountability and evidencing added value and therefore may be a source of potential solutions. While a number of participants are very aware of these tensions, there still seemed a degree of wariness in tackling them openly. Communicating openly could be considered a prerequisite, especially when considering the experiences of others and the positive benefits that clarity of vision and mission can bring to all stakeholders (as demonstrated by the US example).

Clearly the new agendas for university careers services bring challenges. Some of these have been longstanding difficulties for the careers service, like demonstrating the concrete value of guidance; whereas others, such as direct links to DLHE are newer. However, there seems to be a

good understanding of issues amongst participating services and there is a strong desire to meet these challenges. There are a range of ideas and plans being implemented: encouragingly there are specific examples of success. There are also other examples to draw upon from international HE careers services, from other members of the guidance community, other professions and from wider literature.

This research and report shows there are very real challenges facing UK university careers services, but there are also definite opportunities and solutions: this is where further research and development needs to be focused. The researcher will therefore be working with a range of institutions to develop performance management tools, techniques and frameworks for HE careers services in 2009.

The diagram below demonstrates the continual development process necessary for an effective careers service, as identified by the research data. Careers services that seem to have made most progress in tackling the issues relating to measuring effectiveness are those which recognise that it is an ongoing process. Such a process needs invested time and a willingness to consider challenging assumptions and risking the implementation of new solutions.



10. Recommendations

1. Directors of UK university careers services to consider whether they are convinced that they need to demonstrate a rate of return to their institution.
 2. The development of tools, techniques and frameworks for demonstrating that a careers service adds value – the researcher will be working on such frameworks in 2009 and would welcome contributions.
 3. University careers services to work collaboratively within their institutions and across UK careers services (in the first instance) to understand and agree definitions of (key) performance indicators.
 4. University careers services to undertake further evidence based/practitioner research and share the findings more widely.
 5. Research to be conducted into the international context of university careers services and KPIs.
 6. Further research to be undertaken into the expectations of university senior managers to whom careers services report.
 7. On an ongoing basis, to collate and make available in a shared space relevant reports and research articles from a range of journals (e.g. guidance, management, learning and teaching, [educational] psychology, [educational] sociology, training).
 8. The UK HE careers profession to address topics such as KPIs, performance measures and management, measuring impact and adding value at a national level.
 9. Careers services to work towards further development of networking and benchmarking groups for gaining competitive advantage.
 10. The development of specialist training to support directors of university careers services.
 11. Careers services to continue to proactively work within their institutions with institutional performance indicators such as DLHE, National Student Survey, International Student Barometer.
 12. Universities to (continue to) include careers services in strategic planning and development.
 13. The development of more effective management information systems, data collection and analysis methods.
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Appendix 1

Initial Email Sent to Potential Participants

Dear xxx,

'How university careers services measure their effectiveness and success' is a HECSU funded practitioner research project, which aims to enhance our understanding of current practice and expectations. Your contribution would be most welcome through an interview lasting approximately 50 minutes with me.

The objectives of this research project are to:

1. Collect information about the key performance indicators currently used by careers services.
2. Gain insight into the expectations of senior managers to whom careers services report to.
3. Discuss the 'need' for careers services to have measurable outcomes and how these relate to their vision.

4. Consider how careers services conceptualise their effectiveness and success.

All the data will be anonymised.

If you prefer, you are welcome to be involved in the national dissemination and discussion of the findings, for example at a HECSU/AGCAS/HEA event, in relevant publications or online; with or without reference to your actual involvement in the research.

Please let me know if you would like more detailed information on the project and the interview, or would like to discuss the project informally on the phone or via email.

I do hope you will consider participating and sharing your experience to improve our understanding of this important issue across HE careers services, and I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Appendix 2

Participants' Brief

Your involvement

Your agreement to participate will involve the following from you:

1. You read through this brief and if you decide to participate, indicate in an email/letter that you have read this brief and accept the terms.
2. We arrange an interview (allowing approximately 50 minutes), which will be recorded via a dictaphone and me taking notes.
3. You bring any supporting documentation you think will be useful to the interview/send it to me.
4. We engage in an open and honest discussion during the interview of your views and experience within your institution of how the effectiveness and success of your careers service is measured and perceived (see 'Interview questions' below).

In addition, you have the option to:

- Review the interview transcript and send any comments to me.
- Engage in a follow-up discussion, should this be helpful.
- Participate in the dissemination process and discussion of the final report, for example at a conference, in an article or online – this can be with or without reference to your involvement in the actual research.

Project aims

5. Collect information about the key performance indicators currently used by careers services.
6. Gain an insight into the expectations of senior managers responsible for careers services.
7. Discuss the 'need' for careers services to have measurable outcomes, and if indeed this need does exist.
8. Consider how careers services conceptualise their effectiveness and success.

How the results may be used

- The results may be used in original and edited form by Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) and I in a variety of forums, and a written report will be made available.
- Anonymity will be ensured throughout the dissemination process, unless we agree otherwise.
- All information will be stored securely and kept strictly confidential and in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1988) and the University of Leicester Data Protection Policy: www.le.ac.uk/ua/rg/dataprotection

Interview questions

1. What key performance indicators does your senior management within your institution use to measure your careers service's effectiveness?
 - What are your views on these indicators?
2. What, if any key performance indicators does your careers service use to measure its effectiveness?
 - What was your decision to use these particular indicators based on?
3. What, if any are the implications for your careers service in relation to the outcomes of these measurements? (e.g. increase/reduction in budget)
4. How do you define effectiveness and success for the careers service?
 - How does this relate to how effectiveness and success is defined within your institution?
 - How does this relate to how individuals and organisations outside of the institution consider your careers service's effectiveness?
5. What are your main challenges in measuring and articulating your careers service's effectiveness?
6. What support or information would help you to measure your careers service's effectiveness? (e.g. from within the institution from senior management and externally from HECSU, AGCAS)
7. Do you have anything else you would like to add in relation to how careers services conceptualise and articulate their effectiveness and success?

Appendix 3

Participants' Ideas for Future Progress

Following are quotes from participants in relation to support, information, training or resources they think would help them to measure their careers service's effectiveness.

Further research

- *"The value of a careers interview or careers intervention is something that most institutions probably suffer from... and something AGCAS could help us with; examples of good practice in articulating effectiveness"*
- *"If there is any evidence that doing career management skills, workshops and so on, actually brings about better outcomes for students"*
- *"High profile reports that get the interest of senior managers"*
- *"Researched evidence, including this research"*
- *"A next stage of your research might be the international context, Australia, New Zealand because I think there's some good stuff going on there, and what's happening in America because they're so good at alumni contacts. Is there a university that has cracked the issue of how student recruitment (home students or international) smoothes its way into student support and development alongside academic studies that then also has a natural progression into the careers side of things and then the transition into your graduate career when you become an active alumnus? Is there some sort of physical structure, some sort of measures that could help that student? – it's the student experience that progresses into the graduate experience that is more joined up. Does it in some way reflect itself in the physical set-up, which those departments might have by way of accommodation?"*
- *"I think with institutions changing so quickly, AGCAS has to adopt a different approach. I'd like to see more research, challenging practitioner research about the job market. I think one of the reasons AGCAS doesn't get its name across in the press is because the message is always the same; it's a typical careers message, which the press don't find interesting. I think there could be some more critical research done into the job market: the expansion of the student population – 'Are there really the graduate level jobs out there for everyone? x say yes, y say no, what does AGCAS say?"*
- *"HECSU could look at what outcome senior management's membership of Universities UK wants, not just with careers but a whole series of units. The*

principle being to think about what you want and then work out how we get towards that"

- *"Compare what proportion of your final year students are interacting with you in different types of ways"*
- *"Research about impact"*
- *"Determine how other universities are measuring their careers service performance"*
- *"Exploring the study of relationship management with organisations and perhaps sharing expertise"*
- *"If employers would tell us how many applications they've had from us, what the success rate was on a critical mass, I think this would be a better measure of activity"*
- *"What the precise impact is and I think that's wider than just a higher education careers service but it's a bigger issue about people relating to each other in that kind of advisory relationship"*

Good key performance indicators

- *"Something that moves us a bit beyond the operational and process indicators into something that says 'what impact are we having?' or 'how effective are our interventions?"*
- *"An overview of the different ranges of indicators and what they actually measure. Also something on accountability, public relations and reputation management, there's the production and measurement of those areas and how you use them, and the politics of it, because there's a lot of pressure in that area"*
- *"What key performance indicators are effective and a clearer sense of what key performance indicators are being used within the institution"*
- *"Some measure of career management skills that you can administer. If there's some management wisdom then that would be good to know, that could be applied to our context"*
- *"If careers services agreed that there were certain indicators that we'd try and gather data for, we'd have a great basis for comparison and it would actually show that we take these things seriously"*
- *"A few standard key performance indicators for electronic services – broad measures of use and non-use of effectiveness"*
- *"A standard survey measurement for students' use of careers services, one that you could adapt to include local terminology"*
- *"Examples of good key performance indicators for careers services"*

Networking

- *“Have a formal support network with other heads of service on a regular basis e.g. through peer-mentoring”.*
- *“My vision is informed by the leading Australian careers services, the ones that are using technology much more effectively than we are. I think for us to deliver a 21st century careers service, we all need web developers and technical staff and we would have to completely reform the way we work. There are a few UK institutions leading the way but we are well behind when I look at what’s happening in America and Australia. The Australians are particularly ahead of the game and often have less staff than we have but are well supported with technical support”.*
- *“Continue involvement in my informal networks”.*

Training

- *“A leadership development course such as that undertaken by head teachers to be co-ordinated by AGCAS, though funding would be an issue”.*
- *“A management programme for heads of service through institutions or AGCAS, which would include setting strategies, performance measurement (what are reliable and viable and if there are any)”.*

- *“How to manage your boss”.*
- *“How to keep senior management happy”.*
- *“How the league tables work”.*
- *“Dealing with big egos”.*
- *“Through AGCAS, a short life working group to investigate what’s working and what’s not, what do we think would work? To maybe provide some kind of guidelines that can be presented to universities who are considering changes in structure. You could say ‘If you ask these questions, you’ll be getting towards making sure the changes will facilitate continuing to be effective or improving on how effective it is’. We probably now do have enough experience around the country of changes that are not going well, but as yet we don’t have a model that we want to present. It may be out there but we haven’t heard about it yet”.*

Extra resources

- *“Getting an IT person to help move us forward”.*
- *“If I had the resources I would be much more focused on managing relationships with employers and much more focused on systematically collecting outcomes; data on students outside of the DLHE survey”.*

Glossary

AGCAS Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services

AGR Association of Graduate Recruiters

DLHE Destinations of Leaver of Higher Education

HE Higher Education

HECSU Higher Education Careers Services Unit

HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for England

HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency

KPI “Key performance indicator(s) are quantifiable performance measurements used to define success factors and measure progress towards the achievement of business goals”
www.bettermanagement.com/topic/subject.aspx?f=11&s=704



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**to assist practitioners to consider how research informs practice
to assist researchers to develop questions and themes relevant to practice to develop innovative approaches to practice issues
to coordinate with other relevant initiatives
to disseminate activities openly
to contribute to policy formulation**

...and outcomes:

**networked learning community
focused on provision of CEG in HE
range of CEG materials
available electronically short, accessible publications**