

**Universities UK
International**

SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: MAKING GOOD ON THE PROMISE

JANUARY 2020



AGCAS

The Association of Graduate
Careers Advisory Services

UK Council
for International
Student Affairs

UKCISA



**Coventry
University**

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UNIVERSITIES UK INTERNATIONAL

UUKi is the international arm of Universities UK, representing UK universities and acting in their collective interests globally. We actively promote universities abroad, provide trusted information for and about them, and create new opportunities for the sector.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK has a world-class higher education system that attracts more international students than anywhere else in the world, bar the US.

This report, which is a collaboration between Universities UK International (UUKi), the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) and Coventry University, identifies how universities support the employability of their international students (non-EU students registered on a full-time/part-time undergraduate or postgraduate degree course), in a context where, increasingly, this is a factor in international students' decision-making. It outlines current good practice within careers and employability services, within institutions and across the whole UK Higher Education (HE) sector, and recommends where further improvement and support is required to deliver future benefits and shape the policy agenda, in line with Action 5 of the Government's International Education Strategy.

The research is based on a survey of **43** institutions, predominantly completed by careers and employability professionals, and qualitative interviews with careers and employability professionals, pro vice-chancellors or university directors with an international or global remit, employers, and current or recent international students.

Careers and employability service approaches to international graduate employability

Overall, careers services provide comprehensive support to international students from pre-entry to post-graduation, but there are some areas where increased or more tailored resources may be beneficial, particularly with regards to support to gain work experience in the UK or to return to overseas labour markets. The full range of methods used by careers services are outlined in the report, broken down into the following categories: pre-sessional support; raising awareness of services; careers education, information, advice and guidance; curricular and extracurricular activities for employability; support to gain UK work experience; support to enter an overseas labour market; and post-graduation support for international alumni.

- **86%** of survey respondents rate demand for career and employability services from international students as “very high” or “fairly high”, and **70%** expect the new graduate route to further increase demand.
- Only **28%** of services feel that they are able to meet current demand from international students.
- **44%** do not provide any tailored support to international students but students are able to access the same support provided to UK and EU students.
- A minority (**28%**) of careers and employability services have specialist staff to support international student and graduate employability; the majority (**56%**) do not.
- **61%** of respondents perceive international students' appetite for UK work experience to be either much greater (**19%**) or slightly greater (**42%**) than UK-domiciled students. International students and graduates face significant barriers to gaining work experience in the UK, and accessing the new graduate route, while welcome, is expected to be insufficient alone to overcome these barriers.
- Most survey respondents (**83%**) provide information about working in other countries and almost three-quarters (**72%**) have built relationships with employers/recruiters overseas.

Institutional approaches to international graduate employability

International student and graduate employability is a priority within **71%** of institutions and likely to become a priority soon in a further **10%**, yet only **5%** of institutions use metrics or measure performance against KPIs to track the success of their international employability offer.

- Multiple university departments and Student Union branches work collaboratively to support international student/graduate employability in **83%** of institutions, though there is a perceived lack of joined-up approach in others.
- International alumni overseas are recognised as a vital resource to support the employability of current international students, build connections with overseas employers and gain labour market insight, but could be better utilised.
- Just over two thirds (**69%**) of institutions monitor their international graduate outcomes, mostly through the DLHE (Destination of Leavers from Higher Education) survey. Interviewees have significantly mixed views of using outcomes data to assess how well institutions support international graduate employability.

A full list of recommendations for institutions is included in the summary of recommendations, but includes:

- developing a strategic institutional approach to supporting the employability of international students and graduates, with ownership at a senior level and supported by clear objectives and KPIs
- establishing a cross-department working group or similar with responsibility for international student/graduate employability to support the delivery of the strategic approach
- monitoring the outcomes of the institution's international graduates in a more systematic way, and using this data to inform the further development and delivery of the institution-wide strategic approach
- embedding experiences that support the development of employability skills and work experience within taught postgraduate courses and developing these with input from careers/employability professionals and student feedback
- investing in targeted employer engagement with overseas employers and other resources to support international students returning home
- facilitating opportunities for home and international students to interact wherever possible to ensure continuous improvement of international students' English language skills.

Sector-wide approaches to international graduate employability

Just under half (**41%**) of responding institutions collaborate with other higher education institutions to support international graduate employability. Examples of collaborative initiatives they are undertaking include:

- Joint careers fairs, either in the UK or overseas.
- Interest groups and regional forums to collaboratively support international student employability.
- Development of shared resources.
- Joint delivery of webinars and information events for students.
- Collaborative employer visits.

A full list of recommendations for institutions are included in the summary of recommendations but includes:

- investing in further research and analysis, to support evidence-based, data-led responses.

Priority areas should include research focussed on:

- understanding the specific employability needs of international students and the effect of employability interventions on eventual graduate outcomes;
 - best practice in monitoring the outcomes of UK-educated international graduates, and how we measure the quality of international student/graduate employability support;
 - learning from best practice overseas, in particular the approaches taken by competitor countries to support the employability of international students and graduates in their systems;
 - using a collaborative approach to provide better international Labour Market Intelligence (LMI);
 - investing in training for higher education and career professionals on how to support international graduate employability.
- considering ways in which UK businesses might be better supported to access the pool of international graduate talent available in the UK, including developing guidance to educate UK-based employers on visa sponsorship, the proposed graduate route and the benefits of hiring international students.

Next steps

The introduction of the new graduate route, expected to be in the summer of 2021, is likely to bolster the UK's attractiveness to some international students, but the sector must work hard to ensure the longevity of post-study work and learn from the experiences of colleagues overseas to ensure that the new graduate route genuinely benefits international students studying in the UK. In particular, the government is encouraged to restate its commitment to the International Education Strategy by implementing the proposals for the graduate route and delivering proposed reforms to the visa and immigration regimes, including streamlined and less costly application processes, to ensure that businesses can more readily access graduate talent to drive productivity and economic growth.

It will be important for relevant sector bodies – including AGCAS, UUKi and UKCISA – to set a clear agenda for the future. As such, the following next steps are recommended:

- A strategic coordination group should be established to focus on supporting international student employability through collaboration, comprised of sector bodies and institutional representatives.
- An action plan should be developed by the coordination group, setting out a framework of activities to enhance international graduate employability – ideally to coincide with the first year of the International Education Strategy, in March 2020.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The UK is among the most popular destinations in the world for international students, with more than **458,000** choosing to study in the UK¹. The sector has a globally-recognised reputation for quality and excellence in higher education and research, and international students themselves judge the experience to be highly valued, with 9 out of 10 students reporting that they are satisfied with their experience².

However, in spite of this success – and despite being second only to the US as the most popular study destination for international students for many years – there have been challenges. Growth in international student numbers since 2016 has been relatively flat, while competitor countries have experienced double-digit growth as the number of globally-mobile students has grown significantly³. Recognising this lost potential, in March 2019, the UK government released a cross-departmental International Education Strategy, setting out its vision to increase the total number of international students choosing to study in the UK to **600,000** by 2030, and promising to ensure that those choosing the UK benefit from an “increasingly competitive offer”. In particular, the strategy highlighted the importance of helping to achieve positive outcomes for international graduates as a key priority⁴.

[The Government will] work with Universities UK International (UUKi) and the sector to identify and share good practice in how universities effectively support international students into employment and further study, both here in the UK and when they return to their home nation. We will also work with the sector to enhance the evidence base on international graduate outcomes and to monitor the UK’s comparative position with respect to international student recruitment and the international student experience.

Action 5 of the International Education Strategy

Restrictions on post-study work introduced in 2012 may have contributed to reducing the UK’s competitiveness, and in this context the higher education community welcomed the announcement, in September 2019, of plans to create a new graduate route for post-study work for international students⁵. The new graduate route is expected to be launched in the summer of 2021. This will allow eligible students to stay in the UK and work, or look for work, at any skill level for a maximum period of two years. The new route should help the UK become more attractive to some international students, **such as Indian students, whose numbers declined after the removal of the post-study work visa in 2012**⁶. It is a real boon for the sector, which has been tirelessly campaigning for the return of a post-study work visa for international graduates. **We must now work hard to ensure its success.**

¹ *International facts and figures 2019*, UUKi

² *The UK’s competitive advantage 2017*, UUKi

³ *Five little-known facts about international student mobility to the UK 2018*, UUKi

⁴ *International Education Strategy: global potential, global growth 2019*, HMG

⁵ *UK announces 2-year post-study work visa for international students* (September 2019)

⁶ *International Student Behaviours 2018*, UUKi and IDP Connect

“The government has now laid down the line in terms of their expectations, it’s for the sector to respond.”

Pro vice-chancellor

The graduate route only makes the UK’s offering equivalent to what is already offered by competitors overseas, and its reinstatement may **inspire other nations to respond with new legislation or initiatives of their own**. Employability is a very important consideration for international students choosing a study destination, so to remain competitive the UK higher education sector needs to continually adapt, be shown to help students realise their ambitions for work and further study, and to deliver a return on their investment. Even with the graduate route in place, international students may still face barriers to gaining work experience and graduate employment in the UK, while many will want to return home or move elsewhere for graduate work and further study. It is therefore vital that universities are able to offer the support, guidance and opportunities that their international students need to fully realise their potential. Meeting this need, and fulfilling student expectations, is likely to mean an increased demand on careers service provision. This is critical if the UK is to maintain the current very high levels of satisfaction among international students and graduates and retain its reputation as one of the very best places to live, study and work. Supporting international students into positive outcomes, both here in the UK and when they return to their home nation, will help strengthen the attractiveness of UK higher education, ensure we deliver on the promise of rewarding careers for our international students and contribute to the long term sustainability of the new graduate visa route.

The drive to support international student and graduate employability as distinct from the employability of domestic students is not new. **A UKCISA briefing in 2007** stated the following:

One very clear finding from the student feedback was the importance of work experience opportunities in the UK, whether during or after their studies, and the expectation of help from their institution in finding good jobs after their studies, whether in the UK or overseas. These were also areas where satisfaction ratings showed room for improvement... The sector bodies for careers advisers, who have been leading on this topic, have set aims of improving advice and support for students; extending professional development opportunities and resource material for advisers and raising awareness among employers. The latter is particularly crucial, as there are real concerns that the newly introduced International Graduate Scheme (IGS) and Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland Scheme (FT:WISS), which allow graduates to work for one and two years after study respectively, are raising expectations, which may be disappointed if employers are unaware of the terms of the schemes, or are unwilling to employ international students because of their limited period of leave, or based on assumptions about their skills or language competence.

Preparation for success: Key themes in the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education (UK) (2007)

Unlike other aspects of careers service provision, the UKCISA briefing suggests that there has not been significant progress made in this area. We would argue that the lack of progress is not because of a lack of passion – the , the AGCAS journal, shows the great work happening across the sector to support international student and graduate employability – but there has not been quite the same impetus provided through measures such as the Teaching Excellence Framework for universities to invest strategically in support for international students as there may have been for domestic students.

1.2 AIMS OF THE REPORT

This report explores how careers services, universities and sector bodies can make good on the promise to prepare their international graduates for global success. It will provide:

- A snapshot of current practice in this area.
- Case studies illustrating innovative approaches.
- Recommendations for universities, sector bodies and government to help them better support international student and graduate employability.

The report has relevance for a range of stakeholders, and is written with the following readers in mind:

- Careers practitioners in the higher education sector, including Heads and Directors of careers and employability services.
- Pro vice-chancellors and directors with an international, strategy, recruitment or employability remit.
- Other staff who have responsibility for or play a part in international student recruitment and experience at their university.
- Policy makers and advocacy groups related to higher education, international student support and graduate recruitment.

Overall, the main objective is to set the agenda for the future – to help identify good practice in the sector, and suggest a way forward for all of those working within UK higher education that want to further enhance the support and guidance that international students and graduates benefit from when choosing to study in the UK.

1.3 UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

This report aims to show how careers services in UK higher education institutions support the employability of international students, through examples of current and innovative practice, but this in itself carries inherent challenges. The concept of employability has shifted throughout history and continues to be contested – there is no single, universally accepted definition of employability⁷.

There is consensus that employability is more than simply gaining employment: that it involves the development of knowledge, attributes, skills and experience that help individuals gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations⁸. It is therefore not the role of the careers service to get students a job, but support students to develop these underlying facets of employability.

The elements of employability discussed above are universal to UK-domiciled and international students, so the same provision can be made available inclusively to all. However according to the **Equality Challenge Unit**⁹:

Providing equitable careers support does not mean providing the same for every student, but recognising the different needs within a diverse group and making necessary steps to ensure that services are provided in a way that meets these needs as far as possible. International students unfamiliar with the UK job market often require additional or specific information and support that UK students would know already or have access to through other sources and networks.

Careers services: supporting international students (2012) Equality Challenge Unit

7 Artess J, Hooley T. and Mellors-Bourne R. (2017) *Employability: A review of the literature 2012 to 2016*. The Higher Education Academy, York

8 Yorke, M and Knight PT (2006) *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum: Learning & Employability Series 1*. The Higher Education Academy, York

9 Careers Services: supporting international students 2013, Equality Challenge Unit (now Advance HE)

Rather than employability simply being an individual's knowledge, attributes, skills and experiences, a broader perspective of graduate employability suggests that it is constructed from an individual's human capital (skills, competencies, experiences of work), social capital (personal networks, inherent understanding of the labour market, social class) and their individual behaviours (career self-management, career-building skills, how they transition into the graduate workforce)¹⁰. This definition of employability would suggest that some form of bespoke employability support may be helpful in developing the employability of international students.

Careers services use a range of tools to help develop the employability of their students and graduates, including individual career guidance, support to gain work experience, connections with employers, embedded interventions within curricula, and the provision of extracurricular activities and global experiences. But "employability" is not the role of careers services alone. Universities more broadly offer opportunities to develop employability through engagement with the curriculum, sports and other activities, or even simply by enabling students to meet and socialise with people from different backgrounds and places. In short, there is no one solution to improve graduate employability.

Careers services, and universities more widely, develop strategies and programmes of activity based on their context, student population and resources. Reflecting the diverse nature of higher education in the UK, this report gives an overview of current and innovative practice in this area, but recognises that it is for institutions and their careers services to identify the specific approaches and interventions that will work best for their students. Depending on the numbers and nature of their international student cohort, some institutions may benefit from providing bespoke support to specific student groups. We encourage services to understand the employability context and outcomes of their international student/graduate population and use the examples of good practice outlined in this report to inform their provision and develop a more strategic approach across institutions.

1.4 CURRENT CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES FACING CAREERS SERVICES

Careers services face significant challenges in being able to develop the employability of their students. A 2019 report by AGCAS¹¹ found that:

- **40%** of heads of careers services reported budget constraints and limited resources as a key challenge.
- Services struggle to meet the demand of a diverse student/graduate body, while meeting demand of other internal and external stakeholders.
- The unknown impact of Brexit on the graduate labour market and wider economy has been causing deep concern.

In general, careers services have not routinely received specific increases in funding in line with an increase in international student numbers, and therefore may not have the resources to deliver a service that is tailored to the needs of international students and graduates.

Examples of internal and external challenges in supporting international student and graduate employability cited by careers services during this study are outlined in **Table 1**. These challenges are discussed in further detail throughout the report.

¹⁰ Holmes L (2013) *Competing Perspectives on Graduate Employability: Possession, Position or Process?* Studies in Higher Education 38 (4): 538–554.

¹¹ AGCAS *HE Careers Service Survey Report 2019*, AGCAS

TABLE 1: INTERNAL (WITHIN INSTITUTION) AND EXTERNAL (OUTSIDE INSTITUTION) CHALLENGES FACING CAREERS SERVICES IN SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

Internal challenges	External challenges
Lack of resource to provide tailored support to all country groups.	Complex and changing visa landscape
High demand for careers services from international students compared to UK-domiciled students	Political uncertainty in the UK (Brexit)
International students typically require a lot of support to prepare them for UK recruitment and selection processes and to ensure they are work ready	Speed of change in the labour market
Lack of familiarity with UK careers services, and a requirement to manage expectations	Actual, or perceived, lack of opportunities for work experience in the UK for those who want them
Lack of a joined up approach and clarity of ownership for international graduate outcomes within institutions	No external measures or benchmarks that institutions are assessed against
Difficulty balancing commitments to regional and national agendas with supporting international students and graduates	

1.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UK UNIVERSITIES

Qualitative data from this research reflects findings in other sources that employability-related outcomes are one of the most important considerations for international students when choosing a study country and university.

There is no widely recognised sector-wide research into the desired outcomes of international students after they graduate from a UK degree; whether they want to stay in the UK indefinitely, for a few years to gain work experience or immediately return home. Qualitative interviews with students and university staff suggest that international students commonly want to remain in the UK to gain work experience but eventually return to their home countries.

However, international students are not a homogenous group. In 2017–18, there were **458,490** international students (including EU students) studying at UK higher education institutions, accounting for **19.6%** of the total student population in the UK¹². **14%** of all undergraduates and **35.8%** of all postgraduates were EU/international. In 2017–18, the top five sending countries for international students were China (**106,530** students), India (**19,750**), the US (**18,885**), Hong Kong (**16,350**) Malaysia (**14,970**).

¹² *International facts and figures 2019*. UUKi.

HESA statistics on destinations of international students (DLHE survey) tell us that, generally:

- Most international graduates return to their home countries for graduate work or go elsewhere overseas.
- International undergraduate graduates report much higher further study outcomes and lower unemployment outcomes than UK-domiciled graduates.
- International postgraduate qualifiers have a slightly slower rate of employment, along with a higher rate of further study and other (not seeking employment) outcomes¹³.

1.6 METHOD AND SAMPLE

This study examines data from a mixed methods survey, containing both closed and open ended questions, and qualitative interviews.

Survey

The total number of valid responses in this survey was **43**. 'Valid' is defined as a survey response from a participant who gave consent and answered all parts of the survey. As some participants did not answer all the questions, the number of valid responses in each question may be lower than **43**. The responses are from a wide range of regions/nations and different types of universities. While the survey was designed to be completed by any higher education professional engaged in supporting the employability of international students and graduates, **77%** of survey respondents work within careers and employability services and **5%** work elsewhere the institution. All other respondents chose not to disclose their job title. The characteristics of the participating universities and respondents can be found in the appendix.

Qualitative interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after initial data collection with careers and employability professionals (**14**), pro vice-chancellors and university directors with an international or global remit (**11**), employers (**7**) and two 'others' (one student representative and one founder of a consultancy specialising in international graduate employability). A focus group was also conducted with six international postgraduate students currently studying in the UK. All interviewees and focus group participants were selected through convenience sampling via industry contacts and the networks of the research team. The characteristics of the interviewees and focus group participants can be found in the appendix.

Questions were tailored to each audience to understand their perception of how universities, sector bodies and government can better support the employability of international students and graduates in UK higher education institutions. Thematic analysis was conducted across all interviews to identify the key themes and important considerations for each group.

2. CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

This section provides an overview of current practice by UK higher education careers services in delivering employability support to international students, from before they even start their degree (pre-sessional support) until after they graduate.

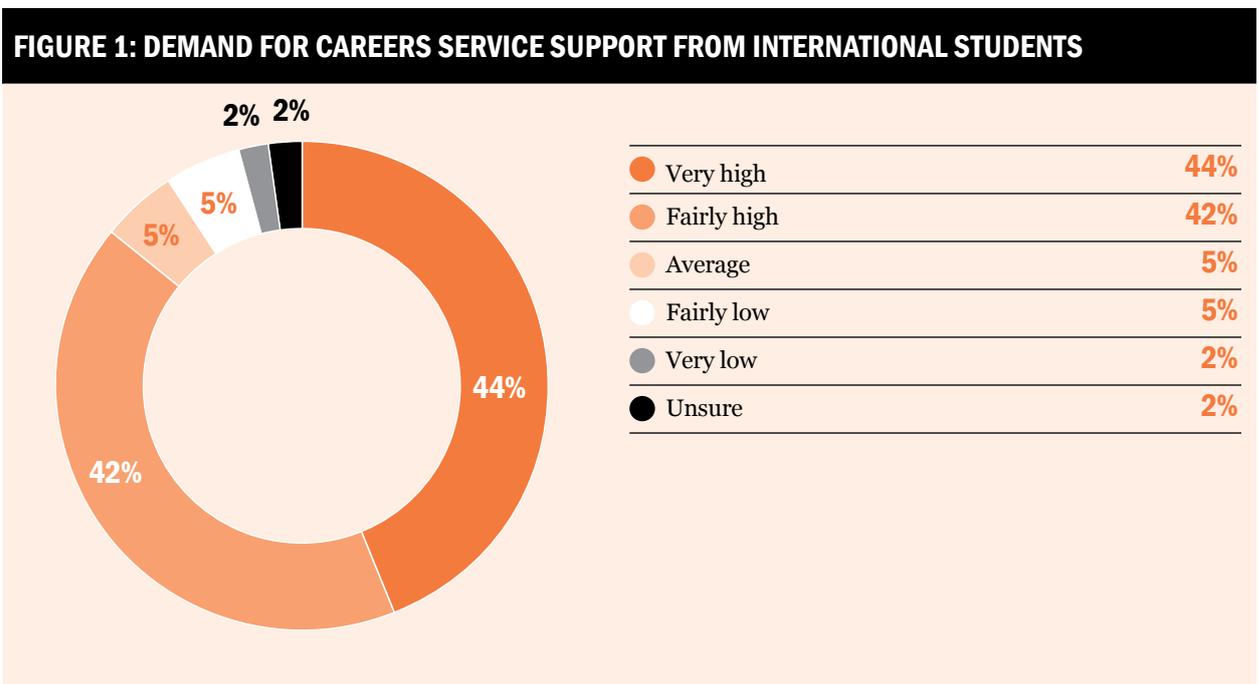
It aims to show the breadth of support delivered by the sector, and services are encouraged to consider their own student population and context and use the examples of good practice that are relevant to their institution when considering their own provision.

2.1 DEMAND, ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION WITH CAREERS SERVICES

Key messages:

1. Demand for careers and employability support from international students is rated as very or fairly high by **86%** of survey respondents, though the level of engagement with services can differ somewhat between institutions.
2. While there is a wealth of literature that examines pre-sessional factors for international students, such as how international students make decisions to study overseas, there is comparatively little research into the employability support that best meets their needs towards and after the end of their course.
3. **44%** of survey respondents feel that they are currently unable to meet demand for careers and employability services from their international students, and many others feel that they will be unable to meet demand if international student numbers increase in line with institutional targets.
4. **70%** of respondents feel that the new graduate route will lead to enhanced expectations of gaining UK work experience from international students. There are fears that the graduate route will increase demand from international students returning to their institution for support throughout the two years, and lead to decreased student satisfaction if they cannot get graduate-level, post-study work.
5. The biggest gap between UK/EU and international student satisfaction is work experience opportunities and graduate jobs in the UK. International students are often disappointed when employers on campus cannot offer visa sponsorship. They are also less satisfied with the information available for overseas countries.

Demand for employability support from international students is high, with **86%**¹⁴ of survey participants classing the level of demand as either very high (**44%**) or fairly high (**42%**). It is important to note that it can be difficult to measure demand for activities that are not already provided by services without robust feedback mechanisms.



(Base: 43 valid responses.)

The majority (**84%**¹⁴) of survey respondents monitor international student engagement with careers service support. International student use of careers services varied from just **3%** of all interactions handled in one office¹⁵ to **50%** of all interactions. Methods for measuring international student engagement with careers and employability services are displayed in **Table 2**. Data is only broken down to country level where there are sufficient numbers of students to provide reliable insights.

Survey responses indicate that measuring the engagement of international students with careers services allows the following general conclusions to be made:

- Engagement levels often vary across the year, with heavy use of services typically occurring at the start of term, during the summer months and in line with visa end dates.
- Respondents perceive the level of international student engagement and demand to correlate with the desire to work in the UK after graduation.
- Services with low engagement of international students often have employability support for international students based elsewhere in the institution, for example within business schools, reducing the engagement with central careers services.
- Engagement with careers fairs and employer interactions is typically higher than for one-to-one appointments.
- Levels of engagement vary between different subjects: there are higher levels of demand from students in engineering, computing, management, business and finance disciplines. Although these subjects have the largest cohorts of international students, few services provide engagement data as a percentage of cohort size, so it is difficult to ascertain whether, student-for-student, these subjects are the greatest users of careers and employability services.

¹⁴ Base: 34 valid responses

¹⁵ This figure was for a small, specialist institution.

TABLE 2 : MONITORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH CAREERS SERVICES**Methods used**

Using customer relationship management systems to monitor numbers of service users and online bookings by domicile (UK/EU/international) and by level of study

Providing a granular breakdown of international student engagement with specific activities, such as one-to-one appointments, workshops and vacancy views

Gathering feedback on what people learned after events/workshops and analysing this on a UK/EU/international basis

Creating data reports for faculties/schools that provides them with thresholds for home and international engagement based on logins, resource use, appointment and event attendance

Correlating international student engagement data with Careers Registration data to see the impact of service engagement on career readiness

Further breaking down the above analyses by country group

Base: 36 valid responses.

There are differences in level of engagement across institutions and student groups. While very few services break down service-usage data by student country of origin, anecdotal evidence suggests that students from China use guidance appointments to a lesser extent than those from India, perhaps because of cultural differences in understanding the role of a careers service or because Indian students place a greater emphasis on securing graduate work in the UK.

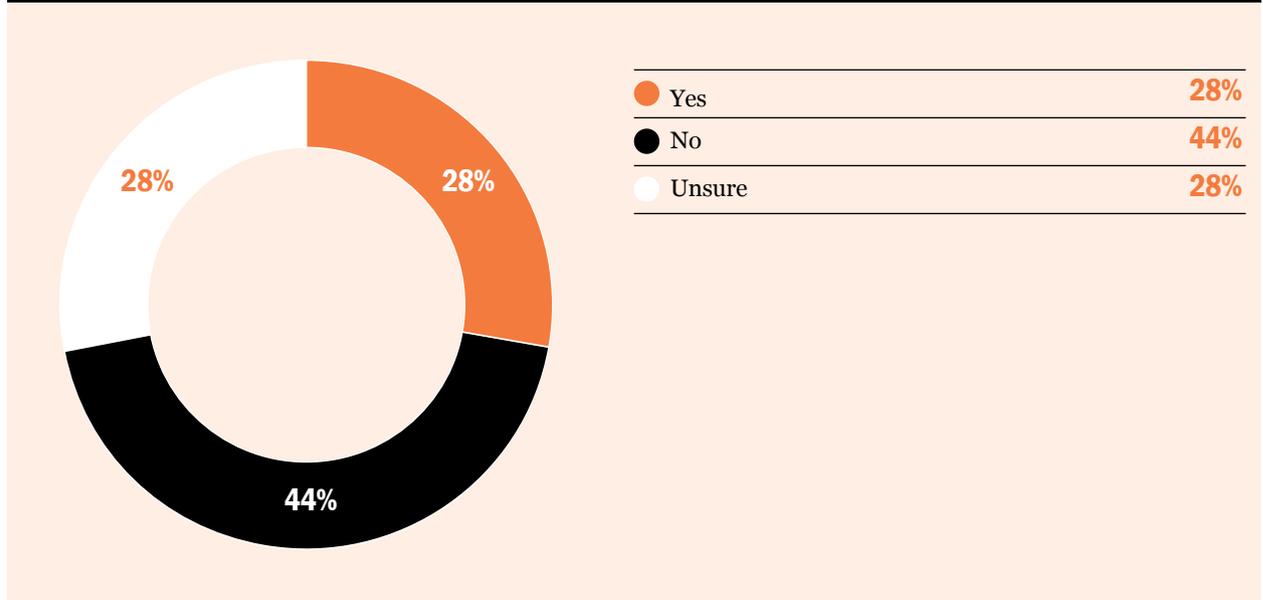
During qualitative interviews, careers and employability professionals were asked “What types of support work best for international students?”. The answers were wide-ranging, often contradictory and based on individual and subjective perspectives.

There is comparatively little research into how best to support international students once they arrive in the UK. The AGCAS First-year Student Career Readiness Survey¹⁶ analysed students’ career readiness and participation in career-related activities to understand how students engage with careers support. It found significant differences in career readiness, experience of careers education before university, cultural and social capital, and participation in career-related activities depending on students’ demographic background, but did not examine international students as a separate demographic. Similar research should be undertaken to understand the employability support needs of international students to inform careers service provision.

Ability to meet demand

Only 28%¹⁷ of survey participants think their service is able to meet current demand from international students and 44% feel that they are currently unable to meet demand. Of the 28% who responded “other”, the vast majority feel that while they are currently able to meet demand, this will not be the case if international student numbers increase in line with institutional targets.

FIGURE 2: DO CAREERS SERVICES FEEL ABLE TO MEET CURRENT DEMAND FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?



Base: 43 valid responses

Services find it particularly difficult to meet demand for up-to-date country-specific labour market information, UK-based opportunities for work experience and graduate roles and one-to-one guidance appointments. The current level of demand means that services have to focus on specific cohorts to maximise resource.

“ We have increasing numbers of international students at our institution with a particular rise in PG students. The additional demand on CEIAG has not been addressed.”

Careers and employability professional

“ We do have to be somewhat careful about over promoting our services as demand is often difficult to meet.”

Careers and employability professional

¹⁷ Base: 43 valid responses

Demand related to the new graduate route

70% of respondents feel that the new graduate route will lead to enhanced expectations from international students. The graduate route is expected to attract more international students to study in the UK and thus increase the level of demand on services. The route is likely to raise students' expectations that they will be able to gain work experience in the UK. This could become a cause of concern for institutions, and for careers and employability professionals who recognise that even with the new graduate route, international students may still face significant barriers to gaining graduate employment in the UK (discussed in further detail in [Section 2.7](#)). This could result in a similar situation to that seen in Australia, *where large numbers of graduates are underemployed or underpaid*. There is a real risk that if other barriers to gaining employment in the UK are not addressed then it will impact international student satisfaction and the institution's graduate outcomes data (discussed in further detail in [Section 3.3](#)).

There are also concerns that the graduate route will increase demand from international students returning to their institution for support throughout the two years, and lead to decreased student satisfaction among those who cannot get graduate-level, post-study work.

“ Without a university business engagement strategy, all [the new graduate route] does is put more pressure on the same number (or fewer, if graduate recruitment declines) of graduate opportunities. Employers will get the pick of the best candidates from a bigger pool, which is good, but will create enormous challenges for us to support ‘disappointed’ students, both domestic and international.”

Careers and employability professional

International student satisfaction with careers service provision

Around two-thirds (64%)¹⁸ of survey respondents assess international student feedback on the careers and employability support they receive at university. It is common for institutions to use feedback received in the International Student Barometer or to measure satisfaction with the service across the entire student population and break down the data by UK/EU/international (typically through surveys, focus groups and feedback forms).

Those institutions that monitor international student satisfaction with careers and employability services rate international student satisfaction as high, but note that they are often eager for more. The biggest gap between UK/EU and international student satisfaction is work experience opportunities and graduate jobs in the UK. International students are often disappointed when employers on campus cannot offer visa sponsorship. They are also less satisfied with the information available for overseas countries. International student satisfaction is perceived to correlate with expectations, so those students who expect they will be provided with internships and will find graduate-level work are often dissatisfied.

“ I think one of the areas where there is lower satisfaction is around access to placements and UK-based job opportunities. We also know that international students on the whole are heavier users of our services than home students. Their evaluation of our services are pretty positive and beyond the access to UK jobs.”

Careers and employability professional

2.2 PRE-SESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Employability is often a selling point for university recruitment teams recruiting international students overseas, with careers services sometimes having a presence at international recruitment events and being one of the first points of contact with international students.

Students from around the world have a different awareness and understanding of the role of careers and employability services, so building this awareness and understanding of what to expect as early as possible is often a priority for services.

TABLE 3 : PRE-SESSIONAL CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Examples of current practice in the sector

Providing materials on the support offered by careers services to international recruitment teams

Embedding information on careers education, information, advice and guidance in pre-sessional English language courses

Providing online pre-arrival modules or courses on careers and employability for international students

Giving presentations about the careers service or careers and employability in the UK at pre-departure sessions or offer holder events in students' home country

Careers webinars for offer holders

“*Right from the pre-departure briefings – and even the offer holder events before they’ve even accepted the offer – we feed in messages about our employability support in meetings and through different presentations.*”

Careers and employability professional

2.3 RAISING AWARENESS OF CAREERS SERVICE ACTIVITIES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Around three quarters (77%¹⁹) of survey respondents use methods tailored to an international audience to raise international students' awareness of CEIAG (careers education, information, advice and guidance) once they have joined the institution.

TABLE 4: HOW SERVICES RAISE AWARENESS OF CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE SPECIFICALLY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Examples of current practice in the sector

Careers and employability presentations at international student welcome/orientation weeks (once they arrive at university)

Targeted start-of-term events to explain the careers service

Direct mail to international students

Section of online careers/jobs portal specifically for international students

Collaborative knowledge-sharing and marketing of services across the institution, for example, with the international office, Students' Union, cultural and national student societies, and faculties

Use of specific online and social media channels to directly engage with international students, including WeChat and Weibo

International monikers for social media accounts, managed by international student staff

Specific welcome programmes for particular cohorts (e.g. Chinese students, students on international foundation programmes)

“ *We have a consistent and strategic international employability programme of activities to raise awareness of CEIAG services to international students that begins at in-country pre-departure events and continues into Welcome Week and throughout their academic studies and beyond.*”

Careers and employability professional

CASE STUDY 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Connecting with Chinese students via WeChat

This initiative is an ongoing collaboration between the Business School and the careers service. Given that Chinese Business School students make up one of the largest cohorts of Chinese students on campus, there was shared interest in how we could use WeChat to better support Chinese students returning home.

The intention was to explore and learn how we could use WeChat to help Chinese students engage with the careers service and their own career development. In particular, to:

- share China related information and opportunities
- follow Chinese employers and receive updates regarding their recruitment activity
- connect with Chinese graduate employers.

Following a smaller trial, we emailed **4,000** Chinese students in January 2019 and throughout the second semester, we had more than **1,000** friends in discipline-based groups. We posted content twice a week. Overall, more than **70%** were satisfied with the service and they have been willing to offer frank feedback, which is not always the case in other spaces. For 2019-20, we so far have over **1,500** student friends.

We did face some challenges:

- **No public account.** A private account has limited functionality for our purposes and requires many awkward and time consuming workarounds. This has led to significant spikes in workload at key points.
- **Language barrier.** It is operating almost exclusively in Mandarin and we are heavily reliant on our student assistant language skills and their understanding of our aims and context to deliver it successfully.
- **Resources.** This was never intended to be an enquiries management system, but being our friends inevitably means some students ask us questions and we are unable to respond individually.

Despite experiencing some challenges, we found:

- Positive student engagement and feedback. WeChat has a strong following and is a very natural space to connect with students, even via a private account.
- Having student assistants managing many aspects of the service has offered greater insight into the platform and user culture, as well as the crucial Mandarin interface.
- We need to work more efficiently between our email-dominated, desk-based world and the mobile world of WeChat, including how we align WeChat with other careers service and business school processes.
- There is a lot more that could be done to explore existing WeChat groups and networks and make more systematic use of WeChat across the university.
- Content requiring people to click through to other spaces, outside of the app, is less popular than content that can be consumed within the app.

In the future we want to encourage more participation and sharing within the groups and explore how they can develop as peer support spaces. We are now connected with our first group of Chinese alumni on WeChat. This leads to questions around their ongoing support needs and opportunities for future engagement. We would like to establish a public WeChat account, which will come with a fresh set of challenges.

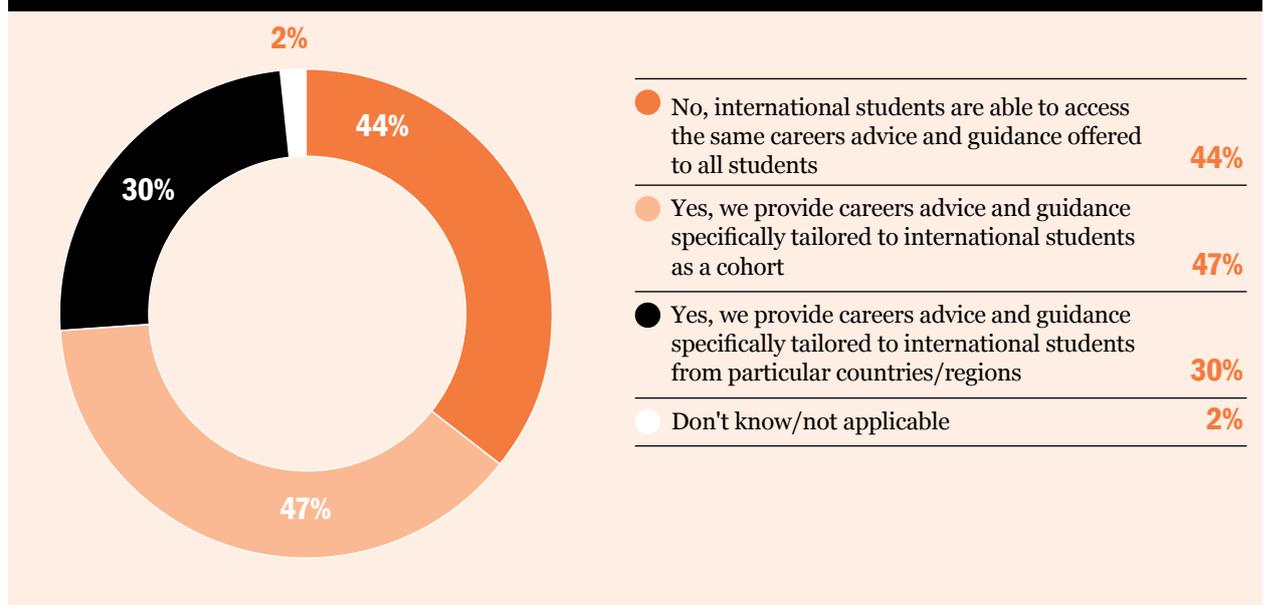
2.4 CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (CEIAG)

Key messages:

1. **47%** of institutions provide tailored careers advice and guidance to international students.
2. However, the majority (**56%**) of institutions have no specialist staff to support international student and graduate employability and **44%** do not provide specific CEIAG to international students, but instead ensure that current services are inclusive to international students.
3. Bespoke support could be valuable in helping international students develop their understanding of UK and international labour markets, personal networks, career-building and how they transition into the graduate workforce.
4. Some CEIAG topics that may warrant tailored delivery include: UK workplace etiquette and culture, visas (delivered with in partnership with experts), finding work overseas and developing business English communication skills.
5. Methods of delivering CEIAG to international students range from webpages and leaflets to ring-fenced work experience opportunities and international careers development programmes.

The survey found that **47%** of respondents provide specific CEIAG to international students, with **44%** of respondents not providing specific support to international students but instead having “inclusive provision”, with all service activities open to all students.

FIGURE 3: THE PROPORTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS THAT PROVIDE TAILORED CAREERS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



(Base: 43 valid responses. Percentages do not equal 100% of participants could select multiple options. For clarity “other” responses have been removed)

As discussed in **Section 1.3**, some aspects of employability – knowledge, skills, attributes and experience – can be developed using the same methods across diverse populations of students. But bespoke support could be valuable in helping students develop other facets of employability, such as their understanding of the labour market, personal networks (international students may not have the personal networks in the UK to support them to gain work experience here), career-building skills (which may vary across cultures) and how they transition into the graduate workforce (which may be influenced by their cultural understanding of the workplace).

When should institutions provide bespoke support for international students?

Should tailored support be provided when an institution meets a specific threshold of international student numbers? Or when the proportion of international students is over a certain percentage? Or does it depend on international student satisfaction with provision, regardless of student numbers?

In short, there is no simple answer to this question. Each institution should reflect on the size/proportion of their total international student population (or population of specific country groups), as well as the needs of their international student population and the extent to which the needs of students are currently met by provision. A data-driven approach, whereby the outcomes of international graduates are assessed against their career goals, would inform thinking in this area (data-driven approaches are discussed further in **Section 3.3**).

“*There’s a lot of funding for widening participation initiatives, which I fully support, but international students have additional support needs too and that isn’t always recognised.*”

Careers and employability professional

Of the **47%** of institutions that provide tailored advice and guidance to international students, just under a third (**30%**) provide advice and guidance specific to students from particular countries/regions.

The types of tailored careers education, information, advice and guidance provided to international students and the methods through which the CEIAG is delivered are displayed in figures 4 and 5, respectively. A summary of current practice, gathered through survey responses and qualitative interviews, is given in **Table 5**. From qualitative interviews and free-text survey responses, the most commonly discussed CEIAG topics specifically tailored to an international student audience are:

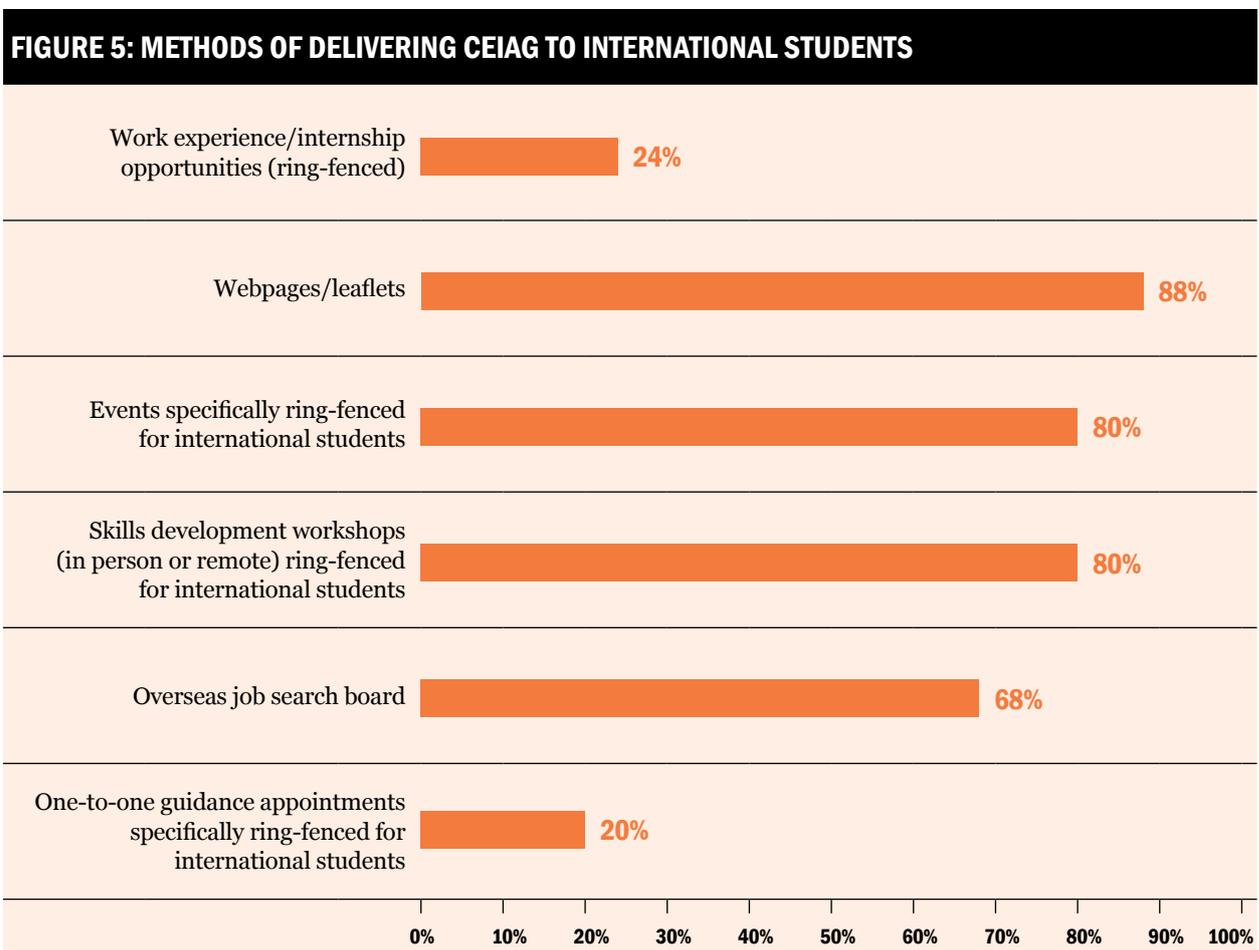
- Helping international students better understand UK workplace etiquette and culture, and expectations around recruitment and selection.
- Visas, including Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneurship visa-specific sessions and general workshops on moving from Tier 4 to a Tier 2 / 5 visa – typically delivered either in partnership with colleagues across the university (such as the international office, visa team, enterprise team or Students’ Union) or by an external organisation (such as a law firm).
- Finding a part-time job.
- Developing business English communication (as opposed to conversational English skills).

“Workshops aren’t ring-fenced in that all students can attend but some topics are likely to only be of relevance to international students.”

Careers and employability professional



(Base: 25 valid responses)



(Base: 25 valid responses)

TABLE 5: TAILORED CEIAG PROVIDED TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**Examples of current practice in the sector**

Advice and guidance about recruitment processes for graduate roles in the UK

Advice and guidance about getting a graduate job in their home country

Advice and guidance about immigration rules and applying for visas

Advice and guidance about getting a job in another international region/country

One-to-one guidance appointments specifically ring-fenced for international students

Work experience/internship²⁰ opportunities (ring-fenced)

Provision of overseas jobs board

Skills development workshops or talks (in-person or remote) ring-fenced for international students

Events specifically for international students

Webpages/leaflets

Workshops and/or sessions for cohorts of students from specific countries

Alumni-student mentoring platform where international students have the opportunity to seek mentoring and career advice from international graduates

Regular and consistent workshops (rather than single, one-off workshops) on topics of value for international students

Specific vacancy systems for certain cohorts, e.g. Chinese students

International careers development programmes (pathways of workshops specifically for international students)

International employability week

²⁰ In this report, internships are defined as a shorter period of work experience that can be completed during or outside of term-time, for example, in the summer.

CASE STUDY 2

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY

The Empower Programme

Empower was established to consider the wider support needs of non-UK students in developing abilities to realise their career potential. We recognised that it would benefit non-UK students if the range of services delivering targeted support coordinated and clarified their offers for ease of access and improved impact. The resulting program is designed to encourage student interaction, empower students to explore ideas, plan ways forward and fully utilise our wider university support networks, through a strong blend of group delivery and tailored support through mentoring opportunities.

We support students to translate their ideas into their applications and resulting interactions with future employers, while also developing their abilities in collaborating with other students and staff mentors. This further personal development feature encourages goal setting to achieve aspirations. Empower provides three core sessions, focused on:

1. Understanding timelines and career journeys
2. Networking and presenting ideas to others
3. Identifying and applying for realistic opportunities

From 2019–20 we have added a fourth session: ‘resilience’. It was recognised that – with current visa restrictions – international students may experience more obstacles or knockbacks to their career plans. The resilience workshop is designed and positioned to help participants to harness these challenges into opportunities.

Students receive mentoring opportunities at the end of the programme that are targeted to their individual needs. This was included through recognition that the programme needs to support individual needs, as opposed to careers professionals deciding what will benefit students the most. Mentoring could be with specialist enterprise staff (if the student is interested in entrepreneurship) the Student Union’s International Officers and Buddy Café scheme (if they want to improve their English), or through the University Centre for Global Engagement (if the student is willing to explore UK and overseas placement²¹ opportunities).

After completing the Empower programme, our students become ‘Empower Graduates’ and support the next cohort of students that participate in the programme by delivering key content. Our Empower Graduates are also encouraged to provide case-studies of their experience and consider how they can support future students.

We have received some really strong feedback from students about the programme, including that it has helped them to become more confident in how they demonstrate their skills to employers, in line with UK customs. It has also helped in considering how this knowledge and understanding would transfer to overseas markets.

However, we have also faced some challenges and made the following changes:

- Students are often not available at times when sessions are being delivered. Due to this, a media rich, program platform is being developed online to increase learning accessibility and flexibility.
- We have improved on how we capture participant information and showcase Empower Alumni experiences.
- We now make better use of career registration information, so that ‘at risk’ student groups can be encouraged to participate in the programme. This will improve programme impact and ROI.

In future, we plan to engage more student numbers, through better identification of key student groups and their needs in relation to UK job searches. We will evolve the programme with each delivery to consider changes to legislation and the employment market.

²¹ In this report, placements are defined as an extended period of work experience (usually between 6 – 12 months) undertaken during term-time often between final and penultimate year of study.

CASE STUDY 3

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

China Career Gateway programme

In 2018-19, Chinese students represented around **40%** of all international students studying on Newcastle's main campus. The Careers Service decided to enhance its careers support for Chinese students by developing a series of bespoke workshops to help students develop strategies and skills to better plan for their career and make effective job applications in both countries.

The initial programme ran during autumn 2018 as a six-week pilot, open to all undergraduate and postgraduate Chinese students, as well as other students interested in working in China. The sessions covered a broad range of topics, including key features of the UK and Chinese graduate labour markets, UK and Chinese CV writing, developing professional English skills for the workplace and a workshop on Chinese recruitment processes, delivered in partnership with Chinese recruitment platform LockinChina. We shared insight into both the UK and Chinese labour markets to capture the attention of Chinese students eager to start their graduate career in the UK, as well as those intent on returning home.

Overall, **220** students participated in the pilot programme, with **100%** of survey and focus group participants stating that China Career Gateway made them feel more prepared for the UK and Chinese labour markets.

China Career Gateway was delivered for a second time in autumn 2019, with overall student attendance increasing by **92%**.

We collaborated closely with the university's alumni department, NU Advancement, to ensure greater career insight from Chinese alumni was embedded into the programme. Written and video profiles from Chinese alumni highlighted the challenges Chinese students face in securing employment and provided advice on how to overcome these.

We also trialled a 'WeChat takeover', allowing students to connect with alumni based in China to ask their career-related questions.

High student engagement has indicated both the importance of delivering a bespoke offer for international student groups and the positive impact this can have on the international student experience. Although creating, promoting and delivering a bespoke programme at the busiest time of year has been challenging, China Career Gateway has empowered Chinese students, as well as students interested in working in China, to kick-start their graduate career.

In collaboration with Newcastle University's International Recruitment Team, we are considering how the programme can be used at the beginning of the student lifecycle, through promotion during recruitment talks and pre-departure briefings as a key part of Newcastle's offer for Chinese students.

As programme delivery only runs for a short period during the autumn term, we have also developed online masterclasses to provide insight into the Chinese labour market and guidance for students looking to work in China, accessible to all students across Newcastle's UK and overseas campuses throughout the year.

“ *China Career Gateway helped me gain a clearer understanding of both the UK and Chinese job markets...I didn't consider job hunting before, but this programme propels me to start thinking about my career path.*”

China Career Gateway participant

Specialist staff resource/specialist support

Just over half (**56%**) of the institutions surveyed have no specialist staff support for international student/graduate employability (see **Figure 3**). However, many institutions do have some staff with supporting international student/graduate employability within their remit or who have it as a responsibility shared across a team.

For the institutions that do provide specialist staff support, this is typically within careers and employability services or other professional services.

“In the past, we had a dedicated resource for international students, which was about developing and championing what we were doing for international students. And about six months ago, when we were looking at service structures and priorities, we decided that we weren’t going to keep that same format. And I think that was a recognition of the fact that what we’re doing has become so mainstreamed and so much part and parcel of everything that we do.”

Careers and employability professional

“We have no specialist support, but we regularly upskill the whole team across all roles on working with international students, and develop region-specific LMI projects to support our largest cohorts of students.”

Careers and employability professional



(Base: 43 valid responses. NB: Percentages do not add up to 100% as participants were able to choose multiple options.)

Of those institutions that employ specialist staff to support international graduate employability, **55%** have between 1 and 2 FTE staff with the responsibility for international graduate employability based in the careers and employability service, **27%** have less than one FTE and **18%** have 3 to 4 FTE²².

²² Based on 11 respondents who answered that they have specific staff resource to support international graduate employability in the previous question.

2.5 CURRICULAR AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Key messages:

1. While less than half (**40%**) of survey respondents monitor engagement of international students with curricular and extracurricular activities that develop employability, **50%** of those that do regard international student participation in these activities to be greater than UK-domiciled student participation.
2. Careers services will often work in interdisciplinary teams to ensure that curricular and extracurricular activities are inclusive to international students, and often incorporate specific guidance for international students within activities.
3. Targeted employability support to postgraduate taught (PGT) international students through embedded work experiences (including internships, placements and “real world” projects) can be effective but must be designed with consultation from careers and employability professionals and international students.

Embedded, or curricular, employability is defined as activities that enhance and develop employability that happen within the curriculum, often with mandatory/assessed elements. Extracurricular employability activities are activities that are specifically designed to develop employability skills but are voluntary and delivered outside of the curriculum. This definition does not cover forms of extracurricular activities that are not specifically designed to develop employability, such as sports teams or societies (though we do recognise that they develop employability).

TABLE 6: EXAMPLES OF CURRICULAR AND EXTRACURRICULAR EMPLOYABILITY ACTIVITIES

Employability skills awards (extracurricular)

Micro placements embedded in curricula (curricular)*

“Real-world”/employer-led projects (curricular)

Business competitions and games, e.g. hackathons (can be extracurricular or curricular)

Volunteering opportunities with employability outcomes (extracurricular)

Consultancy projects with employers (can be extracurricular or curricular)

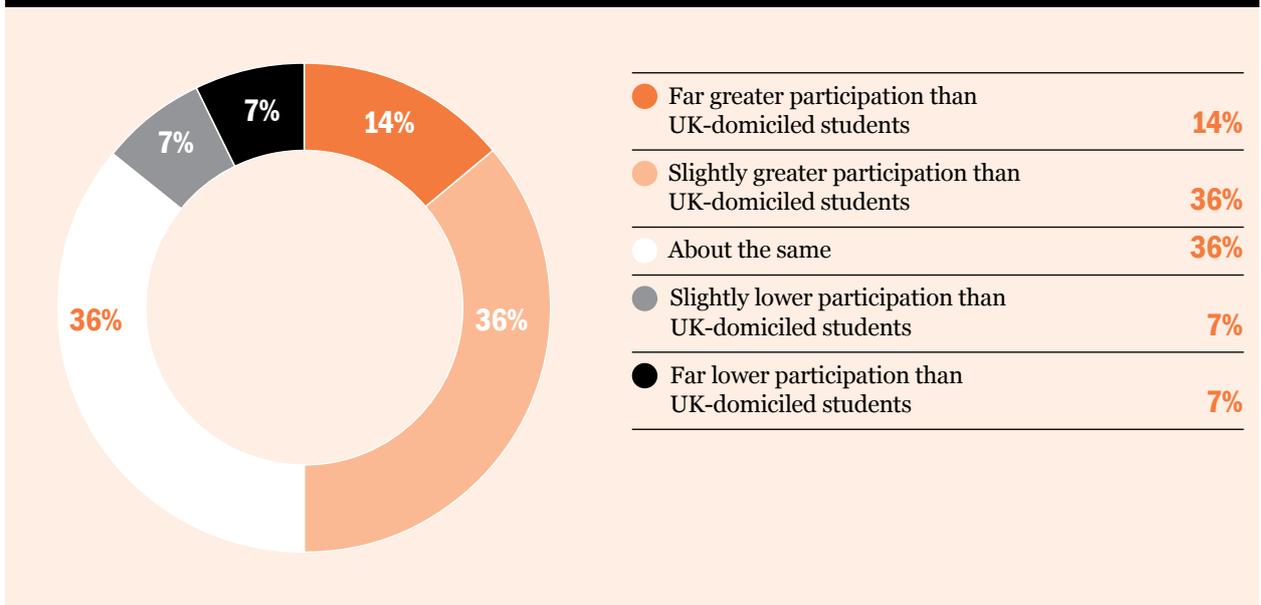
Employability mentoring programmes (extracurricular)

*Non-curricular forms of UK work experience, including internships and placements, are discussed in [Section 2.7](#)

Less than half (40%) of survey respondents monitor engagement of international students with curricular and extracurricular activities that develop employability. Engagement with curricular employability is measured through feedback surveys after the activity. Engagement with extracurricular activities is monitored through the take-up of employability awards and using online CRM/booking systems to see who has booked or attended extracurricular activities.

Of those respondents who monitor engagement with curricular and extracurricular employability activities, 50% regard international student participation as either slightly greater or far greater than UK-domiciled student participation (see Figure 4). This is not the case for all institutions, however, as 14% believe participation is slightly lower or far lower than for UK-domiciled student.

FIGURE 7: PARTICIPATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CURRICULAR AND EXTRACURRICULAR EMPLOYABILITY ACTIVITIES VERSUS UK-DOMICILED STUDENTS



(Base: 17 valid responses)

“There is high uptake [of curricular and extracurricular employability activities] as students understand the value employers place on it and are highly invested in their career. There is a completion gap between home and international students... We think the gap is due to pressures of studying in a second language/competing demands on master's students.”

Careers and employability professional

“International student preferences vary greatly – some are very keen to be involved in extracurricular activities, whereas others choose to focus on their studies. In many ways this is similar to our home student population.”

Careers and employability professional

Only 32%²³ of respondents measure international student satisfaction with curricular and extracurricular activities. Of those that do, this data is normally captured through feedback surveys after the activity or through the International Student Barometer. When assessing satisfaction with curricular and extracurricular activities, respondents stated that while they can separate out international student feedback from UK-domiciled student feedback, this was not something they did regularly.

Those respondents that measure international student satisfaction with curricular and extracurricular activities perceive satisfaction to be high, but this was not evidenced with data.



ONLINE SURVEY
iGraduate International Student Barometer

iGraduate’s international student barometer is an online survey. It is a paid for service and institutions that take part are provided with data which helps them to understand and compare the decision-making, expectations, perceptions and intentions of their international students from application to graduation.

Curricular and extracurricular employability activities have to be suitable for all students who take part, whether via their course (curricular) or outside their academic learning (extracurricular). Careers services will often work in interdisciplinary teams to ensure that these activities are inclusive to all students, including those who are not UK-domiciled (Table 6)

TABLE 6: WAYS IN WHICH SERVICES MAKE CURRICULAR AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES INCLUSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
Current practice in ensuring curricular and extracurricular activities are inclusive to the needs of international students
Embedding information about UK workplace culture in any preparatory sessions (for example prior to working on a volunteering/consultancy project or completing a micro-placement)
Ensuring guidance around volunteering and embedded work experience takes into consideration restrictions around working and volunteering that may impact on international students’ visa restrictions
Considering how employability awards can meet the needs of both international students who want to gain work experience or graduate work in the UK and those who wish to return home
Ensuring a range of employers with diverse backgrounds and opportunities (ideally including those who recruit to overseas locations) are reflected in micro-placements, employer-led projects and skills awards
Putting consistent feedback mechanisms in place to ensure that curricular and extracurricular activities meet the needs of international students

23 Based on 41 respondents

THE POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT (PGT) CHALLENGE

Over **80%** of Chinese undergraduates²⁴ and over **40%** of undergraduates from Hong Kong²⁵ progress to postgraduate study somewhere in the world after graduation. Indeed, international students make up **36%** of postgraduate students in the UK²⁶. Targeting employability support to PGT international students is sensible, but can be challenging as students are on campus for a very short length of time and face visa restrictions. Postgraduate taught programmes with embedded work experience (either a placement, internship²⁷ or project) help students gain work experience in this context and are popular with international students. In a focus group carried out with international students from across the world studying the same MSc course, five out of the six students had opted to pay an additional sum to study a degree with embedded professional experience. All students cited the opportunity to get work experience in the UK as one of their top three reasons for choosing the institution and the UK to study.

For PGT courses with embedded work experience (placements, projects or internships) to be successful, there must be:

- sufficient resources within careers services or faculties to ensure that enough quality opportunities are sourced and that students have adequate support when sourcing their own
- international student input to ensure that courses with embedded work placements meet their expectations and needs in terms of practical considerations and visa restrictions.

“*[As part of the course] we get an opportunity to do an internship with some company over here but we have no idea about when the dates are so everybody’s quite confused. We don’t know when we will start the internship and we have our accommodation contract for one year, so that means we might waste three months of the contract, which we’ve already paid in full in advanced, and then when we come back from internship we have to pay more to find another place to stay for three months. We weren’t told any of this beforehand.*”

PGT student from Malaysia

Embedded employability/work experience can particularly benefit PGT students but should be developed in consultation with careers/employability professionals, student feedback and ideally employer feedback. Pre-sessional support and careers information should be leveraged to ensure students have been introduced to their careers departments, key graduate recruitment timings and support offered by their institution before they arrive.

²⁴ 84% of 2016/17 graduates, 81% of 2015/16 and 2014/15 graduates. Three Year Trend Analysis of UK-educated International Graduate Outcomes. The University of Warwick

²⁵ 43% of 2016/17 graduates, 49% of 2015/16 graduates and 44% of 2014/15 graduates. Three Year Trend Analysis of UK-educated International Graduate Outcomes. The University of Warwick

²⁶ *International facts and figures 2019*, UUKi

²⁷ Internships are defined as a shorter period of work experience that can be completed during or outside of term-time for example in the summer

CASE STUDY 4

THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Big Team Challenge

8

days

8

corporate
partners

1,200

participating
students

As part of our Induction activities, all new undergraduate and MSc students take part in The Big Team Challenge. This is an opportunity for students to get to know and work with their new classmates, while working on a challenge set by one of our Corporate Partners (employers we work closely with for placements, graduate roles or projects). Often the Corporate Partner may be seeking student insights into how to better target a global millennial audience for their recruitment process, products or services. Students work under time pressure to present their proposals to the Corporate Partner, and prizes are awarded for the best performing teams.

This is a great way for students to get a taste of the challenges facing UK companies, and to see how their international outlook and knowledge can play a part in helping to answer those challenges. This early exposure to our Corporate Partners underlines to students the importance of enhancing their employability during their time at university. It also fits with the School of Management's ethos of being 'research-intensive and practice-driven', producing well-rounded graduates who can apply their academic knowledge in a work context.

Through the Big Team Challenge, we hoped to achieve the following aims:

- Students get to know and work with classmates. We organise teams to promote integration between international and UK students
- Students meet with and work on a corporate project at the start of their degree
- Students understand the challenges facing UK corporate contacts
- Students understand the importance of enhancing their employability during their university degree
- Students understand the importance of engaging with the Careers team from the start of the year
- Enhance corporate engagement to enable closer interaction on other activities throughout the year.

The logistics of organising large events like this when students have only just arrived can be challenging. But corporate engagement activities like this are a key point of differentiation for the School of Management, and used in our marketing material. So generally students are well aware of these activities and highly motivated to participate in them.

We have run the Big Team Challenge for 10 years and the format constantly evolves to changing student numbers and demographics, and corporate needs. It makes it dynamic and exciting to be involved with.

“What I’ve discovered is that sometimes [course directors and university managers] seem to work very closely with the recruitment people who do some scoping out about what kinds of master’s courses are being demanded in the market... but they forget to include us... Had I been consulted, I would have strongly recommended that it wasn’t the best model and suggested they could look at other ways of [designing a master’s module with professional experience] that might be better.”

Careers and employability professional

CASE STUDY 5

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

Applied Consultancy Project

Many overseas masters’ students in the School of Business desire UK work experience, but the challenges of sourcing large numbers of internships in a small city mean that offering internships is not always possible. There was previously an opportunity for a limited number of students to do an eight-week internship through our partners, Intern CVMM, or students could do desk-based research. However, student numbers have increased from 200 per year to around 400, so there was a strong need to increase our offering of professional work experience for our students. To fill this gap between internships and desk-based research, and to respond to the needs of this cohort of students, in 2017–18 we piloted the Applied Consultancy Project. While the projects are open to all students studying the course, the majority of students on masters’ programmes in the business school are international.

Our employer engagement officer sourced live business questions from local companies. Companies presented the questions to the students, who worked with the companies on a consultancy basis to find solutions. Support was given by the careers adviser to prepare students for their consultancy roles, and consider the skills they would need to be effective.

Students worked as a group, but submitted their findings individually as credit-bearing reports (instead of a more traditional dissertation) as part of their master’s programmes.

We experienced some challenges:

- Students studying conversion master’s programmes come from a variety of academic backgrounds with varying experience and communication skills to study business courses.
- International students had problems understanding the business questions set.

It is not clear at this stage to what extent the reports produced are useful to the companies, but we hope to address this with:

- more involvement from academic staff at an early stage so that they fully understand the questions set, and can advise the students effectively
- an invitation to academics to come to the meetings with the companies, so that they have the same information that the students have
- a stronger message to students that they need to manage their time effectively and not leave things until the last minute.

2.6 ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As with CEIAG, most institutions (91%²⁸) provide entrepreneurship activities that are open to all students. While it is common for institutions to provide entrepreneurship support to international students seeking to start a business in the UK (49%), it is less common for institutions to provide support to students – not just international students – starting businesses overseas (14%). This may reflect a lack of knowledge within careers services, and universities more widely, about overseas labour markets and any visa implications (discussed in further detail in Section 2.8).

The extent to which careers and employability services are involved in the delivery and facilitation of enterprise and entrepreneurship activities varies between institutions, with some holding responsibility for these activities, some working in partnership with other services (often enterprise teams in the institution) and others simply signposting students to relevant services. It is important to note that advice on visas can only be delivered by specific trained and authorised individuals in an institution, so joining up with those teams is absolutely essential for legal reasons.

TABLE 7: CURRENT PRACTICE BY INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Current practice in supporting international student enterprise and entrepreneurship

Sponsorship of Start-up visas. The number of visas that can be sponsored by an institution is typically between 10 and 20 per year. Some institutions use a competitive pitching process to allocate sponsorship

Workshops for international students on how to apply for the Start-up visa

Support for those looking to start their own business through workshops, peer-learning groups, speaker series, socials and one-to-one coaching

Referring students and graduates, including Start-up visa recipients, to Local Enterprise Partnerships, business incubators and other local organisations for further guidance and support

Remote coaching via Skype and phone calls for graduates who have returned to their home countries/other country to start a business

Promoting availability to Start-up visa recipients of business adviser who works with them on a one-to-one basis throughout the duration of their visa. Encouragement to stay in touch with their community of university business advisers once they have left the scheme, so that they can keep accessing business support providers well beyond the duration of the visa

Provision of physical office space for Start-up visa recipients

Establishing links or mentoring arrangements between current and previous Start-up visa recipients

Support for Start-up visa recipients to explore their visa options beyond initial endorsement, through workshops aimed at introducing them to different kinds of appropriate visas and introductions to other potential endorsing bodies

²⁸ Base: 43 valid responses. Percentages do not total 100 as respondents were able to select multiple responses.

2.7 SUPPORT TO GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE OR GRADUATE-LEVEL EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK

Key messages:

1. Demand from international students for UK work experience is high, with **61%** of respondents rating their appetite for UK work experience as greater than UK-domiciled students.
2. **30%** of respondents provide tailored support to international students to gain UK-based work experience, with a small number (**7%**) providing or facilitating work experience opportunities in the UK for international students.
3. Careers and employability services face challenges when supporting international students to gain work experience in the UK, including high expectations of support and of expectations of suitable opportunities that they will be able to apply for.
4. Two thirds (**65%**) of survey respondents perceive there to be a difference in how UK employers view offering work experience to UK and EU-domiciled students versus international students, with visa regulations and sponsorship cited as the greatest barrier to UK employers hiring international students and graduates.
5. Careers and employability professionals cited concerns that UK employers may lack understanding and awareness of visas and regulations, yet only **9%** undertake initiatives to support UK employers recruit international students.

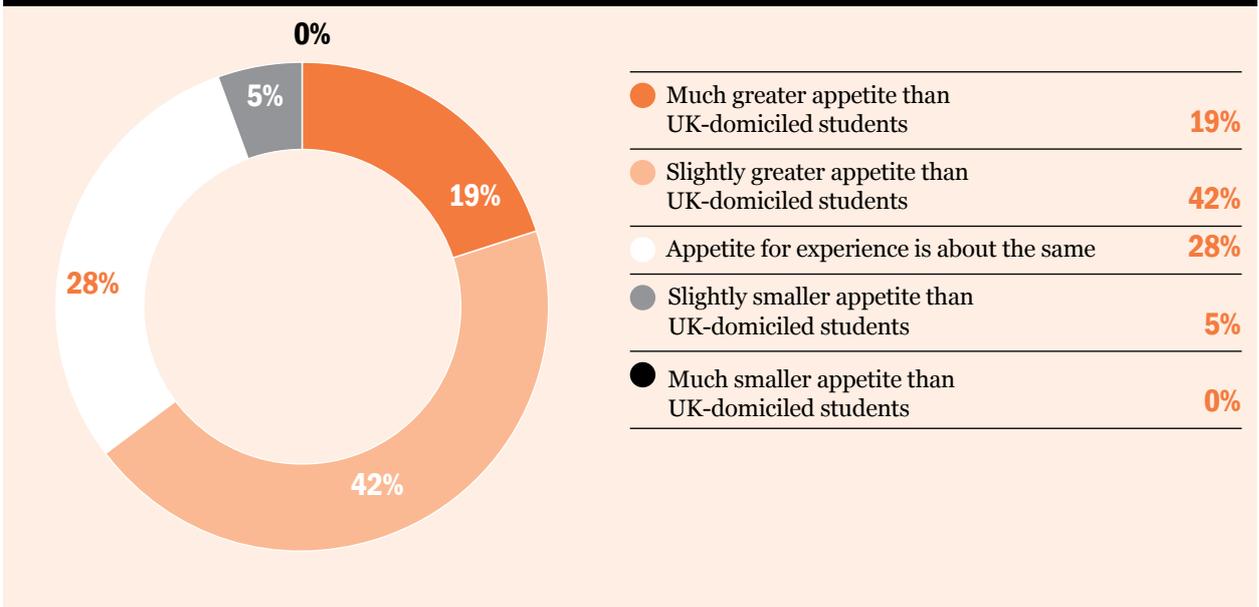
Despite a perceived trend in recent years that the number of international students who want to stay in the UK for work after they graduate has decreased, both anecdotal evidence and evidence from student interviews suggests that most want to gain at least some work experience in the UK, including part-time work, internships (defined as a shorter period of work experience that can be completed during or outside of term-time, for example in the summer), placements (defined as an extended period of work experience, usually between six and 12 months, undertaken during term-time, often between the penultimate and final year of study) and graduate jobs.

“ I would like to work [in the UK] for a short period of time before I go back because I believe that once you have learned something, you should put it into practice... I want to see what I've done with my skills and explore using them in the workplace. But then ultimately, maybe in five years at most, I want to go back home.”

Taught postgraduate student from Ghana

A total of **61%** of respondents perceive that international students' appetite for UK work experience is either much greater (**19%**) or slightly greater (**42%**) than UK-domiciled students (see **Figure 8**). Only **5%** think that their appetite for work experience is slightly less than UK-domiciled students and none think that it is much less.

FIGURE 8: PERCEIVED APPETITE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOR UK WORK EXPERIENCE COMPARED TO UK-DOMICILED STUDENTS



(Base: 43 valid responses. Percentages do not equal 100% as “unsure” has been removed for clarity)

Why is appetite for UK work experience so high amongst international students?

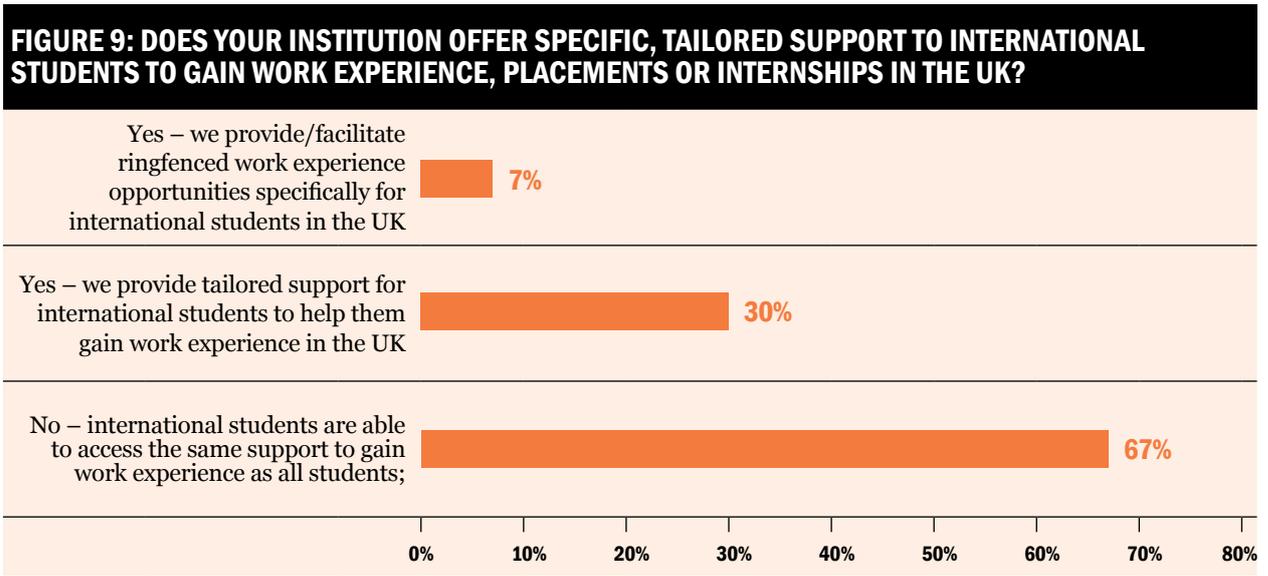
There is increasing recognition, both by international students and HE professionals, that a degree in the UK is no longer enough to make international students stand out in either the UK or international graduate labour market. They may also have lost knowledge of or connections to the graduate labour market of their home countries due to living and studying overseas for years, which adds another disadvantage to their job hunting after they return home. UK work experience helps international graduates develop their standard of English and adds value to their degree, both improving their chances of getting a graduate job in the UK and differentiating them from their domestically-educated peers in their home job markets.

Just over half (**51%**²⁹) of survey respondents monitor international student engagement with support from their careers services to gain work experience in the UK. Engagement is commonly measured through uptake of formal placement and internship schemes, attendance at relevant events or engagement with careers service jobs portals (through applications or clicks).

Those services that monitor engagement report that international students on engineering, business and management courses are the most engaged with careers service support to gain work experience in the UK. Anecdotally, there has been an increase over recent years in the number of international postgraduate students seeking work experience (including placements and internships) in the UK, which may have led to the proliferation of masters’ courses with integrated work experience at UK universities.

Because of the barriers that prevent undergraduate international students undertaking a placement year opportunity, namely cost to the student and lack of opportunities, it is difficult to assess true demand for placements. It is important to note that while placement years are typically paid and the fee for a placement year is normally lower than a normal year of their degree, the perceived cost to the student – on top of the fees they already pay – may reduce the number of students who undertake a placement. Assessing international student uptake of and demand for placement years can also be difficult as placement schemes are often coordinated by faculties, meaning that the data is not available to careers and employability services.

Figure 9 shows that two-thirds of institutions (**67%**) provide inclusive support, whereby international students are able to access the same support to gain work experience as all students. **30%** of respondents provide tailored support to international students and only **7%** (three respondents) provide or facilitate ringfenced work experience opportunities in the UK.



(Base: 43 valid responses. Percentages do not equal 100 as participants were able to select multiple options. Unsure/not applicable removed from chart for clarity.)

29 Base: 43 valid responses

Barriers to international students gaining UK work experience

Careers and employability services face challenges when supporting international students to gain work experience in the UK. Students often have high expectations of support, influenced by their cultural backgrounds, courses of study, future plans, and expectations of suitable opportunities that they will be able to apply for. This is often not the case: there is a perceived lack of UK work experience opportunities available (including graduate jobs, internships and placements), and due to intense competition, those which do exist are hard for international students to obtain. By way of example, the website Student Circus has advertised **8,000** positions since 2017 but **30,000** international students have registered to use the site over the same period.

Time constraints, particularly on taught postgraduate students, can further disadvantage those who do not start seeking work experience early. International students may also require support very early in their programmes, given graduate scheme deadlines in the autumn, to understand the how to successfully apply for roles and transition to work in the UK.



PROFILE PROVIDER

Student Circus

Student Circus is a job search platform for international students in the UK. It was set up in 2017 by two international students who were sponsored by their university to gain Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneur visas so that they could make their idea for how to help international students find work experience in the UK a reality. The service's unique selling point is that all jobs posted on the platform are from employers that have a Tier 2 sponsorship license and accept applications from international students. Apart from jobs, the platform also presents internships and placements for students. The website has over **30,000** users and has advertised more than **8,000** roles since 2017.

“*We are the intermediary between students wishing to remain in the UK after graduation and a limited number of available opportunities. So many will engage with us in the hope we can have an impact on that situation – and express their frustration to us about a reality over which we obviously have no control.*”

Careers and employability professional

“*[International students] have considerable anxieties, uncertainties and often misplaced aspirations for the connection between getting UK work experience and the likelihood of a visa. We spend a lot of time managing expectations.*”

Careers and employability professional

Approximately two thirds (65%) of survey respondents perceive there to be a difference in how UK employers view offering work experience to UK and EU-domiciled students versus international students, with UK visas and legislation cited as the biggest perceived barrier to UK employers recruiting international students. This reflects the opinions of employers gathered through qualitative interviews. All employers interviewed – albeit a small sample size of seven – stated that the biggest barrier to them in recruiting international students is restrictive visa regulations. The cost and time involved in sponsorship – as well as fear of getting it wrong – is also flagged as a barrier to recruiting international students and graduates by both careers and employability professionals and graduate employers.

“*If you are the best qualified person at the end of it [the recruitment process], then we’ll offer you a role and we’ll go through [the sponsorship] process. If all things being considered equal, you perform the same as somebody that doesn’t require a visa, I’d then choose the person that doesn’t need a visa.*”

Employer perspective – corporate

Concerns were also raised by careers and employability professionals about the lack of awareness among employers regarding visas and legislation for students on placements and other forms of work experience.

Some employers spoke about a reticence to recruit international students for internships and placements because they currently cannot be part of their pipeline for graduate roles. The new graduate route, allowing students to work for two years after graduation, may change this behaviour somewhat, but only if employers understand the implications of the new route.

Only 9%³⁰ of services that responded undertake initiatives to help UK employers recruit international students. Many respondents flagged that they would like to do more to encourage UK employers to recruit international students, but found it difficult due to resource constraints, employer engagement not being in their remit, or being uncertain about how best to support UK employers to recruit international students. Encouraging employers to offer short work experience opportunities or consultancy projects to international students could be a small step towards helping employers feel able to offer longer-term options.

“*Before we make an offer, we’ll get it verified that they’ve got the right to work in the UK. Then there is added complexity around the official end of their course. At some universities the end of their course isn’t until the official end in October, whereas our programme starts in September, which means that they have to comply with the restrictions on their BRP of working 20 hours a week, so we wouldn’t be able to support their offer. It’s a significant challenge.*”

Employer perspective – corporate

One area the employers involved in this study did not typically perceive a barrier, but careers and employability professionals did, is international students' language skills and understanding of UK work culture. Again, it is important to note that this was a very small sample size of employers who all had positive experiences of recruiting international students and graduates.

“ I think the main barrier is their English, which means they're not getting through the initial stages of recruitment processes. We also thought that perhaps a lack of work experience, particularly for the postgraduate students who have studied elsewhere at undergraduate level and then come here but have never worked – they've got nothing to draw on when they're actually writing applications.”

Careers and employability professional

CASE STUDY 6

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Understanding SME's views on recruiting international students and graduates

In summer 2019, the careers service at The University of Sheffield conducted a small survey to develop a clearer understanding of UK SME employers' views on recruiting international students/graduates.

The survey found different results when UK SME employers recruited international students/graduates for different types of vacancies. It suggested that:

- Employers are more likely to recruit international students for short-term, project-based placements than for casual part-time work or graduate jobs.
- The main reason employers did not usually consider them for casual intern roles was a belief that international students needed more time to develop an understanding of what the business and the industry involves, as well as to adapt to UK business culture.
- Few UK employers recruited international graduates, due to the complexity of the restricted UK visa regulations. This in turn deterred the creation of a talent pipeline through recruitment of international students into year-long placements.

Many employers recognised and benefited from the positive attitude, skills and contribution that were made by international students, such as creativity, diversity, diligence, positive work ethic, fluency in a second language, and knowledge and understanding of a different culture. At the same time, employers identified characteristics that might make it more difficult for international students to make an impact within organisations, particularly where they might be engaged on a relatively short-term basis. Integration into UK culture and developing an appropriate level of English can be difficult and take time, and can result in a lack of confidence among international students. Limited longer-term employment prospects within the UK can often be demotivating for international students and consequently they are less likely to regard a short-term work opportunity as a springboard to permanent work with that employer in the future.

TABLE 8: SUPPORT PROVIDED BY CAREERS SERVICES TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE (INCLUDING PLACEMENTS AND INTERNSHIPS) IN THE UK

Provide tailored support to help international students gain work experience in the UK, e.g. workshops on finding work experience and internships that focus on challenges specific to international students.

Provide/facilitate ringfenced work experience and volunteering opportunities specifically for international students in the UK (only 7% of respondents provide this)

Signpost employers to guidelines on recruiting international students or providing support webpages to employers

Ask organisations advertising on university jobs portals, attending careers fairs or speaking at events whether they can sponsor international students and and, if so, ensuring that international students have this information.

Run specific pre-careers-fair sessions for international students to help them understand how to successfully navigate a UK careers fair

Provide national Insurance number processing workshops

Gain feedback on international student satisfaction with support to gain UK work experience

Build questions about whether UK-based employers hire international students into employer interactions (including via jobs portal when posting an online job vacancy) and up-skill employer-facing teams to signpost employers to up-to-date advice and resources

Gather employer-facing case studies demonstrating the benefits of hiring an international student/graduate

Gather student-facing case studies showcasing other international students who have gained UK work experience or graduate jobs

NB: some of the examples listed in this table are open to all students, rather than just international students.

CASE STUDY 7

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

International Talent Pool

The aim of this project was to work with local business to find paid work opportunities suitable for international students. Through a cross-university working group, research from other universities and anecdotal evidence, we found that international students found it difficult to secure beneficial work experience and a clear need was identified. Having liaised with a local international trade adviser at the Department for International Trade, we also identified a need on the part of employers, who did not feel confident to do business globally because of language/cultural barriers. The project sought to address both challenges by linking international students with local companies to support their global business activities. Funding was accessed from UKCISA for one of their project support grants.

The project developed paid opportunities for international students with businesses, primarily in the local area. In order to meet the diverse student need and fit within Tier 4 visa restrictions, roles took a variety of forms: some were short-term full-time opportunities over holiday periods and others were part-time ongoing opportunities. In total, **23** students/graduates from **13** different countries were placed through the funded year of the programme (2017-18).

One of the main challenges we faced related to converting initial employer interest into actual job opportunities. There seemed to be a variety of reasons behind this, for example, the timing of students' availability compared to employer need, the logistics of getting new roles through HR and employers having existing internship programmes that took precedence.

The project team sought to maintain close dialogue with companies to establish the likelihood of a job role materialising, and making a clear decision to drop leads and refocus efforts elsewhere was a key part of the employer engagement strategy.

The breadth of opportunities was not quite as hoped as the majority were based around language need and within the areas of marketing and communications.

- More flexibility was required regarding the make-up of opportunities than initially anticipated (internships within holiday periods) to fit with employer need.
- Awareness of the legality of offering opportunities to only an international cohort was important. Although the university's legal team advised this could happen through 'positive action', it was decided that roles would be open to all eligible applicants.
- Convincing employers to pay did not prove as much of an issue as was perhaps anticipated.

There was a real appetite for this project, both from employers and students, and strategically within the university. We developed close partnerships with local employers that have been maintained, and the programme and offer have continued and developed on the basis of evaluation received.

2.8 SUPPORT TO ENTER AN OVERSEAS LABOUR MARKET

Key messages:

1. Most services (**84%**) help their students understand overseas labour markets, with priority regions defined by student demand, locations with high proportions of alumni and countries where overseas campuses are based.
2. The value of English language skills overseas is recognised by careers and employability professionals and there are concerns that international students are not sufficiently developing these skills while studying. Facilitating opportunities for interaction between UK, EU and international students can help build cross-cultural learning and provide international students with opportunities to speak English.
3. Most survey respondents provide information about working in other countries (**83%**), advertise overseas vacancies (**75%**) and host workshops/events with overseas employers (**69%**).
4. Almost three-quarters (**72%**) of services have built relationships with employers/recruiters overseas. The majority of these respondents (**77%**) prioritise building relationships with employers in target regions, and some (**47%**) prioritise building relationships with organisations in target sectors and industries.
5. Investment in targeted employer engagement with overseas employers and other resources to support international students returning home is recommended.

Existing studies on career and employment outcomes for students returning home offer quite mixed findings. The International Graduate Outcomes survey, for example, found that many students returning to Asia see their UK experience as giving them an advantage and, consequently, superior earning potential compared to peers that remained at home³¹. However, other studies suggest that the lack of local networks and loss of knowledge of labour markets in their home countries may in fact be detrimental to graduate outcomes³².

This suggests that there is a clear need to provide better, more comprehensive and up-to-date labour market information (LMI), and that creating opportunities to connect with employers overseas is vital to support the employability of international students returning home or moving elsewhere. Further, there may be structural or process enhancements that can help ensure that international graduates returning to their home country experience a more seamless transition into employment. In China, for example, it is critically important that the state and prospective employers are able to verify qualifications quickly, and there is a preference for using centralised, shared services for this purpose. In the UK, the Higher Education Degree Datacheck Service is the preferred point of contact (rather than liaising with institutions directly). Using such services helps to ensure that returning students experience the shortest possible delays in having their qualifications verified, and are therefore able to enter work sooner.

³¹ *International graduate outcomes 2019*. UUKi

³² *Employability in focus: Exploring employer perceptions of overseas graduates returning to China (2018)*. British Council ITG

In total **84%**³³ of respondents help their students (both UK and international) understand the labour market outside the UK, **14%** do not provide help and the others answered “unsure/not applicable”. There is an obvious recognition that careers and employability professionals cannot be experts on every labour market in the world, so expertise and resource is led by demand (students’ country of domicile, locations with high proportions of alumni and countries where overseas campuses are based). China, India, Nigeria, Hong Kong and Malaysia are common countries where services invest to understand their graduate labour market.

Some services also conduct surveys of their international students’ intentions and preferences post-graduation and monitor their career interest areas (sometimes through **Careers Registration**³⁴).

“It is difficult to develop and maintain labour market information and employer relationships abroad with limited financial resources. Our international students come from many different countries and we do not have the staff resource currently to develop in-depth knowledge of different countries.”

The importance of English overseas

In a recent study of Chinese employers, **59%** of firms in China (both local companies and foreign international companies) cited the ability to speak English as a key skill they look for when recruiting undergraduates²⁵. In addition, **42%** of companies cited English as an “appealing” course for a potential candidate, while **40%** cited it as “extremely appealing”.

Yet anecdotal evidence from careers and employability professionals and university leaders suggests that the anticipated language premium of an English language education is not being realised. Chinese students are not speaking enough English nor developing their abilities far enough while in the UK in order to become an asset back home. Many of the case studies outlined in this report specifically aim to mix groups of UK, EU and international students together, to facilitate cross-cultural learning and provide international students with plenty of opportunities to speak English.

“Another big change area is English language and the number of overseas universities teaching courses in English, including some universities based in China. Quite often locally educated graduates may even have a better command of English than those overseas by the end of their study.”

Careers and employability professional

³³ Base: 43 valid responses

³⁴ <https://london.ac.uk/careers/careersregistration>

Provision of more international labour market information was flagged by survey respondents as one of the areas that requires more resources and investment. The UK has many different labour markets and graduate migration patterns; similarly, it is unrealistic to see countries as big as China or India as single homogenous labour markets.

Most survey respondents (**83%**) provide information about working in other countries (see **Figure 10**). These resources may be produced in-house or created by an external organisation like AGCAS, GradLink or GoinGlobal. A large proportion also advertise overseas vacancies (**75%**). Few, however, (**28%**) provide international mentoring opportunities.



PROFILE PROVIDER

GoinGlobal

GoinGlobal offers career and employment information for 120-plus locations worldwide, as well as an international jobs and internships database. The career and employment information includes information on:

- Industry and employment trends
- Financial considerations
- Business/professional associations and networking groups
- Work permits and visas
- Resume/CV and cover letter guidelines
- Cultural/interview advice

CASE STUDY 9

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND

Gradlink

GradLink UK is an award-winning specialist careers site for international students and graduates who have or are studying in the UK. GradLink is produced by UWE Bristol for all international students in the UK. It is used by international students at over **130** UK institutions, as well as numerous universities overseas.

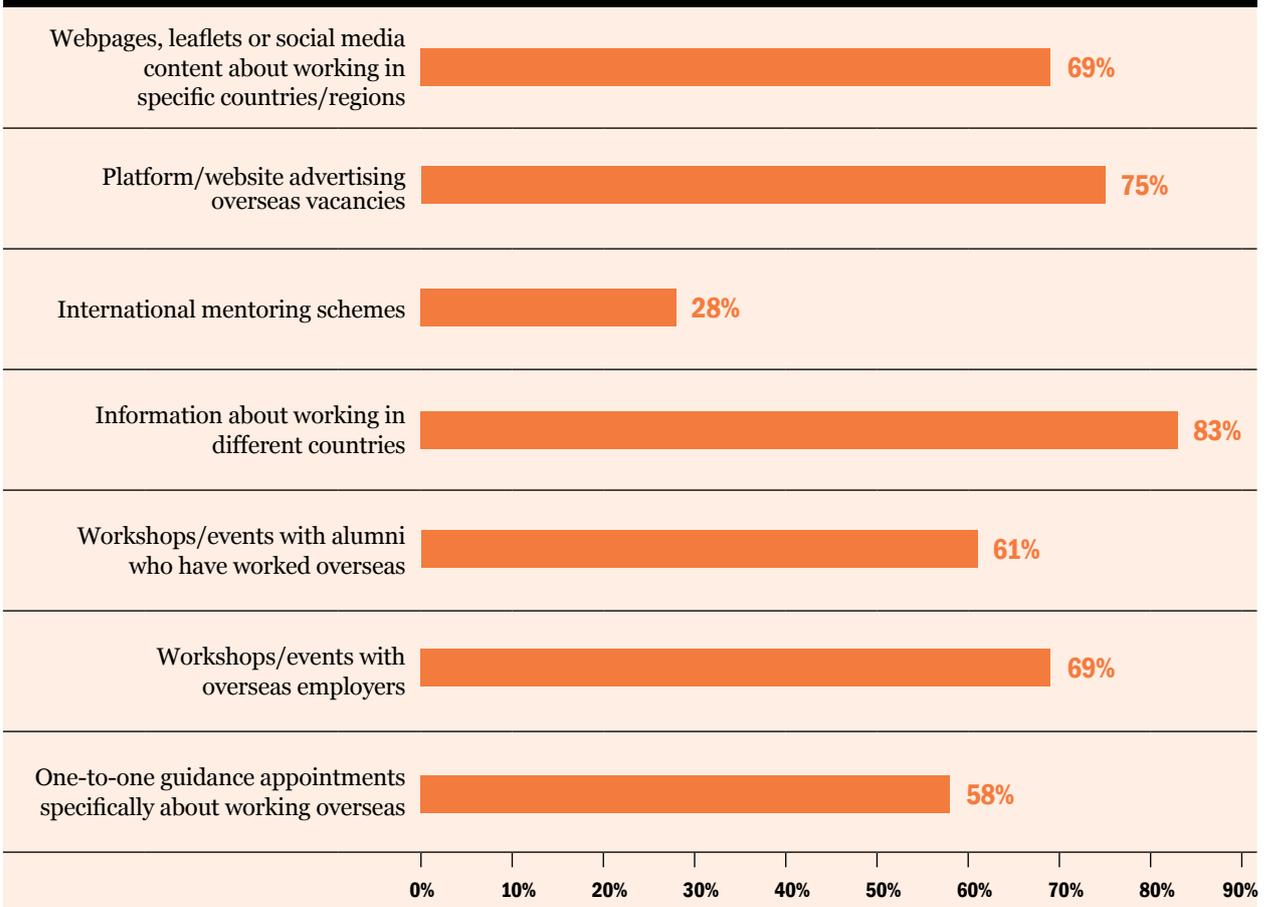
GradLink helps international students and graduates connect with graduate employers across the world, search and apply for jobs, and submit their CV for employers to search. GradLink has a global network of over **600** employers and provides an essential link for international students to find careers and jobs in their home country and beyond.

GradLink currently includes sections for China, South-East Asia (ASEAN), the Gulf, Canada, Africa, India and Bangladesh. Further country sections will be added in the future, with the next site being Gradlink USA. Each section includes extensive information and advice about the graduate job markets in those countries/regions.

These sections are created using insight and information gained from employers and organisations visited overseas, as well as work with Department for International Trade staff in those countries. Research for these sections is also undertaken by postgraduate students from these countries. GradLink also produces detailed fortnightly blog articles on the latest careers issues facing international students. These are linked to from our social media account, which has over **100,000** followers.

When setting up new GradLink sites we conduct extensive research on which are the most pertinent sectors for students from that country/region. We base our decisions on a range of factors including the courses undertaken/career aspirations of the students from those countries studying in the UK, as well as the key growth areas/sectors of opportunity in those countries. For example, law is a key area of interest to Canadians in the UK, hence we have connected with law firms and organisations for GradLink Canada.

FIGURE 10: CURRENT PRACTICE TO HELP STUDENTS (INTERNATIONAL AND UK-DOMICILED) UNDERSTAND THE LABOUR MARKET OUTSIDE THE UK



(Base: 43 valid responses)

TABLE 9: CURRENT PRACTICE TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS RETURNING HOME OR TO ANOTHER COUNTRY**Examples of current practice to support international students returning home or going elsewhere**

Provide information about working in different countries or specific countries/regions, e.g. through webpages, leaflets and social media

Advertise overseas vacancies on jobs portals (plus include a filter so users know they are global opportunities)

Host international employers on campus as and when they are in the country or host webinars with overseas employers

Provide in-person or online workshops for international students to help them prepare for returning home or moving elsewhere

Provide workshops/events with alumni who have worked overseas

Teach international students how to use international databases that the university subscribes to (for example, IBISWorld, Passport or Hoovers) to search for information about international market trends by sector or specific organisations

Set up international mentoring schemes

Provide one-to-one guidance appointments specifically about working overseas

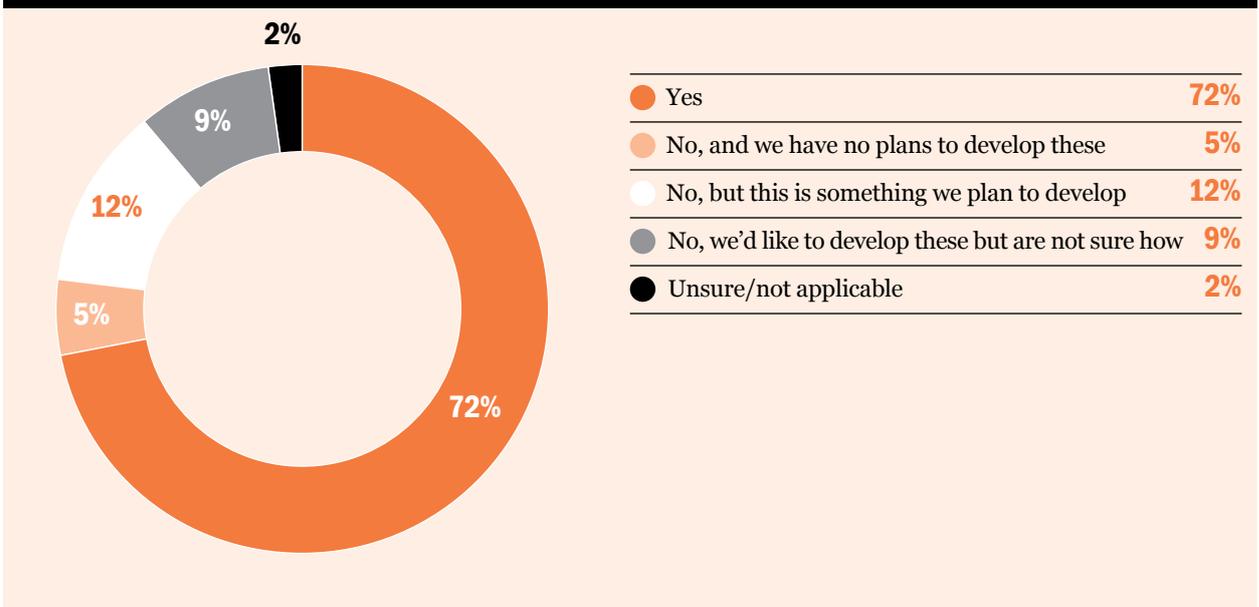
Run overseas careers fairs (e.g. Warwick/Manchester's Work in China fair)

Dual function staff members, e.g. staff within recruitment teams who also support returning students, identify alumni networks and coordinate events

Relationships with overseas employers

Almost three-quarters (**72%**) of survey respondents have built relationships with employers/recruiters overseas. Of those that do not have relationships, **12%** have plans to develop these relationships, **9%** would like to develop relationships but don't know how, and **5%** have no plans to develop relationships with overseas employers.

FIGURE 11: PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WHO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH OVERSEAS EMPLOYERS



Base: 43 valid responses

“ We took the decision that individual links with companies would not be sustainable in terms of knowledge of the company. We prefer to work with organisations with a broader recruitment reach, like Lockin China.”



PROFILE PROVIDER

Lockin China

Lockin China is the largest recruitment platform specialising in supporting students to find employment in China, used by over **500,000** students and **20,000** employers. Students can use Lockin China to:

- view the graduate job and internship opportunities in China
- upload their CV and apply for vacancies
- learn about the Chinese job market and making effective applications
- participate in competitions organised by companies in China.

Of those **72%** of respondents who have relationships with employers/recruiters overseas, **77%**³⁵ prioritise building relationships with employers in specific regions based on areas where large proportions of their current students were originally domiciled (China, Hong Kong, SE Asia, India, Nigeria), regions of strategic importance to universities and, to a lesser extent, countries where home students are looking to gain experience. Some interviewees were able to speak in detail about the cities and regions they were prioritising (for example, Tier 1 cities in China like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen). However, respondents providing this amount of detail were very much the minority.

35 Base: 31 valid responses

A smaller proportion of institutions (47%³⁶) prioritise building relationships with overseas employers in certain sectors. Those who do prioritise particular sectors use graduate destination data and subjects of study with the highest numbers of international students (often business, management, finance and engineering), align with other priorities in the university strategy or, alternatively, use career registration data to assess international students' preferred sectors of employment.

Some institutions are sophisticated and targeted in their engagement with overseas employers, but this is atypical. The framework below, used by the University of the West of England (UWE)/ GradLink outlines how services can use an evidence-based approach to design an international employer engagement strategy:



The approach outlined above shows that the same data-driven techniques that help careers services form strong relationships with UK employers can be applied to employers overseas.

There are many ways that careers services can identify overseas employers to build relationships with, and these are summarised in **Table 10**.

“*The creation of sustainable and mutually beneficial collaborations with key partners is at the heart of our international strategy. We focus on a small number of high-quality partnerships that will lead to opportunities for staff and student mobility, joint teaching, and research collaboration.*”

Careers and employability professional

TABLE 10: METHODS USED BY CAREERS SERVICES TO IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE WITH OVERSEAS EMPLOYERS

Frequently used	Infrequently used
Via links to alumni (71%)	Via current students from that country/region (39%)
Via other links to the university, e.g. historic links, links with departments (68%)	Via local recruiters overseas (42%)
The organisation approaches the university (77%)	Has a local/regional connection to the university (36%)
Through events/networking (61%)	Introduced through another organisation or individual (39%)
Using online marketing and social media (including LinkedIn and WeChat) to approach employers	Attending relevant networking events involving international employers
Via overseas staff (55%)	Virtual fairs with overseas employers

NB: Percentages based on 43 responses. Where percentages are not given, these were not asked about explicitly but mentioned in qualitative survey responses and/or interviews.

“ *We target relevant alumni in priority countries – for example top 100 companies in China, recruiters in a range of overseas countries – to share labour market information.*”

Careers and employability professional

Overseas employers are targeted by universities from around the world, so making the UK HE sector, and single institutions in particular, ‘stand out’ is a challenge. UK institutions face significant challenges in building relationships with overseas employers. For example, face-to-face contact is often required to build meaningful relationships with overseas employers, which can be difficult when there are long distances to travel and language barriers to overcome. Lack of brand awareness of UK universities and little understanding of local customs, structures and labour markets also presents challenges.

An interesting way for institutions to maximise their resources when building relationships with overseas employers was identified in qualitative interviews with both careers and employability professionals and pro vice-chancellors/directors with an international/global remit. UK universities often form partnerships with overseas organisations for research, teaching and procurement of services. Generating opportunities for international students to gain work experience or graduate work with overseas employers could be built into partnership agreements.

“ [Other parts of the university] have developed non-HR contacts in order to offer internships or mentoring which can enrich students’ academic experience and we work with them to extend the relationship to HR/employability.”

Careers and employability professional

CASE STUDY 9

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY (CU)

Geely Global Club

Founded in November 2018, this initiative with the largest private vehicle manufacturer in China and the owner of Volvo and Lotus as well as other marques, builds on longstanding links to establish a sophisticated and sustainable framework to coherently and systematically address the rapidly increasing talent and technology development needs of this fast-growing company in the UK and in China. The major elements of the framework include:

1. Coventry supports Geely’s recruitment by providing access to qualified individuals through jointly run recruitment fairs in which sophisticated use of social media communicates opportunities to students from Coventry and other universities who are interested in working for Geely and engages them in recruitment events held in Coventry where opportunities can be explored in detail.
2. Extracurricular training is provided for engineering students in CU including through work experience in relevant UK companies so that they are better equipped to generate value to Geely, or indeed other automotive companies, on recruitment to their Chinese or UK operations.
3. Enhanced technological development is provided to Geely through CU support of a jointly agreed research and development agenda. This includes a series of workshops to bring CU and Geely researchers together in the UK and in China throughout the year to review progress with existing collaborations and identify new areas for collaboration.
4. Building relevant research capacity by developing a joint doctoral training academy focussed on technological areas of joint interest to Geely and CU.
5. Developing individuals who are ‘ready to hit the ground running’ and make an immediate impact on employment through the implementation of a CU internship programme with Geely which will see significant numbers of students each year taking up internships with Geely.
6. Support Geely’s further training needs by running tailored technical and management development programmes in the UK in the form of summer schools and ‘winter tours’.
7. Support Geely’s training needs by running tailored Master’s-level programmes in multiple engineering, design and management areas at Geely locations in China.
8. Supporting the development of the Geely Design studio, which has been located in the City of Coventry, by fostering links with the CU National Transport Design Centre and Faculty of Arts and Humanities including through joint workshops and symposia.
9. Provision of multiple Geely scholarships each year for individuals to come to the UK to study automotive engineering, design and low-carbon transport.
10. Enhancing and leveraging the Geely link with FEV, a major automotive services company, which has recently located a large research and development facility in Coventry to support its global activities.

This relationship is jointly managed by the DVC International and the DVC Research with identified project managers in international relationship management and research project development to ensure that activities are joined up and resources appropriately applied to ensure the delivery of the agreed outcomes.

2.9 POST-GRADUATION SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI

All the careers and employability teams interviewed provide support to international graduates once they leave the institution, lasting from between 18 months to a lifetime. International alumni can also be an invaluable resource to help services develop labour market information for countries that graduates move to and connect them with employers.

This section focusses on how careers services and employability teams support international alumni through events and initiatives. Engagement with international alumni or alumni teams to build connections with employers or develop international labour market knowledge is discussed further in [Section 3.2](#).

Examples of good practice and exemplary practice in supporting international alumni are summarised in [Table 11](#).

“ There is definitely a big demand from our overseas alumni to benefit from the connections we are starting to make, not just with UK employers but with overseas employers as well. So with the majority of the sessions that we are now organising with overseas employers, we will also organise webinars [to run] at the same time and these webinars will be available to our large alumni base.”

Careers and employability professional

TABLE 11: CURRENT PRACTICE IN SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF ALUMNI

Current practice in supporting the employability of alumni

Virtual support via Skype, web, webinars and virtual careers events

Having a specific communications strategy that includes both digital tools (primarily LinkedIn and WeChat) and non-digital tools to maintain links with alumni

Proactively inviting international alumni to relevant events and webinars, even when the primary audience is current students

Provision of a university email address to maintain contact with international alumni

Careers and networking events for alumni and employers overseas

Provision of virtual communities that allow alumni to connect with anyone in the world, to facilitate international networking

Careers presence at overseas graduation ceremonies, with workshops/advice for graduates without graduate roles

3. INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

Key messages:

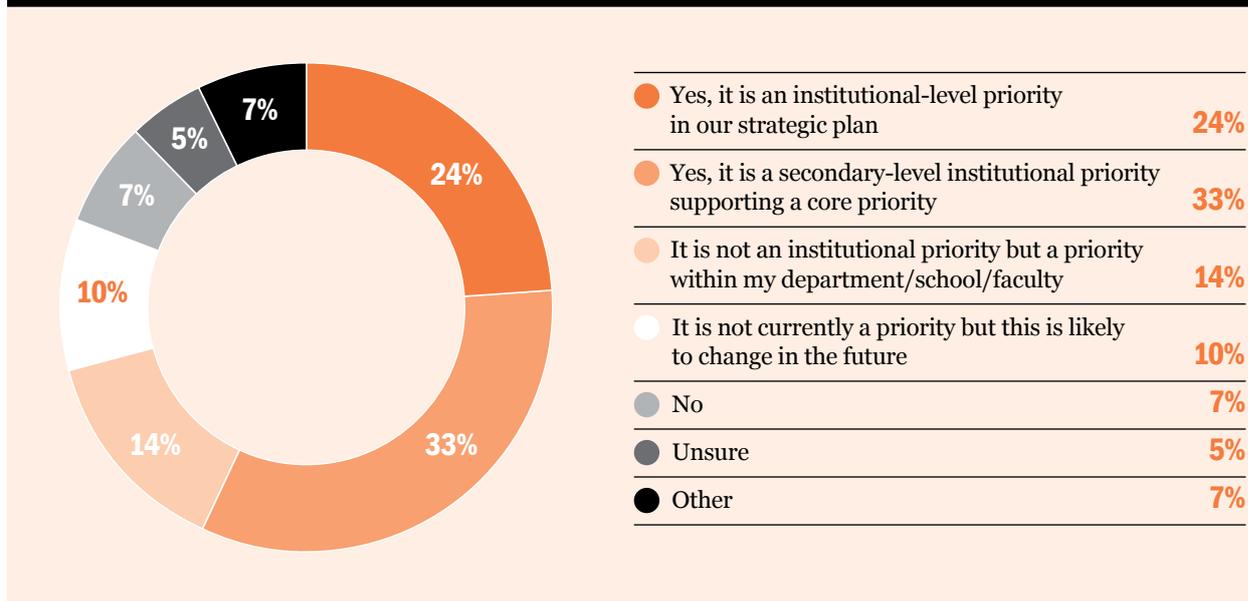
1. International student and graduate employability is a priority within **71%** of institutions, and likely to become a priority soon in a further **10%**.
2. University departments and Student Union offices work collaboratively to support international student/graduate employability in **83%** of institutions, though there is a perceived lack of joined-up approach in others.
3. Only **5%** of institutions use metrics or measure performance against key performance indicators to track the success of the institution's international graduate employability offer; **75%** do not and **20%** of respondents are unsure.
4. Some institutions have a group within the university, with representation from relevant departments and championed by a senior leader in the institution, to work collaboratively to support international student/graduate employability. This is recommended as good practice.
5. International alumni overseas are recognised as a vital resource to support the employability of current international students, build connections with overseas employers and gain labour market insight, but could be better utilised.
6. Just over two thirds (**69%**) of institutions monitor their international graduate outcomes, mostly through the DLHE survey. Interviewees have significantly mixed views of using outcomes data to assess how well institutions support international graduate employability. It was widely recognised as a way of incentivising institutions to invest in support for international students/graduates, but concerns were raised about difficulties in collecting data and whether outcomes truly reflect success for international students and graduates.
7. It is recommended that sector bodies research how best to measure how institutions support the employability of their international students and graduates, looking at both metrics and holistic measures of success.
8. Connection with alumni and tracking international graduate outcomes are recommended to demonstrate the long-term return on investment of a degree from a UK university.

3.1 INSTITUTIONAL IMPORTANCE

57% of survey respondents perceive international student employability to be an institutional-level priority (where the employability of international students is strategically important) or secondary-level priority (where the employability or success of all students, including international ones, is a priority). A further 14% perceive international student employability to be a priority within their department, school or faculty.

10% of respondents expect international student employability to become a priority soon, which means that over four fifths of institutions consider the employability of international students to be strategically important at some level.

FIGURE 12: THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY



(Base: 42 participating institutions)

“ I think that the conversation at the moment in higher education and certainly in the university is about how do we provide a really positive student experience which is inclusive of the diversity of our student body, which very much includes our international students. And I think there’s also a recognition that they are an important part of our community and our alumni. We want them to feel supported and connected to the university.”

CASE STUDY 10

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

International students as future professionals

At the University of East London, we have **17,000** students from over **135** countries studying **160** different courses. Our Centre for Student Success supports our international students with their career development. Its services include sourced placement opportunities and volunteering, mentoring with professionals, careers fairs and CV workshops. International students also benefit from an employment module and our Skills Academy, with interactive workshops that develop the confidence, attitude, knowledge and skills to enable them to achieve their career and employability goals.

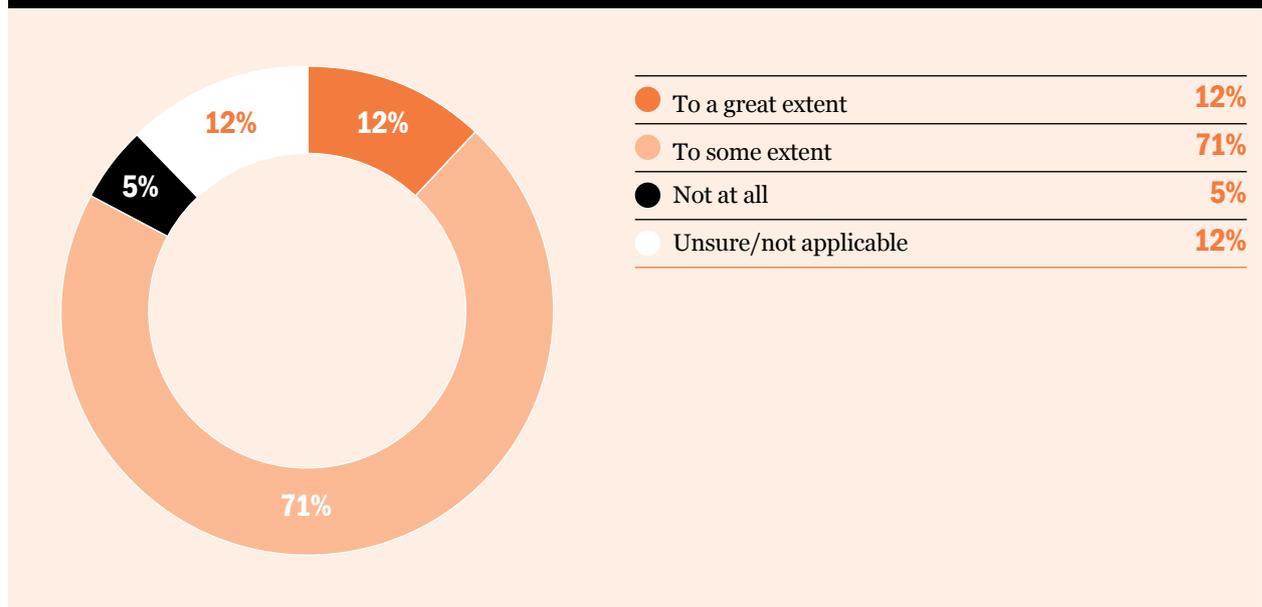
However, we realise that the world of work is changing rapidly and that the skills that will set future graduates apart in the job market include soft skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence and resilience, alongside practical skills, such as digital proficiency.

This is why we have changed our courses. Starting in September 2019, we have placed the development of these skills at the heart of every one of our degrees, counting towards students' final qualification. We call this our **Professional Fitness & Mental Wealth programme**.

As evidence of their achievements we give all our students a career passport. This digital repository is proof of students' level of mastery in each skill. Some of these skills will be validated externally, by the likes of Amazon and Microsoft, earning students an online badge, while others will be monitored and managed internally.

We have begun a ground-breaking collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS). AWS is the industry sponsor of one of our campus-based Career Zones, a physical (and digital) hub that brings together academics, students, industry and communities through shared knowledge, learning and innovation. This collaboration will also see the establishment of an industry research institute with a focus on technology-informed business skills, such as artificial intelligence and will include the launch of a cloud associate degree.

In October 2019 every student was provided with access to AWS Educate, an online platform providing self-paced learning in cloud computing skills. With the increasing demand for cloud-savvy employees, this provides an academic gateway for the next generation of IT and cloud professionals.

FIGURE 13: THE EXTENT TO WHICH DIFFERENT UNIVERSITY FUNCTIONS COLLABORATE TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

(Baseline: 41 valid responses)

The majority of survey respondents (**83%**) believe that collaboration across different parts of the institution to support international student/graduate employability occurs to a great extent or to some extent. The departments that collaborate most often to support international student/graduate employability are: the international office (including the international recruitment team), the careers service, the alumni team and the Students' Union.

“ We would really like to see cross-institution recognition that employability of international graduates is as important as it is for UK graduates. We'd like to see across the institution a realistic understanding of the benefits and the limitations of the post-study visa, that we're all managing expectations and giving the same messages.”

Careers and employability professional

“ We now have a standing invitation to the forum where recruitment strategy in China is discussed and have agreement that we will be invited to attend the monthly team meetings of our Recruitment & International Office. We hope this will generate funding streams to accompany them on occasional international trips that will enable us to build relationships with employers.”

Careers and employability professional

“ We have a Careers Service Internationalisation Working Group, responsible for leading and coordinating international student employability initiatives. This is comprised of members from the Careers Guidance, Information, Business Engagement and Enterprise teams, as well as one Careers Service Assistant Director.”

Careers and employability professional

Some institutions have established international graduate employability working groups or similar bodies responsible for leading and coordinating international student employability initiatives. Such groups are comprised of stakeholders from across the institution, typically from the careers service, international office, Students' Union and student services.

CASE STUDY 11

ASTON UNIVERSITY

The Aston Future Groups

The Aston China Futures Group was set up in January 2017 to develop Aston's understanding, improve communications and build opportunities for employability and skill development of Chinese students. Additional Aston Futures Groups for Indian and Nigerian students were set up in October 2019 and are currently in their early stages of development. The aims of each group are negotiated with students, and revisited annually. For the **Aston China Futures Group** they are:

- To help Aston get a better understanding of what is important to Chinese students in their career planning.
- To help more Chinese students become involved in careers and employability activity at Aston in order to get the best experience possible.
- To help Chinese students get work experience in the UK and jobs back in China.
- To understand more about what Chinese students do after their MSc course – the employers they work for and the careers they enter.

Each of the groups is made up of self-selecting students – most of whom are studying postgraduate taught qualifications in the business school – and led by a careers consultant who specialises in supporting MSc Business School students. Other staff members involved in the group include the Postgraduate Business Development Manager, who is actively involved in building links to support international students returning home, recruitment/marketing staff and members of the alumni team.

The groups are a strong selling point for the university's international recruitment team, and feature in in-country promotional materials and input to international agents.

The students in the **Aston China Futures Group** play a vital role in feeding back the needs of Chinese students – particularly around careers and employability – to the university and developing activities that meet these needs. In the 2018-19 programme they also:

- helped the university explain and communicate the Aston China Experience – what Chinese students can expect from their time at Aston
- represented Aston University at events with the local Chinese business and cultural community, including Chinese New Year activity and other high-profile Chinese community events
- promoted Aston University activities to Chinese students, future students and key stakeholders in the local community.

At the end of the year, students are invited to a celebration event, attended by senior university staff, to recognise their input. They are given a certificate that acknowledges their achievements as well as the skills they have developed through their involvement, helping students articulate what they have learned.

The recently established Aston Futures Groups for India and Nigeria have helped us to understand how different nationality groups have different priorities, and work in different ways, showing the need to adapt approaches in supporting different student groups.

CONTINUED...

CASE STUDY 11 CONTINUED**ASTON UNIVERSITY****The Aston Future Groups**

We also introduced “getting to know you” meetings for all Chinese, Indian and Nigerian students at the start of the academic year as a ‘soft’ introduction and invitation to join the different Aston Futures Groups, and provide country-specific careers information for all students from these nationality groups.

Some of the more challenging aspects of delivering the programme have been:

- Ensuring continuing levels of engagement throughout the year.
- Making sure that we spend our time on projects that are meaningful to the group and wider student population. Each group has an action plan, explaining how the student and staff action points connect to the group’s objectives. After each meeting, these action plans are updated and act as an agenda for the following meeting.

- Working predominantly with one-year MSc students means that there is limited time for the groups to build momentum, and it is harder to build on the group’s progress each year with changing members.
- It is time and resource intensive, particularly now we have three nationality group running.

In order to make sure other country groups do not feel left out, we make it clear to all nationalities that we will support the creation of new groups if there is sufficient interest. This poses a potential risk of a “snowball effect” where the success of current country groups leads to other nationality groups wanting to create their own.

We are really proud of the achievements of the Aston Futures Groups and aim to continue developing and building on the programme of support.

Only **5%**³⁷ of survey participants state that their institution uses metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) to track the success of the institution’s international graduate employability offer; a fifth of respondents (**20%**) do not know whether their institution does or not. This may suggest a lack of clarity in some institutions about who is responsible for supporting international graduate employability, if multiple departments are directly or indirectly supporting international student employability but the streams of work are not joined up or working towards a defined strategy.

A lack of a joined-up institutional approach to supporting international student and graduate employability was flagged by both careers and employability professionals and students.

“ *We wanted to change course because it didn’t have [professional] experience. We went everywhere – to registry, to the faculty – and nobody wants to take responsibility, nobody knows where we should go, where they are. So they just kicked us around.”*

International student from Malaysia

“ I don't think what we have is joined up. So whilst there aren't massive gaps [in provision], what we have isn't seamless. And I don't think the university knows generally what support is available for international students across the board... Even with the people we work with, like the international student support team, there's huge employability benefits from a lot of the programmes that they offer but I've recently had talks with them about how we can join up together and it was almost like news to them. It was like 'oh yeah'.”

Careers service professional

A lack of joined up approach was also evident in discussions about institutional responses to the new graduate route in qualitative interviews. While the majority of interviewees³⁸ who discussed their institution's response to the change in policy said that it was collaborative, led by a particular group and “on message”, some spoke about how certain parts of the university were communicating policy changes but that this was not reflective of other action taking place in the institution.

“ Well, our recruitment team are very excited about it [the new graduate route] and are already incorporating that information into that recruitment. We haven't responded to it yet, because as far as I'm aware, it doesn't affect our students and graduates currently.”

Careers service professional

“ [The new graduate route has] been shared quite a lot because it's on promotional videos being shared by the main corporate University social media pages as 'look how amazing this is, it's a reason to study here', but we don't know what the visa is yet. It's tricky to manage.”

Careers service professional

“ [Universities are] very focused on recruitment or alumni stuff and less so on the on the individual student journey... Ensuring that at each point students are getting the best value is probably the best that a university could do to attract more people in.”

Employer perspective, global corporate

3.2 COLLABORATION WITH ALUMNI AND ALUMNI TEAMS

How careers services support international alumni’s employability is discussed in **Section 2.9** above; this section discusses how international alumni and alumni teams can be leveraged to support current international students, build connections with overseas employers and generate insight into overseas labour markets. Methods that institutions use to collaborate with alumni and alumni teams to support the employability of their international students and graduates are summarised in **Table 12**.

“ We maintain strong links with our alumni chapters and invite them to events when on recruitment visits; we also liaise with Chambers of Commerce connections and leverage alumni connections in companies we are introduced to at round-table networking events. We are increasingly seeking to capitalise on institution-level partnerships to build links to develop international student employability.”

“ We work with alumni groups based in international locations to leverage their support to organise events in their location and to participate in virtual ‘meet an alum’ sessions.”

TABLE 12: CURRENT COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE WITH INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI TO ENHANCE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

Current collaborative practice

Bring international alumni to speak – either in person or virtually – at events

Using alumni ambassadors overseas to host or coordinate employer engagement events

Using alumni to build links with employers overseas

Internships schemes where international alumni hire interns from the same country/region who study at their alma mater (usually over the summer)

Alumni/student mentoring schemes, either via online platforms or through linking alumni with newly-qualified international graduates in their country/region

A theme that emerged from qualitative interviews, particularly with university leaders, is that the connection with alumni could be better utilised to support international student and graduate employability. Multiple interviewees reflected on the fact that their international alumni will be working in varied careers around the globe. As such, without either maintaining strong connections with alumni or having effective ways of tracking their career destinations, universities cannot follow the longitudinal outcomes of their international graduates, use them as case studies for employability when recruiting students, or leverage them to create opportunities for current students.

“What is the value of a UK degree over a lifetime? What I’d really like is a soft power study ... looking at champions of industry, so CFO, CTO, CEO, around the world. We could probably point to more CFOs, CTOs et cetera being UK educated than Australia, Canada or Europe. I think this would give the UK a real significant advantage.”

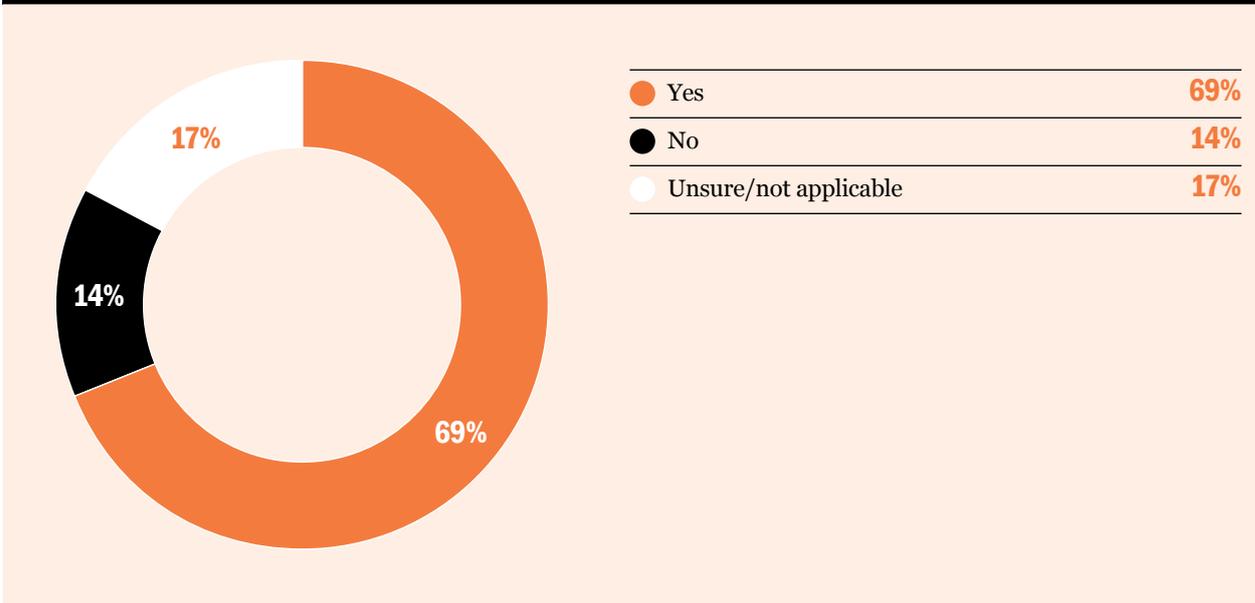
Employer perspective

Recommendation for the sector bodies:
 Better engagement with alumni and monitoring of international graduate outcomes should be used to identify UK-educated graduates who are in powerful positions across the world in different industries to illustrate the long-term return on investment of a degree from a UK institution.

3.3 MONITORING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE DESTINATIONS AND OUTCOMES

As discussed throughout this report, employability is hugely important to prospective international students when choosing a country and institution of study. Yet only just over two thirds (69%³⁹) of institutions surveyed track or record what their international graduates do after their degree.

FIGURE 14: DO YOU TRACK/RECORD INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE OUTCOMES?



(Baseline: 42 valid responses)

39 Base: 42 valid responses

The majority (86%⁴⁰) of respondents who track international graduate outcomes data do so through the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) and Graduate Outcomes surveys, though a large proportion of respondents acknowledged that DLHE returns for their international graduates were very low.

Some respondents also track outcomes through internal means, such as maintaining engagement with alumni and institutional career destination surveys. Interviewees – including careers and employability professionals, and university leaders – acknowledge that there are significant challenges involved in collecting data about international graduate outcomes, whether through DLHE or other methods:

- Careers and employability professionals perceive that international graduates are more likely to complete outcomes surveys when they are experiencing a positive outcome, and are typically reticent to share salary data.
- Maintaining contact with international students once they have graduated is difficult, particularly if they go and work overseas or study for further qualifications overseas. This may lead to survey results being skewed towards students who stay in the UK to study, because they are more easily contactable and more likely to respond to the survey.
- Different countries have different graduate recruitment cycles, so a single-point-in-time survey may not accurately represent graduate outcomes for that country.
- Salary thresholds and the definition of “graduate” jobs differ around the globe.

The lack of engagement with DLHE and other survey-based means of measuring international graduate outcomes may result in institutions receiving highly selective feedback and missing information that could help them build more effective curricula and better support. While there is no accepted gold-standard of measuring international student graduate outcomes, we showcase four examples of how organisations collect international graduate outcomes data opposite.

COLLECTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA – FOUR PERSPECTIVES

1. EMPLOYER

“ The worrying thing is that if we don’t start publicising this kind of data sooner rather than later, Australia will start doing it and then they’ll be known for employability. And it’s not about being the best actually. It’s about being the first.

2. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

“ I think having international student employability as a priority, as a measure would definitely make sure universities put more resources [and] more support [in]to international students because currently the big problem facing career services to help international students is their budget.

3. PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR/DIRECTOR

“ I have really mixed feelings about [international graduate outcomes]. If we don’t measure it, we won’t really have institutions that are accountable. But I know how hard it will be to get good response rates. And in some ways, it means that the institutions that are incredibly well resourced will be able to do what it takes to get good response rates. And that means you have the top end of the Russell Group performing best in the league tables, which means they will be able to continue to win business in future ... which could impact on the richness and the diversity of the sector.

4. CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY PROFESSIONAL

“ Careers services are measured through [Graduate Outcomes] and [the Teaching Excellence Framework] on outcomes of home undergraduates which incentivises universities to invest in this area and this can be at the expense of other cohorts, e.g. taught postgraduates, international students. This is the overriding challenge. It affects our ability to address all the other challenges e.g., understand overseas labour markets, provide work experience initiatives tailored to specific needs.

Data showcase

There are many challenges in collecting international graduate outcomes data, not least keeping in touch with alumni, response rates and comparing salaries and labour markets across the world. But it is not impossible. The case studies on the following pages demonstrate four different approaches.

CASE STUDY 12: FOUR METHODS OF COLLECTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA

ASIA CAREERS GROUP

An innovative approach to assessing international graduate outcomes

In an era of social media, virtual business networks, big data and artificial intelligence, there are better ways of capturing data and analysing it to achieve governmental and individual institutions' aims of understanding their graduate outcomes.

We feel that attempting to collect outcomes data by repeatedly surveying graduates is not working very well and is likely to impair the way universities build relationships with their alumni. A more coherent and coordinated strategy needs to be considered as a matter of urgency.

Asia Careers Group has collected graduate outcomes data including destinations, average salaries and job titles for over **42,000** graduates returning to Asia annually since 2016 – possibly the largest dataset of international student graduate outcomes in existence, with the benefit of longitudinal tracking to capture career progression as well as the ability to overlay average salary data for every job title held.

All data is collected from publicly available sources such as job sites, business networks, LinkedIn and salary benchmarking tools, negating the need to survey graduates.

Results are overwhelmingly positive:

- The majority of UK graduates are employed within **15** months when they return home; they command higher graduate starting salaries than the national average.
- A significant number work in world leading multinational corporations (ACG Top 20).
- Increasing numbers of are working in the big tech firms and tech start-ups.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Analysing international graduate outcomes using DLHE

In January 2016, Warwick's Student Careers & Skills department successfully gained funding from the British Council and the Department of Business, Innovation & Skills to deliver a project focused on enhancing UK-educated Chinese student employability.

The project aims were:

- To provide employability support for UK-educated Chinese students before, during and after their UK studies.
- To support Chinese student employability in the Chinese labour market by enabling UK Higher Education to be better informed and resourced.
- To provide graduate outcome trend analysis for UK-educated Chinese graduates.

Since the initial project began, Warwick has continued this work, collecting and analysing graduate outcome data across three years – 2015, 2016 and 2017 – plus expanding the research to include UK-educated students domiciled in Hong Kong, India, Malaysia and Singapore. All the reports are freely available.

In the most recent round, over **30** UK higher education institutions shared their anonymised Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) data to provide the sector with robust evidence of the value and impact of a UK education on international graduate outcomes.

With the new Graduate Outcomes measurement coming in 2020, Warwick will continue to explore opportunities to collaborate and analyse Outcomes data, the target collection rates for international students being **25%**.

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Keeping contact with international graduates

We were keen to collect this data, with the move to Graduate Outcomes meaning we would have a 2 year gap before obtaining information on destinations of our postgraduate students, many of whom are international. Furthermore, the national approach meant less institutional ownership and control, and we were concerned about a drop in response rates. The aim was to get comprehensive data with maximal response rates from our international postgraduate students which we could use to assess employment outcomes and provide employability support to graduates who needed and/or requested it.

CASE STUDY 12: FOUR METHODS OF COLLECTING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE OUTCOMES DATA

We did this through:

- exit surveys of undergraduates before they left the university
- online and telephone surveys with postgraduates six months after they left
- using native-speaking students (Chinese, Indian, SE Asian students) to do the survey calling
- giving all graduating students the option of a Bath.edu email address
- trying to offer all graduates ongoing contact and working closely with alumni office to make this happen
- ensuring graduates knew that surveys would be coming.

We found that:

- Phoning for feedback from their own institution has led to increased responses – phone calls from their institution and in their language are a key part of securing high response rates. We obtained high response rates from international graduates who were contacted in (mostly) their own language.
- We were able to build a good picture of outcomes which exceeded that obtained if no telephone survey was used. This could then be used to be used to support international student career planning and further course development.
- Graduates are less likely to participate fully if they have not got a job, which means that data collected may be positively skewed towards those in employment. Historically, a reason for not having good international returns from DLHE is because students may not report if they are not in a positive destination. We found that building relationships made students more able to report honestly – though not always about salary. This is probably a cultural difference with UK students.

With the first release of national Graduate Outcomes data, we are waiting to see the full picture of international student response and the data collected before we commit to further interim telephone surveys. In an ideal scenario, Graduate Outcomes would provide data of equivalent quality but if not then we would look to explore reinstating the interim international telephone survey.

UUKI

The iGo survey

The i-GO survey was administered to EU and non-EU graduates across **58** universities in the UK. The i-Go survey collected responses from **16,199** international (other EU and non-EU) graduates who had earned a UK qualification between 2011 and 2016 – less than **1%** of all international graduates from UK higher education institutions during that same period.

The majority of responses (**64%**) were medium-term graduates, between two and five years post-graduation, and the remainder (**36%**) were longer-term graduates who had completed their studies five to seven years previously. The largest respondent group among both non-EU and EU graduates had studied at taught postgraduate (PGT) level. Approximately a quarter of the non-EU respondents and **37%** of EU respondents had completed an undergraduate degree in the UK. Postgraduate research (PGR) qualifiers made up **18%** of the EU group and **16%** of the non-EU group.

The i-GO study uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide insight into the destinations and reflections of international and EU graduates in the medium and longer term. An online survey was the primary method of data collection. A tested questionnaire instrument was developed in consultation with an advisory group composed of institutions and UK sector bodies. The surveys were run from October to November 2018 and targeted EU & International graduates who completed their studies between January 2011 and July 2016. Targeted measures were taken to provide insight into key source markets including China, the USA, India, Malaysia and Nigeria. Qualitative information was gathered both through the survey instrument in open-ended questions.

Key findings:

- **83%** believe a UK degree helps international graduates find employment
- **82%** believe studying in the UK is worth the investment
- **53%** of UK graduates earn above average compared to peers educated elsewhere
- **69%** of international graduates progress more quickly than peers educated elsewhere.

An alternative to metrics?

The benefits and limitations of measuring the value of higher education for UK-domiciled students through quantitative data (namely through DLHE, Graduate Outcomes and Longitudinal Employment Outcomes) are discussed widely elsewhere; however it is valuable to reflect on the fact that while international graduates are not a homogenous group, they are different to UK-domiciled students. Any measure of outcomes should be interrogated for whether it truly measures success according to international graduates.

When careers and employability professionals and pro vice-chancellors/directors were asked how “success” in supporting international students and graduates should be defined, some spoke about metrics and outcomes but a large number spoke about more “holistic” measures of success.

“*We hope to put people into the position where they realise their potential and where they are able to exercise their employability choices. And that means not necessarily putting them in position to get the highest paid job that’s available in the marketplace. But to find fulfilling things to do, which from their perspective allow them to make their lives the best they can be.*”

Pro vice-chancellor/director

Being measured on international graduate outcomes could incentivise universities to invest in support for international graduates. But equally it could be a laborious process that increases competition between institutions and does not tell us much about whether international graduates are truly experiencing positive outcomes for them, or give a true measure of how good the university is at supporting their employability. While it is beyond the scope of this report to propose measures for assessing how effective institutional support for international students and graduates is, the sector should consider exploring this further.

“*I guess the easy way to [assess how good a university is at supporting international graduate outcomes] would be to measure the [activities]. In the same way that OFFA agreements talk about what universities do rather than what they achieved... even if you said to universities something like [here are] ‘ten things that you could do to support graduate employability, we would expect to see significant evidence of you doing six’.*”

Pro vice-chancellor/director

4. SECTOR-WIDE APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

This section provides an overview of current approaches to cross-sector collaboration between UK higher education institutions in delivering employability support to international students. It highlights the benefits of collaboration between institutions. Findings indicate that there is scope for much more collaboration, and institutions should consider areas where colleagues across the sector are duplicating efforts and where joint efforts could make the most of limited resources while maximising impact for students.

Key messages:

Only **41%**⁴¹ of responding institutions collaborate with other HEIs to support international graduate employability. Examples of collaborative initiatives to support international student and graduate employability include:

- Joint careers fairs, such as the **China Graduate Recruitment fair** led by The University of Warwick and The University of Manchester
- Interest groups to collaboratively support international student employability (AGCAS internationalisation task group)
- Development of shared resources
- Joint delivery of webinars for students
- Collaborative employer visits
- Regional forums to discuss supporting international students and graduates, for example Midlands International Group and GW4 Alliance

Better collaboration between universities and sector bodies maximises resources, provides economies of scale and broadens the reach of individual institutional activities to more international students, which can collectively improve the employability outcomes of all our international students and graduates.

Survey responses and comments in interviews highlight an appetite for collaboration, not just regionally or between similar institutions, but across the UK. There could be a role here for national bodies such as Universities UK, UKCISA or AGCAS to play in convening the sector to, for example, collaborate in engaging with international employers.

“ *I personally think there is scope for more collaboration between institutions. It's a sensitive issue because universities are also in competition, but in UK education how everybody performs affects how everybody is perceived.*”

Pro vice-chancellor/director

CASE STUDY 13: REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

The GW4 Alliance

The **GW4 Alliance** brings together four world-leading universities: Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter. We are four of the most innovative and research-intensive universities in the UK. Our Careers Services have been working together since 2015.

We offer a tailored service designed to suit the recruitment needs of overseas employers seeking talented returning graduates.

Employers can advertise vacancies on our portals and engage directly with our students by leading webinars, attending our Careers Fairs in China, mentoring our students or hosting internships.

Through the Alliance, the GW4 universities aim to provide their international students with careers support that is more ambitious, comprehensive and of higher quality than each university could achieve on its own.

The Alliance does this by:

- sharing knowledge and resources so that the GW4 universities can build on each other's good practice and reduce unnecessary effort and duplication
- collaborating on projects, particularly where this provides an attractive reason for overseas employers to engage.

Activities:

Global Returning Talents Careers Fairs: hosted in Shanghai in 2015, Shanghai and Beijing in 2016, and Shenzhen and Shanghai in September 2017 and September 2018. Fairs are open to current students or those who have graduated within the last three years. Approximately **800** students and graduates attended each year.

British Council Study UK Employer Insight Panels: the GW4 Alliance successfully bid to host one of the British Council Study UK Career Development workshops and welcomed senior Chinese HR and industry experts to Bristol in February 2019. Over **350** students attended from across the four universities. The panel gave up-to-date information about China's job market, industry trends, employer expectations, and the recruitment process for returning graduates.

Webinars: Bristol organised two webinars led by actively recruiting China-based employers. These were promoted across the GW4 Alliance with over **40** students participating in both the BOE Technology and AlphaSights webinars, the latter recruiting to roles in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul.

2020 plans

Aligning with the Chinese Spring recruitment season, we are running a suite of **eight** webinars with employers across a range of sectors, again hosting the British Council Study UK employer event, and on 1 April holding a Careers Fair in Shenzhen for our students and alumni.

CASE STUDY 13: REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

The Midlands International Group

The **Midlands International Group (MIG)** is a collaborative, cross-institutional group of **15** universities, combining the knowledge and expertise of careers and employability professionals to create events and resources for international students. MIG began as the East Midlands International Students Working Group in 2004, comprising eight universities with a mission to promote the employability agenda for international students across the region, and explore international opportunities for home/EU students. In 2013, the group welcomed universities in the West Midlands to share knowledge and expertise more widely. MIG member institutions are: Aston University, University of Birmingham, Birmingham City University, Coventry University, University of Derby, Keele University, University of Lincoln, Loughborough University, University of Leicester, De Montfort University, the University of Nottingham, Nottingham Trent University, University of Northampton, University College Birmingham and The University of Warwick.

Activities

Tailored events: MIG has provided the region with a wide range of events, including The China Event (2009), The India Event (2010) and Develop Your Global Career (2014), which attracted **500** international students. Through these events, closer working relationships were developed with organisations such as ACCA, AISEC, British Council, Global Career Company and BUNAC, as well as immigration solicitors, and employers. In addition to the benefits international students gained from attending these events, they also strengthened the knowledge, skills, resources and confidence of careers and employability professionals working with international students.

Webinars: MIG successfully bid for UKCISA project start-up funding to launch an innovative programme of **15** webinars, sharing resources regionally and nationally to reach more international students. Webinar topics included: Making the most of your time in the UK; Global CVs and personal branding; Tier 5 visas and alternative options. We have offered **10–15** webinars per year, with participation from over **800** international students over the course of three years of delivery. Our evaluation showed that **100%** of students would recommend the webinars to colleagues, with students commenting that “e-presenters and global speakers responded well to students’ questions in the virtual environment”, and that it had been “the best information received since starting university”

Monthly blog features: Presenting different university perspectives and ideas for addressing key student issues and concerns.

Thanks to MIG, universities in the region can increase their international student provision by sharing resources, knowledge and expertise, collaborating on international events and webinars, and delivering streamlined communication. As a group, MIG delivers far more for the international student population than each university could achieve on its own.

CASE STUDY 14

THE ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE CAREERS ADVISORY SERVICES (AGCAS)

The Internationalisation task group

The AGCAS Internationalisation Task Group supports careers professionals to work effectively with international students at UK universities. We seek to keep AGCAS members up to date with legislative changes around recruiting international students in the UK and to identify and share best practice in supporting international students. We also support central AGCAS research and responses to government consultations that relate to international students.

Many AGCAS member services have anything from zero to a small handful of people dedicated to supporting international students. This means that delivering student support and innovating provision can sometimes feel like it is being done in isolation, and often without much funding behind it. As numbers of international students at our institutions grow, and the landscape changes with the reintroduction of the post-study work visa, we believe that connecting professionals across services to support and learn from each other is a key part of our role as a task group.

1. Training

We deliver an annual training event to provide professionals with the insights and networks that they need to do their job. The last two events have supported over **110** careers professionals and featured a wide range of speakers from external organisations such as UUKi, UKCISA and the British Council.

2. Community

We have an active LinkedIn Group for AGCAS members working with non-UK students and graduates, with a particular focus on international student career development. This is a great place to ask questions to the community and share tips and insights on a regular basis.

3. Resources

Our task group page on the AGCAS website is packed with resources, including:

- A guide for employers recruiting international graduates
- FAQs for careers practitioners working with international students
- Case studies of good practice across the UK
- Cultural awareness workshop resources
- Links to information on working in China and India
- Reports on international student destinations

5. RECOMMENDATIONS, NEXT STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION

In 2017/18, nearly 500,000 international students, making up 19.6% of the total student population, were studying in the UK⁴².

The proposed introduction of the new graduate route is expected to make the UK even more appealing to students from around the world. But with increased international student recruitment comes increased demand on careers and employability services, of whom only **28%** feel that they are able to meet current demand from international students. The introduction of the new graduate route creates very real concerns that if the barriers to gaining employment in the UK are not addressed, international students will find themselves underemployed and UK higher education institutions will suffer the consequences of poor international student satisfaction on their own graduate outcomes and on the attractiveness of the UK as a study destination as a whole. Furthermore, the reintroduction of post-study work visas does not benefit the vast numbers of international students who choose to leave the UK after graduating and seek graduate work overseas. Careers and employability support provision is vital to ensure that we make good on the promise and prepare all international students who choose to study in the UK for global success.

This report has described the current practice used by careers and employability services to develop the employability of international students and graduates and identified important challenges professionals in this field face in providing that support. We recognise the significant differences between institutions in terms of available resources and the character of their international student body and encourage careers services to use a data-informed approach to assess whether their current provision meets the needs of their international students and identify areas where international student-specific interventions may be beneficial.

Recommendations for institutions:

Institutions should consider:

1. Developing a strategic institutional approach to supporting the employability of international students and graduates. This strategy should be informed by the views of careers professionals and international students, with ownership at a senior level, and be supported by clear objectives and measurable KPIs.
2. Establishing a cross-department working group or similar with responsibility for international student/graduate employability, championed by a senior leader within the institution, to support the delivery of the strategic approach. Representation from international students or an international student representative on the group is also highly recommended.
3. Monitoring the outcomes of their international graduates in a more systematic way, and using this data to inform the further development and delivery of the institution-wide strategic approach to international graduate employability.
4. Ways of embedding experiences that support the development of employability skills and work experience within PGT courses, developing these with input from careers/employability professionals and student feedback.
5. Investing in targeted employer engagement with overseas employers and other resource to support international students returning home. Building opportunity generation into partnership agreements and contracts with overseas organisations should form a key part of this engagement.
6. Facilitating opportunities for home and international students to interact wherever possible, including in the curriculum and during extra-curricular activities, to ensure continuous improvement of international students' English language skills.

Recommendations for sector, professional and representative bodies:

Sector, professional and representative bodies should work collectively to develop the resources, support and guidance that institutions, HE professionals and businesses can draw on to enhance the employability of international graduates.

In particular, sector, professional and representative bodies should:

7. Invest in further research and analysis, to support evidence-based, data-led responses. Priority areas should include research focussed on:
 - a. Understanding the specific employability needs of international students and the effect of employability interventions on eventual graduate outcomes.
 - b. Best practice in monitoring the outcomes of UK-educated international graduates, and how we measure the quality of international student/graduate employability support. This research should be exploratory and look at different ways of measuring success, including outcomes data and more holistic methods.
 - c. Learning from best practice overseas, in particular the approaches taken by competitor countries (namely Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA) to support the employability of international students and graduates in their systems.
 - d. Providing better Labour Market Intelligence (LMI). A collaborative approach to providing LMI resources by country, and country profiles, is to be recommended, perhaps through targeting investment to expand the scope, quality and accessibility of resources that already exist.

8. Invest in training for higher education and career professionals on how to support international graduate employability.
9. Consider ways in which UK businesses might be better supported to access the pool of international graduate talent available in the UK, including:
 - a. Developing guidance to educate UK-based employers on visa sponsorship and the proposed Graduate Route, as it emerges, and to highlight the benefits of hiring international students.
 - b. Using relationships with organisations like ISE, CBI, FSB, local LEPs and Chambers of Commerce to reach a wide variety of potential employers.
 - c. Collaboratively working across the sector to build the ‘study UK’ offer.

Recommendations for government:

The Government is encouraged to:

10. Restate its commitment to the International Education Strategy, building on the positive aspirations to deliver an “increasingly competitive offer” and a “more welcoming environment” for international students. In particular:
 - a. Implement the proposals for the Graduate Route, first announced in September 2019, and work with the sector to promote the opportunity to current and prospective students.
 - b. Deliver proposed reforms to the visa and immigration regimes, including streamlined and less costly application processes, to ensure that businesses can more readily access graduate talent to drive productivity and economic growth.
11. Encourage international employers engaged through government business to work strategically with UK institutions, helping to identify potential employment opportunities for the UK’s international graduates.

Next steps and implementation:

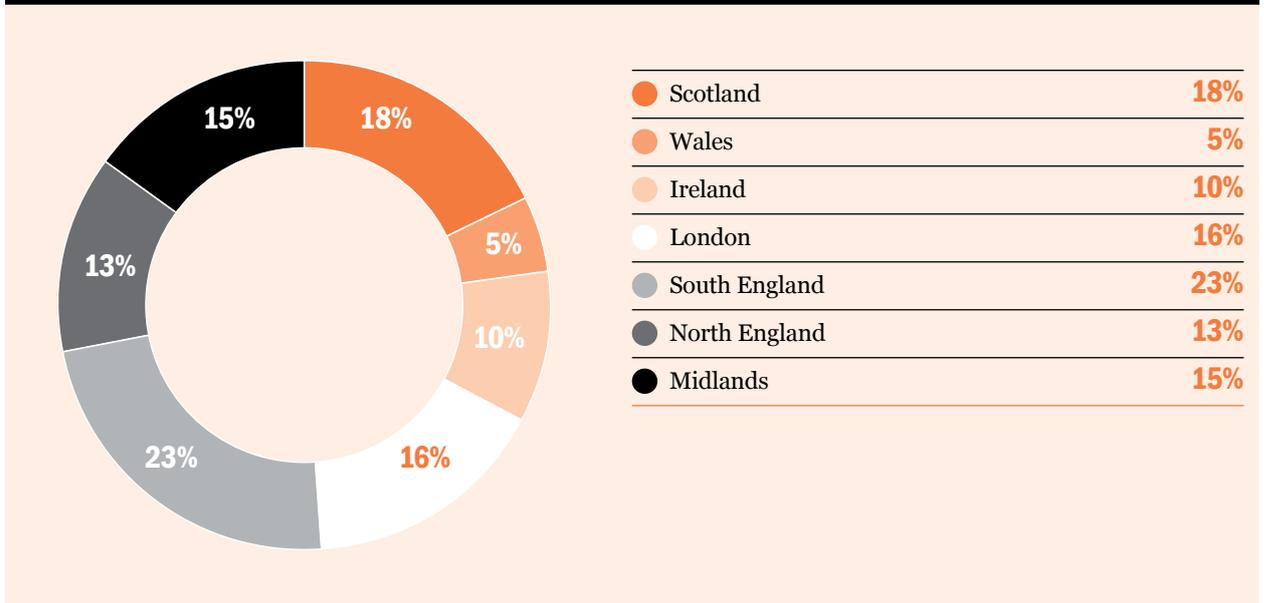
It will be important for relevant sector bodies – including AGCAS, UUKi and UKCISA – to set a clear agenda for the future. In terms of next steps:

- A strategic coordination group should be established to focus on supporting international student employability through collaboration, comprised of sector bodies and institutional representatives.
- An action plan should be developed by the coordination group, setting out a framework of activities to enhance international graduate employability – ideally to coincide with the first year of the International Education Strategy, in March 2020.

APPENDIX

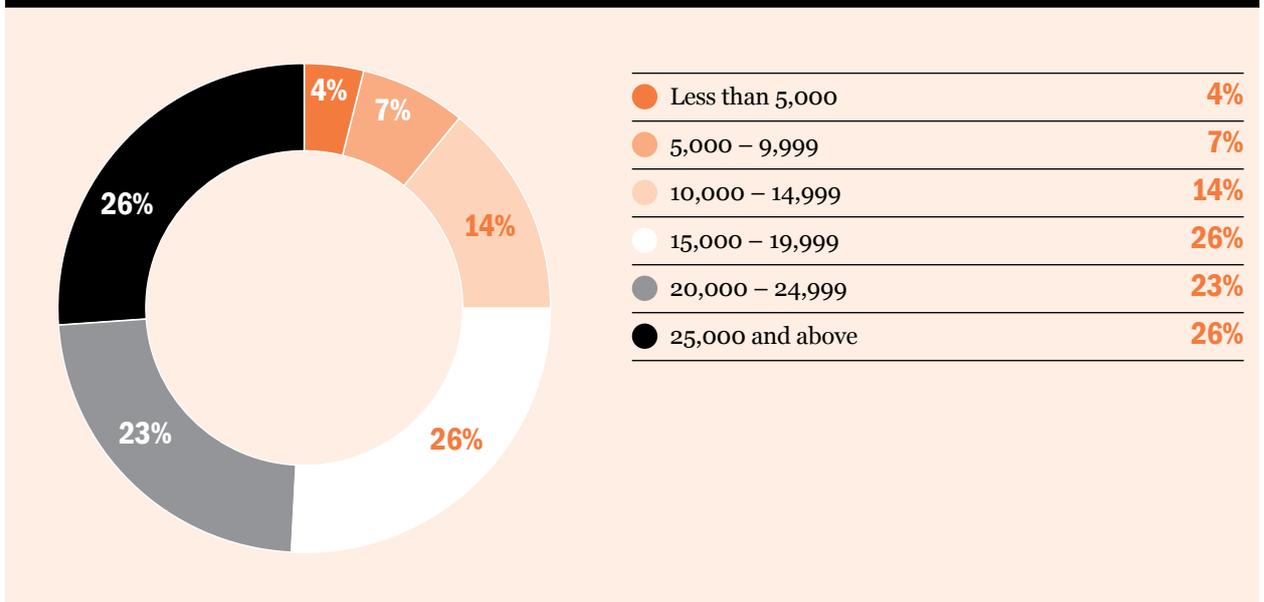
CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

FIGURE 15: GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS



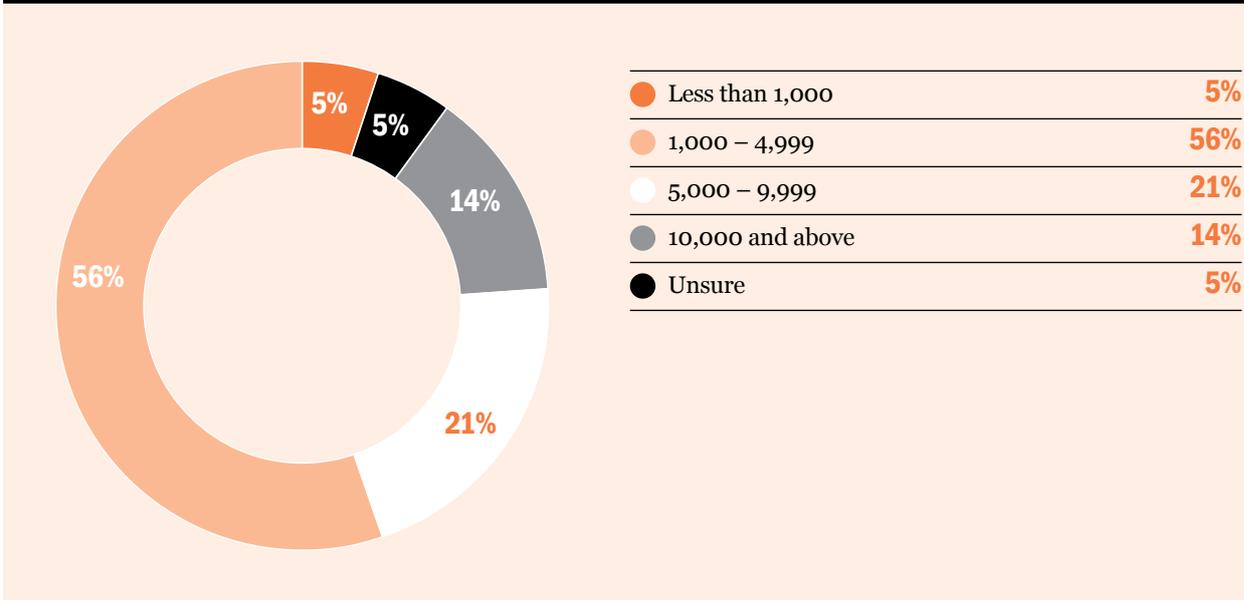
(Base: 43 participating institutions)

FIGURE 16: NUMBER OF FULL TIME EQUIVALENT UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS



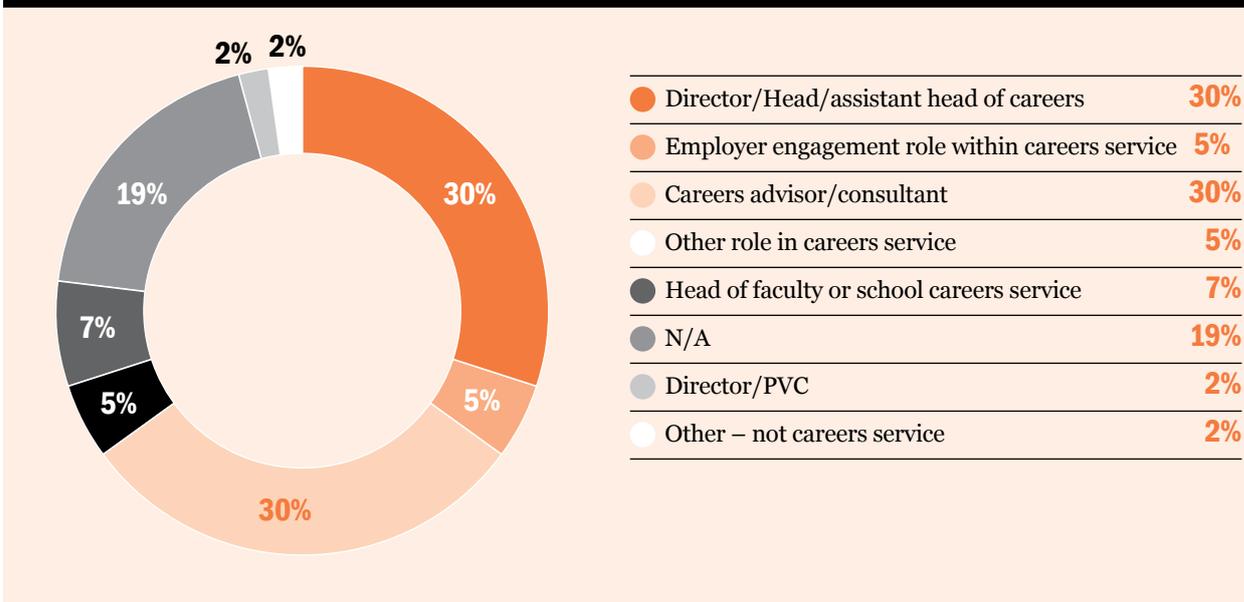
(Base: 43 participating institutions)

FIGURE 17: NUMBER OF FULL TIME EQUIVALENT UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



Base: 43 participating institutions.

FIGURE 18: JOB ROLE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Base: 43 participating institutions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES AND FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

TABLE 13: CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT AND EMPLOYER INTERVIEWEES

Country	Number of student participants	Type of organisation	Number of participants
India	3	SME (250 employees or fewer) – UK	2
Malaysia	2	Large third sector organisation (1,001 – 5,000 employees) – UK	1
Ghana	1	Multi-national corporation	2
Nigeria	1	Professional membership organisation	2

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Imperial College London

King's College London (The Careers Group)

Lancaster University

London School of Economics and Political Science

National University of Ireland, Galway

Newcastle University

Northumbria University

SAE Creative Media Institute

SOAS, University of London

Swansea University

Teesside University

The Careers Group

The University of Edinburgh

The University of Sheffield

The University of Warwick

Ulster University

University College Cork

University of Aberdeen

University of Bath

University of Birmingham

University of Bristol

University of Dundee

University of East London

University of Exeter

University of Hertfordshire

University of Leeds

University of Leicester

University of Limerick

University of Portsmouth

University of St Andrews

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