



# Social Mobility and University Careers Services

A report by the Bridge Group  
Funded by the UPP Foundation

**BRIDGE**  
group



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In recent years, as higher education has expanded, the burden of paying for a degree has shifted towards the individual. This naturally presents difficulties in terms of maintaining the 'University for the Public Good', as well as ensuring there is greater equity in terms of going to, succeeding at and benefiting from the university experience. We believe the UPP Foundation can make a small but significant contribution in helping universities and the wider higher education sector overcome these challenges.

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## BRIDGE group

The Bridge Group is a charitable policy association researching and promoting socio-economic diversity and equality.

Since its launch, the Bridge Group has established itself as an authoritative, independent voice on social mobility. The Charity undertakes leading research and policy analysis to inspire equal access to education and employment amongst young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The Group identifies, and challenges, barriers to progression that are determined by background whilst also advocating for the social, cultural and economic benefits of diversity. The Bridge Group has undertaken commissions from a wide range of organisations including the Cabinet Office, the Wellcome Trust, KPMG and the Sutton Trust.

Based at King's College, London, The Bridge Group is a dynamic organisation, able to respond quickly to current issues in public policy and expose under-explored areas of the social mobility debate. The Group prides itself on its power to bring people together from across sectors to debate the key problems and help to define the solutions to promote social equality. The Charity is non-partisan, and is not associated with any political party.

[www.thebridgegroup.org.uk](http://www.thebridgegroup.org.uk)

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*Who are we to define their success? Many students [from lower socio-economic backgrounds] have made such a positive leap into the university. Their earnings might not be as good at graduation, so we try to solve this through intervention. They don't want to work for [large corporate firm]. So what? They're informed. They're happy. They're successful on their terms.*  
– (Interviewee)

*Students from higher income families have median earnings which are around 25% more than those from lower income families. Once we control for institution attended and subject, this premium remains at around 10%.*  
– (Institute for Fiscal Studies: 2016)

*The Careers Service used to serve students who walked through the door. Now, we have ultimate responsibility for a very important measure of institutional success. Parts of the sector are well resourced for this. Where it's more limited, the students who need most support are most likely to be let down.*  
– (Interviewee)

*We have an impressive programme to encourage [pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds] to apply. If they make it, they have probably sacrificed more, maybe even achieved more to get in. But [those from higher socio-economic backgrounds] arrive with so much more. They participate, they know what employers want. And they leave with even more. Yes it's uncomfortable, but what can we do?*  
– (Interviewee)

*The evidence suggests that the provision of effective career guidance within higher education can contribute to social mobility, improved retention, attainment and progression to employment as well as to enhanced career management skills.*  
– (Higher Education Academy: 2017)

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## Executive Summary

The debate about social mobility rages on, and higher education maintains its role at the heart of it. For many, a university education is the route to greater health, wealth and happiness, and is the primary gateway to the professions. However, participation in higher education continues to be accessed disproportionately by those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Consequently, vast amounts of expertise and money have been expended on interventions and research aimed at promoting access to higher education. Whilst by no means unwelcome, this focus has nevertheless been unbalanced, with too little investigation of the system into which a wider range of students are being encouraged. It has historically been assumed that participation in higher education has a social levelling effect: once you're in, you'll get ahead.

This is a myth.

Those for whom the cost of higher education is most acute often benefit the least. Students from more affluent backgrounds benefit from better graduate outcomes compared to their less advantaged peers, even once we control for the institution attended, subject studied, and a range of other relevant factors. Whilst the most significant analysis has a limited focus on graduate pay, this important exposition of the socio-economic pay gap should alarm all of those with an interest in equality and access.

There has been a welcome increase in the focus on graduate outcomes, both at national level (through the Higher Education and Research Bill, for example), and amongst institutions that are undertaking increasingly sophisticated local research. Higher

tuition fees, new research evidence, and a more discriminating sense of value amongst students have all sharpened this focus. As greater attention is placed on outcomes amongst all stakeholders, the role of careers services in securing positive graduate outcomes is elevated.

This report is the first to focus explicitly on the role of university careers services in addressing the gap in graduate outcomes and, significantly, to give voice to practitioners who are leading institutional strategies. The study is built on a wide-ranging review of literature and policy, and includes new evidence derived from over thirty interviews with leading practitioners. The findings highlight significant commitment and purpose in many institutions. This includes: increasing use of data to fuel evidence-based activity, targeting, and evaluation; activities embedded in student learning; employer engagement that is growing in scale and depth; and greater investment to support activity. Universities do not operate in isolation. Just as students' experiences prior to higher education are formative, employer practices, and the labour market, play an integral part in influencing who gets ahead, and the mechanisms associated with this.

The report begins by outlining key policy matters and context, establishing the landscape in which this debate is currently being played out. Deploying new evidence from interviews and case studies, we then deliver analysis and observations about the factors contributing to unequal graduate outcomes, and conclude with specific recommendations for Government, universities, employers and the wider range of stakeholders.



## Key Findings

- **University participation does not have the levelling effect that was previously assumed;** those for whom the cost of higher education is most acute often benefit the least. Students from more affluent backgrounds benefit from better graduate outcomes compared to their less advantaged peers, even once we control for institution attended and subject.
- **Policy and practice designed to boost social mobility are still focused disproportionately on promoting access to higher education.** There has not been sufficient interrogation of the system of higher education into which a wider range of students are being encouraged, especially with respect to unequal graduate outcomes.
- **The definition of graduate success is importantly under review,** most significantly through the DLHE consultation. However, the graduate salary indicator will likely continue to hold greatest currency, not least because of its importance to the Treasury in relation to student loan repayments, and prospective students' (and their families') perception of cost and value. Notions of return on investment may be most important for those students for whom the cost is most acute.
- **The increasing focus on graduate outcomes is welcome and overdue, at institutional and national level.** The Higher Education and Research Bill, for example, places more emphasis on graduate outcomes (and the gaps between different groups), and an increasing number of institutions are applying sophisticated analyses to local data sets. Higher tuition fees, new research evidence, and a more discriminating sense of value amongst students, have all sharpened this focus.
- **Effective career guidance in higher education can contribute significantly to realising more equal outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds,** including through improved retention, attainment and progression to employment. The new evidence in this study substantiates, and expands on, findings from research studies in the UK and internationally.
- **There are pockets of good practice, but scale and reach are problematic at many institutions.** Scale and selection are significant operational challenges for most university careers services. Whilst those interviewed understand the need to provide bespoke support to students, it is widely felt that the segregation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is not a helpful strategy. Equally significantly, there are many examples of programmes that are impactful, but engage very small numbers relative to the overall eligible population.
- **There is a minimal evidence base about what works.** This is partly a matter of evaluation methodology (for example, cause and effect are notoriously hard to identify in the data, and control groups are similarly problematic), but also because effective practice in this area is emergent at the most committed institutions, and a worryingly low priority at the least committed. Whilst much robust research has been undertaken, many of the studies that we have reviewed are small scale, or are confined to a specific disciplinary context.
- **The sophisticated use of data analytics is becoming increasingly important** in designing, targeting and evaluating careers services. In the best instances,



institutions are moving beyond analysing the effect sizes of factors that impact on graduate outcomes (delivering statistical analyses such as regression modelling, and cluster analysis), and developing predictive analytics to help identify students at risk of weaker graduate outcomes.

- **Institutional investment in Careers Services appears to vary wildly across the sector**, and not only by expected factors such as university income or league table position. This study explores the extent of the variation and its effects.
- **Student experiences of careers education prior to university are formative**, and have a significant impact on subsequent outcomes. There is much evidence to indicate a correlation between an understanding of 'career readiness', at point of entry to higher education, and graduate outcomes. Students who enter higher education with a strong sense of the need to develop their employability, alongside achieving academically, are more likely to maximise the opportunities available during their experience, and thereby secure more positive employment outcomes.
- **A quick and comfortable transition to university plays an important role in graduate outcomes.** The speed with which students settle into university typically affects participation in key activities during the initial year of study, when leading employers are increasingly identifying students as prospective hires. These early experiences shape participation in subsequent years, and impact on students'

perceptions of the need to balance academic study with wider endeavours that are given premium in the employment market.

- **Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds participate less in activities that have greatest currency amongst employers.** This includes extra-curricular activities (leadership roles in sports and societies, for example); work experience that contributes to career aspirations; internships amongst competitive employers; international opportunities to study and work; and access to postgraduate education.
- **Geography matters.** There is significant geographical variation in the level of employer involvement in careers provision in higher education, regarding the quantity of time and resource, and the quality of the contribution. Geography is a feature influencing the nature of employer engagements, and regional institutions are required to devote more careers staff time to fostering collaborations and opportunities.
- **Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have lower retention rates across the sector.** Graduate outcomes obviously depend on completing the course: nearly half of the difference in retention rates between socio-economic groups is due to socio-economic background, rather than prior attainment, or other factors correlated with weaker university performance.

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- **Universities can only do so much: the practices of employers can be supportive, or deeply unhelpful, in widening opportunities to talented students from lower socio-economic groups.** Negative practices include: marketing strategies limited to a small number of institutions; campus presence that engages only self-selected students; screening university applicants by school attainment; selection processes that show conscious bias towards more affluent applicants; and troublingly ambiguous definitions of talent. However, much progress is being made by a modestly sized, but important, community of employers.
  - **The wider labour market also has a significant effect on graduate outcomes.** The effects of the 'massification' of higher education mean that the resources typically used to get ahead in the past (which we might refer to as educational capital) are now contributing to a congested market. Employers are therefore increasingly looking for additional skills, attributes, and experiences, to distinguish between candidates.
  - **Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are not homogenous.** Far too little is understood about the needs of specific groups within this community including, for example, care leavers and students from disadvantaged rural and coastal communities. This is endemic in the debate about social mobility, and more needs to be understood through qualitative study.







## Summary of Key Recommendations

- A. The 2016 careers service resources survey developed by AGCAS could be significantly built upon. This should be undertaken annually, be enhanced in its detail and level of analysis, and include bespoke reports comparing universities from different mission groups and locations, which can inform careers service planning. There is scope that such a survey could be developed in co-operation with ASET and NASES.
- B. Far greater consideration should be given by the sector and by policy-makers to the way in which university league tables disincentivise the important role of universities in tackling social immobility. Whilst developing discrete rankings that focus on social mobility and access are welcome, greater thought should be given to the current opportunities within the main rankings to include, for example, 'distance travelled' metrics. The way in which universities are publicly ranked risks continuing to contradict key policy imperatives associated with improving socio-economic diversity.
- C. Whilst careers information and advice is often embedded in universities' outreach with schools, greater emphasis should also be placed on careers education and management more widely, delivered by university careers professionals (preferably embedded within outreach teams), often in partnership with employers, and funded primarily through Access Agreements.
- D. Whilst there is much good work being undertaken to embed careers provision within the curricula, the following should be standard at all institutions: a dedicated, trained member of academic staff in each department with responsibility for partnering with careers professionals to embed careers provision (with the same status and time allocation as, for example, an academic colleague leading on admissions); disaggregated data available to individual departments; and a member of the senior leadership team (for example, a pro-vice-chancellor) to champion and have shared accountability for outcomes.
- E. NUS should guide Student Unions to collate and submit robust diversity data with respect to participation in student societies and sports. This could be achieved by linking institutional datasets, and should be shared across the sector in aggregate to enhance knowledge of the characteristics of the students most likely to be gaining experiences that are often highly regarded by employers, particularly leadership and management experience.
- F. Every institution, in collaboration with their Students' Union, should develop a specific and comprehensive strategy to close the gap in participation in clubs and societies by social background and other relevant background characteristics. These should draw on the research evidence and include: providing resources that help students to succeed (bursaries, technologies, coaching support); overt work to develop students' capacities to mobilise their resources effectively; and supporting the generation of social capital and valuable 'connections' on arrival.
- G. Careers programmes that formalise, recognise, and provoke students to reflect on their experiences

should be common practice in the sector, and participation rates closely monitored to assess whether students likely to benefit most are accessing these programmes.

- H. Alongside several other organisations, we advocate the following with regards to internships, and strongly encourage universities and the NUS to join us: a four-week legal limit on unpaid internships; employers accessing the apprenticeship levy funding to generate quality placements for students; the publishing of accessible guidance on the rights of interns; and strongly encouraging employers to advertise all internships. We are keen to promote flexible approaches to internships to enable more SMEs to deliver them and to ensure that students who rely on part-time paid work are not placed in a vulnerable financial position in order to take up a short-term role to enhance their employability.
- I. Where it is practicable, providers of student accommodation from the university and private sectors should explore offering students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reduced or pro bono accommodation to enable access to internships during university vacations, especially in London.
- J. Universities should be much more ambitious in creating meaningful employment opportunities for students on campus, and adopt best practice recruitment and selection approaches for this, to promote diversity.
- K. Careers services should develop mechanisms to ensure that access to international work experience

opportunities is not conditional on students having access to significant personal finance. Institutional options may include subsidy for eligible students through Access Agreement funding, fundraising for discretionary monies to support students, or encouraging employers to provide supporting funds.

- L. Building on established institutional practices, a nationally coordinated campaign should be launched to encourage and enable alumni to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds; this should include a national online platform, marketing, and guidance materials. There are several third sector organisations well placed to deliver this.
- M. University fundraising professionals should explore with careers services opportunities for fundraising from alumni and other stakeholders, to support the success and progression of students from lower socio-economic groups. There is some well-established practice in this area, but it is currently modest in scale.
- N. Predictive analytics and, for example, regression analyses, have the potential to leverage important information to support careers services in diagnosing student needs, and targeting and evaluating provision. This requires connectivity between multiple datasets, staffing capacity, and expertise to deliver. Quantitative analysis should also help to inform further qualitative investigation with students.

## Context and Key Themes

1. The current political, economic, and cultural climate provides a dynamic backdrop for this study. In this opening section, we summarise the evidence about unequal graduate outcomes and the role of careers services in addressing this, and consider briefly the wider contextual factors.

### Unequal Graduate Outcomes by Socio-economic Background

2. Historically, it has been widely assumed that university has a social levelling effect: once a student attains a university place, any hurdles associated with socio-economic background have been effectively overcome, and are thereby nullified. This is not true in many instances. After controlling for institution, subject, and prior attainment, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to gain employment in the top professions, and earn less on graduation.<sup>1</sup> A study in 2016 interrogated comprehensively whether students from poorer backgrounds who attend similar universities, and study the same subject, earn less in the labour market than their more advantaged counterparts. Based on parental income, students from higher income families have median earnings which are around 25% more than those from lower income families; once controlling for institution attended and subject chosen, this premium is sustained at 10%.<sup>2</sup>

3. These aggregate data inevitably conceal significant differences within the sector; we know from the interviews in this study, and from the Bridge Group's wider work, that the gap in graduate outcomes by

socio-economic background varies by institution and subject area. These headline findings, however, provide an important imperative to understand better the factors behind this gap, to provide a stronger evidence base on which policy and practice can be formulated. The latest evidence on the way that increasing tuition fees are affecting university participation, and perceptions of value and return on investment;<sup>3</sup> also adds urgency to the need to improve our understanding of these findings.

4. Despite increased investment in supporting student progression, and institutional pieces of research, there is minimal national evidence about the most effective way to direct this resource. Work is underway to address this, including a recent OFFA commission to understand whole institution approaches to widening participation.<sup>4</sup> Amidst this, careers services across the sector have experienced a significant shift: our interviewees invariably expressed strong views about the increased scope and importance of their profession.

### The Changing Purpose of Careers Services

*"The Careers Service used to serve students who walked through the door. Now, we have ultimate responsibility for a very important measure of institutional success. Parts of the sector are well resourced for this. Where it's more limited, the students who need most support are most likely to be let down."* – Interviewee

5. A range of national and institutional drivers place increased focus on careers services, and elevate their importance. The focus on graduate outcomes is most notable in the Government's proposals

to introduce the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a mechanism through which institutional metrics will be linked to the introduction of higher student fees. There is an ongoing debate about the way the framework will be implemented, but it will almost certainly include more detailed metrics on retention, student engagement, and graduate progression (and these are likely to be disaggregated by socio-economic background).

6. The intensifying quest for league table dominance means that institutional leaders are also placing increasing pressure on careers services to achieve improvements in metrics that fuel the rankings.<sup>5</sup> This driver was of concern to many interviewees, who felt that a narrow focus on these metrics can be reductive. This was one of the key findings of a recent study undertaken: "it is often what can be measured easily by an institution that is valued most, rather than more intangible activities."<sup>6</sup>

*"[There has been] a paradigm shift in service provision following the changing context of career services. A key feature of this is a shift from a singular or standalone careers service, to one that is instead becoming an ecosystem". – Blackmore et al (2015)<sup>7</sup>*

7. In our interviews, several areas of tension arose from this changing role, including: the need to reach large populations of diverse students, but to maintain personalised approaches; and an aspiration to adopt an evidence-based approach, but limited practitioner research and availability (or connectivity) of datasets. Several interviewees reflected on considerable variation in the resourcing of careers services across the sector. This raises

important questions about the ability of some institutions to meet increased expectations, and about parity of student opportunity. Whilst there are no data to substantiate this, some interviewees indicated that resources available to individual careers services do not correlate with the number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds attending those institutions, nor to their geographical location and proximity to large employers.

8. These tensions are important to note, but not insurmountable; indeed, many institutions appear to be managing them very effectively. Interviewees described a range of dynamic strategies to support students in this changing landscape. The recent outline from the Higher Education Academy about the strategies typically deployed by universities, below, provides a useful summary of these comments.

**Figure 1: Strategies and frameworks typically deployed by universities<sup>8</sup>**

Changing the structures seeks to reorganise the institution to make it more effective in delivering employability. This might include changes to staffing, resourcing, curriculum and institutional mission.

Changing the programme mix focuses on the development of the range of programmes and qualifications offered. For example, this may include the development of programmes that have a strong vocational focus, placement years and an increase in employer involvement.



Curriculum development explores how changes to the current curriculum such as the introduction of employability modules or employability elements can support graduate employability.

Extra-curricular provision focuses on what institutions can do outside of the core curriculum through the provision of career and employability services and other provisions designed to enhance the student experience while co-curricular provision emphasises provision which complements or extends the curriculum.

Networking explores ways in which institutions can involve external stakeholders in the development of student employability.

9. Many interviewees identified the defining trend as the move towards embedding careers provision across campus activities, and within curricula through much more meaningful links with academic teams. Whilst this essential practice, echoed in the literature,<sup>9</sup> is certainly not new, activity in this area appears to have increased more rapidly in recent years. In advocating this approach, many interviewees also expressed some caution; there is a danger that in embedding employability across the campus it can be “everywhere and nowhere” (interviewee). A range of changes in national policy imperatives, institutional drivers, and market forces have positioned careers services at the heart of most institutional strategies. The next section explores in more detail how the narrowing of the gap in graduate outcomes sits within this role.

### The Role of Careers Services in Narrowing the Gap

10. Studies in the UK have been mainly cautious about the association between access to careers services, and improved graduate outcomes. The Futuretrack report on transitions into employment, for example, found that the use of careers services was modest (almost half of 130,000 participants in the research had never visited their careers service), and there was little evidence to suggest that participation impacted on outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Another study found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were typically more likely to draw on informal sources of information, such as websites, and less likely to access formal provision.<sup>11</sup>
11. Recent studies, however, are more affirmative, indicating that the provision of effective university career services can contribute to social mobility, improved retention, attainment and progression to employment, as well as to enhanced career management skills.<sup>12</sup> There is mounting evidence of a correlation between effective careers provision and successful graduate outcomes in some local institutional studies and, potentially, through

HEFCE’s Career Registration Programme.<sup>13</sup> A recent report has also argued that those who engage with career planning appear to achieve improved graduate outcomes.<sup>14</sup> However, despite these important pieces of evidence, there is a lack of robust evidence about the way in which universities can most effectively support the outcomes of students. This is partly because of the complexities of rigorously evaluating careers provision; cause and effect are notoriously hard to isolate, and this is exacerbated by the increasingly embedded nature of provision. The cost of such evaluation may also be prohibitive, and many interviewees reflected on the unavailability or incompleteness of important data (for example, participation in work experience or student societies), or a lack of connectivity between existing datasets (for example between background characteristic data solicited at application, and data on participation in careers services).

*“As an institution, we are committed to interrogating our own data, and we listen to our students carefully. But this is an area where we feel we are piloting work, trying new approaches...it would be so helpful to understand better what this looks like nationally” – (Interviewee)*

12. Based on the Bridge Group’s earlier studies,<sup>15</sup> and the wider evidence base, the gap in graduate outcomes by socio-economic background is likely a construct of a range of factors, including: students’ experiences prior to higher education; place; differential participation in student activities that have currency amongst employers (extra-curricular activities and work experience, for example); and the marketing and selection practices of employers.

### “Who Are We to Define Their Success?”

13. The debate has intensified about how policy-makers, institutions, and the media define success in graduate outcomes. The ongoing consultation regarding the DLHE survey has provided a keen focus for this debate,<sup>16</sup> with enthusiasm for reforming the current system. There is broad dissatisfaction about: its narrow focus on jobs; its emphasis on status and earnings; the early timing (the main data point is six months after graduation); and how institutions can ‘game’ the survey.
14. Metrics about graduate salary are understandably important to the Treasury (because of the way in which student loan repayments are contingent on this),<sup>17</sup> but there is concern about the reductive nature of this single measure. It can mask a range of factors, including students who make an informed choice to disregard high-earning



professions. More fundamentally, those designing and delivering higher education courses are unlikely to feel that the endeavour is intended to catapult students into high earnings.

15. The latest consultation proposes to include self-assessment questions about students' satisfaction, including whether current employment or study is considered 'meaningful and important'. These definitions are fundamental in considering how socio-economic background affects graduate success, since the dominant narrative is built on a model of deficit. Distance travelled is an important concept in education, and is exercised widely in the school sector (often as "value added"<sup>18</sup>; it considers student outcomes contextually, rather than using absolute terms to benchmark all participants against one another. This concept was raised in many interviews, and links to HEFCE's investment in learning gain,<sup>19</sup> which attempts to measure improvements in knowledge, skills, and work-readiness made by students.
16. There is also an emerging narrative that moves beyond considering employability as a set of skills and competences, and towards more nuanced conceptions of student identity. This is typically built on the principles of Bourdieu<sup>20</sup>, employing ideas about cultural norms and the notion of capital (different types of resources available to an individual). Thereby, the emphasis is on the need to support students in their transition out of the university, helping graduates experience, negotiate and make sense of their emerging career identity<sup>21</sup>

### The Importance of Place and the Labour Market

17. The influence of geography on student outcomes is only beginning to be understood, particularly with respect to: the geographical mobility of students in university participation and in post-university employment; the availability of work experience and internships by region; and the impact of regional labour markets on graduate outcomes. As increased attention is given to the influence of place on social mobility, more significant evidence is emerging to highlight geographical inequalities. The Bridge Group is leading research on this area along with others.<sup>22</sup>
18. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to move away from home to study and, if they do, they are more likely to return to their home region on graduation (and much less likely to move to London where many of the most competitive graduate jobs are to found). This is a key finding in research from AGCAS<sup>23</sup>, from Trendence (illustrated on the right)<sup>24</sup> and in the wider evidence about regional patterns of employment.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 2: Student mobility on graduation (Trendence: 2015)

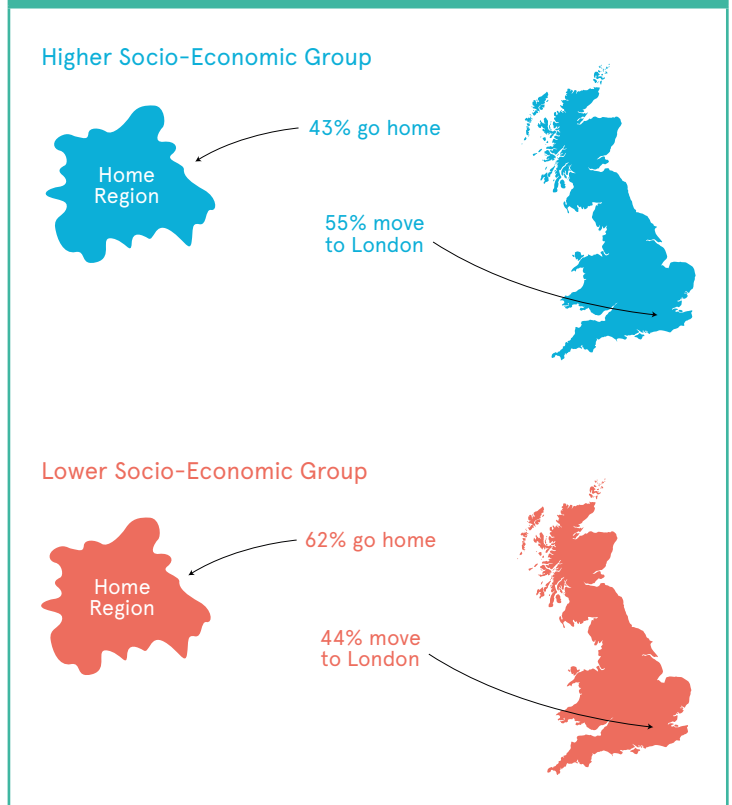
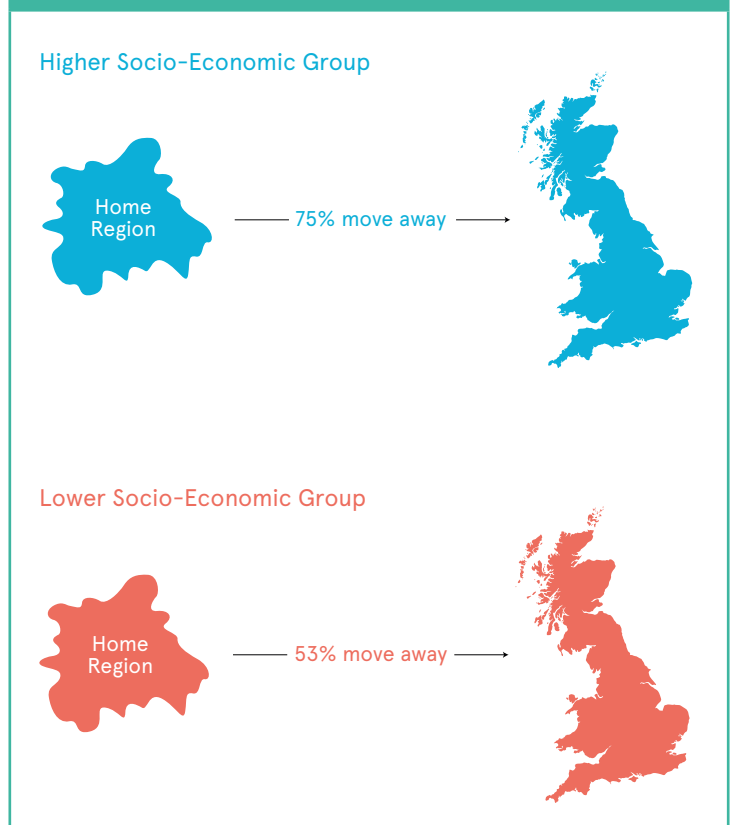


Figure 3: Student mobility on graduation (Trendence: 2015)



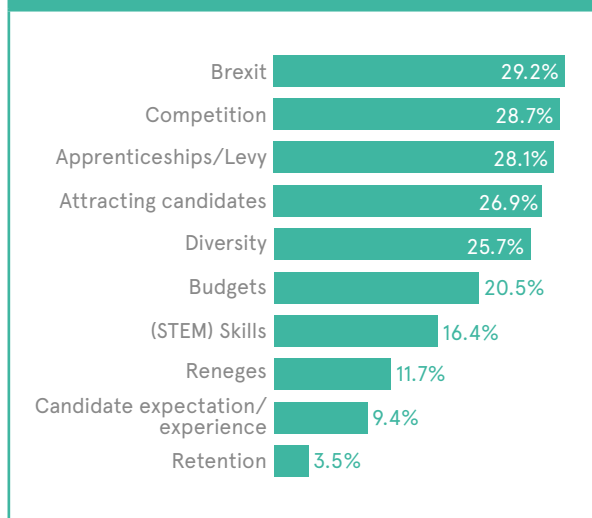
19. These findings were supported by many of our interviewees. Whilst a lack of geographical mobility may be positive for many students, who may have close family, social or cultural ties to their locality, graduate prospects are unavoidably connected to regional labour markets, and there are stark geographical divides. For example, high-paying, professional jobs are concentrated in the Capital, where the number of managerial and professional jobs has increased by 700,000 in the last ten years. By contrast, the number in the North East has increased by only 56,000.<sup>26</sup>

20. Regional dynamics also impact indirectly on league table positions that, as outlined earlier, place emphasis on status and earnings; institutions and students based in London, for example, are typically advantaged in this respect. At institutions in the regions where high proportions of students (typically disproportionately those from lower socio-economic backgrounds) are more likely to stay in the local area and work for SMEs, or the public sector, this can impact negatively on institutional rankings.

21. The graduate employment market has a supply side, and a demand side: university careers services have an important responsibility in helping to shape the former, but are limited in their ability to influence the latter. Job growth in the British economy has shifted more towards low-skilled jobs compared to other European countries – for every ten middleskilled jobs that disappeared in the UK between 1996 and 2008, about 4.5 of the replacement jobs were high-skilled and 5.5 were low-skilled.<sup>27</sup> In Ireland, the balance was about eight high-skilled to two low-skilled, while in France and Germany it was about seven to three. Furthermore, whereas technology has historically mainly made ‘blue-collar’ jobs redundant, recent developments are set to have the same effect on many more highly skilled jobs, including paralegals, middle managers and journalists.<sup>28</sup>

22. Graduate vacancies amongst top employers are down by 8% in 2016/17, and the average number of applications per graduate vacancy has risen to 68 (from 65 last year). According to the latest research from the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR),<sup>29</sup> the key challenges expected by employers in the year ahead are Britain’s exit from the European Union, the UK apprenticeship levy, and increasing competition for good candidates (illustrated above right).

**Figure 4: Top 10 challenges recruiters expect in the year ahead – 171 employers with 20,424 graduate hires (AGR: 2017)<sup>30</sup>**



23. The shift towards the knowledge economy and the increased demand for highly skilled workers is one of the key drivers for mass participation in higher education. Graduates might therefore be perceived as entering a congested market when they leave higher education,<sup>31</sup> competing with a greater number of students with comparable levels of educational qualifications. The resources typically used to get ahead in the past, which might be referred to as educational capital, are now contributing to the experience of congestion. This could further privilege those who are from higher socio-economic backgrounds, who can be better equipped with the types of skills and experience valued by employers. Within this aggregated labour market, the behaviours of individual employers are critical to supporting equal progression, and this is explored briefly in the next section.

### Employers in Pursuit of Social Mobility

24. Any gains achieved through the practice of universities in supporting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds can be capitalised on, or nullified, by the corresponding practices of employers. The inaugural Access to the Professions report<sup>32</sup> began to articulate the important role that employers play in determining graduate outcomes, and provided a platform for the establishment of the Social Mobility

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Business Compact.<sup>33</sup> This latter programme invited employer signatories to undertake a range of activities in pursuit of greater socio-economic diversity. The more recent development of the Social Mobility Index<sup>34</sup>, a benchmarking tool to improve approaches to social mobility, promises to provide a better range and rigour of information about employer practices, and may engender increased peer pressure.

25. To date there is minimal evidence that activity amongst employers is having a meaningful effect on socio-economic diversity in the professions. This is, in part, because initiatives are often weakly evaluated, the required data are often unavailable, and they occur in isolation. This is improving, as we see greater transparency amongst employers (see, for example, the Bridge Group report interrogating socio-economic diversity in the Fast Stream).<sup>35</sup> Several employers have also located themselves as thought leaders, through policy and strategy reforms, with some indicative evidence of impact.<sup>36</sup> Alongside these individual policy initiatives, there are also examples of purposeful collaboration, including Access Accountancy and, in the law sector, Prime.<sup>37</sup>

26. The section that follows explores factors that contribute towards the gap in graduate outcomes by socio-economic background, drawing on our new research, and the wider literature. This includes a much deeper exploration of the role of employers, and the way in which their relationships with careers services, and students, are a critical part of this.





## Factors Affecting Outcomes: Experiences Prior to University

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27. Schools have been legally responsible since 2012 for their pupils' careers guidance. Several reports have highlighted that careers education in England is a postcode lottery, with quality varying considerably by school and area. A lack of funding to support Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) is also an issue; this has been found to have resulted in the compounding of inequalities, particularly in schools with lower levels of funding, and most acute in rural and coastal areas.<sup>38</sup>
28. Interviewees reflected on the importance of students' experiences prior to university, and how these shape attitudes towards, and capabilities associated with, career management and employability. Careers education at school has been proven to have positive outcomes on attainment, and is shown to help young people to understand better the relationship between educational goals and occupational outcomes, increasing pupil motivation.<sup>39</sup> This supports the evidence explored in the most recent State of the Nation report by the Social Mobility Commission, whereby the quality of careers education is linked to background. A survey of students conducted by King's College London found that "wealthier students, who were found to have higher social capital, were nearly one and a half times more likely to receive careers education compared with students with lower social capital, who were significantly more likely to be from poorer families".<sup>40</sup>
29. There is also evidence to indicate a correlation between pupils' understanding of 'career readiness' at the point of entry to higher education, and graduate outcomes. Students who enter higher education with a strong sense of the need to develop their employability alongside achieving academically are more likely to maximise the opportunities available during their experience and secure positive employment outcomes. Students involved in a recent study from diverse socio-economic backgrounds were highly critical of their school experience of CEIAG, and this meant they were less likely to visit the careers service at university. Students have an advantage in developing their career capability if they: attended schools with a strong approach to CEIAG; have a family network where careers thinking and planning is accorded high value; or have a proactive and confident approach in seeking information and opportunities.<sup>41</sup>





## Factors Affecting Outcomes: Participation at University

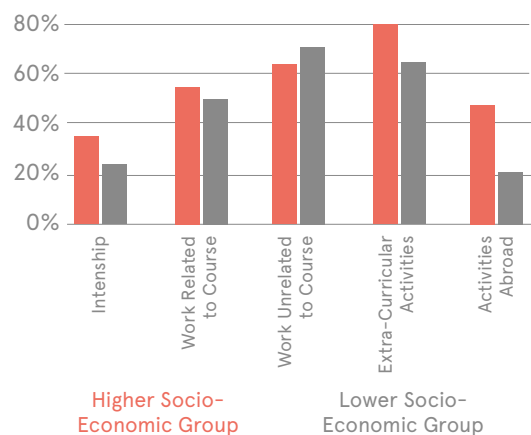
*“With shifts in access to education, when the playing field appears to have been levelled for some people...advantage is maintained through a shift in the rules of the game. The game is no longer just about educational advantage based on quality of degree.”*

– (Bathmaker et al: 2013)<sup>42</sup>

30. The formative years prior to university appear to play an important role in graduate outcomes. Subsequently, opportunities that typically endow students with greater currency in the employment market are accessed disproportionately by the most advantaged. The latest data on differential participation in activities is outlined to the right. It highlights that students from higher socio-economic groups are much more likely to participate in extra-curricular activities and activities (study or work) abroad; students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to undertake work unrelated to their course.



Figure 5: Experiences of students by socio-economic background, n>40,000 (Trendence: 2015)<sup>43</sup>



31. In exploring these differential participation rates, a range of contributing factors emerged in our interviews. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often have a more acute focus on their academic work, often at the expense of other pursuits that act as powerful signals of talent to employers. Previous studies also highlight that living on campus is positively associated with engagement in these activities and this has implications for commuting students who are more likely to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Finance is also important, since a high proportion of students access money from their families to support participation in activities.<sup>44</sup>

*"Financial restrictions limited working-class students in terms of extra-curricular activities, with many of them having to work during term time. There was a social chasm between private and state school students, often exacerbated by university accommodation costs." – (Paired Peers)<sup>45</sup>*

32. Furthermore, there is evidence to indicate that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often find the transition to university more challenging – sometimes academically, and often socially.<sup>46</sup> There is corresponding evidence that many employers are engaging with university students much earlier in their studies, and often during the first year, when many students are negotiating the significant transition to higher education and are unlikely to invest in opportunities to support employability. Some interviewees also referenced students' perceived return on investment as a result of engaging in competitive internships and work placements; this view was best captured in one interviewee's comment, below.

*"Students from [lower socio-economic backgrounds] often don't perceive that there are the same returns available in going for the really competitive internships and work experience programmes. Some are simply put off by the view that [lists three prestigious employers] just don't recruit people like them. So, what's the point in investing all that effort, all that emotion? Employers need to help us break that view down, if indeed it is not true." – (Interviewee)*

33. There are also more straightforward explanations. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have caring responsibilities, they

are more likely to need to work in more routine jobs to support themselves financially, and many of the opportunities to boost career readiness have a cost associated with them (for example, participation in sports clubs) or entail significant opportunity costs (unpaid internships, for example). In considering strategies to engage students who are typically less engaged, most careers services are reluctant to create opportunities only available to specific groups of students. Targeting was typically considered to be negative, because of the risk of stigmatising or stereotyping some groups.

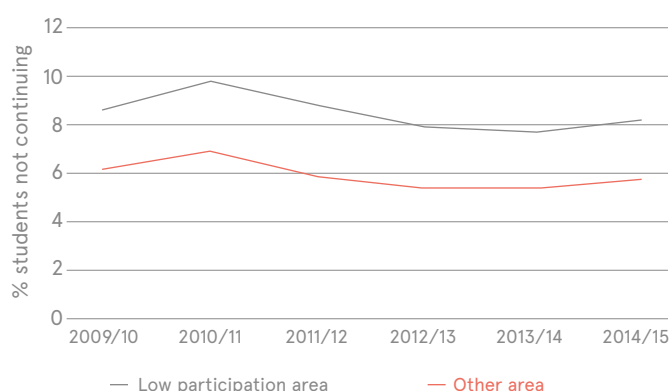
34. The evidence base is clear: graduates need more than a good degree to compete effectively in the marketplace. Awareness of this often arrives too late for many students, or is simply out of reach. Internships, wider work experience, participation in extracurricular activities, and global experience are increasingly becoming minimum requirements amongst some employers, rather than desired. As employers give increasing currency to engagement in these activities, it is important to consider to what extent they are genuine signals for talent and potential in the workplace, and to what extent they are closely correlated with affluence and privileged access to opportunity.

35. In the sections that follow, this study explores the importance of some of these opportunities in shaping graduate outcomes, and some of the factors behind differential participation rates. This provides the foundation for the concluding section, in which this evidence is considered and recommendations are made.

## Student Retention

36. English universities have a low rate of attrition compared to most peer countries; for example, in the USA, just 65% of students graduate within six years, and that proportion drops to a third for Associate Degrees in community colleges.<sup>47</sup> However, amongst English universities there is a significant retention gap by socio-economic background. This is illustrated in the figure below. Within these data, there are a group of twenty institutions where around one in ten students do not continue their studies after one year (many of these institutions are selective). Correspondingly, there are institutions with different profiles that have amongst the highest retention rates for students from lower socio-economic groups, including City University London, Aston University, and Kingston University.

**Figure 6: Proportion of students at English universities not continuing in the following year by Polar3 area and year of non-continuation (young full time first degree entrants) (SMF: 2016)<sup>48</sup>**



37. The difference in completion rates amongst students from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds is of concern, including at some of the UK's most prestigious institutions. This is illustrated in the table to the right. A deeper exploration of these data is outside of the scope of this report, but it is noteworthy that a recent study found that nearly half of the difference in retention rates between socio-economic groups was due to socio-economic background, rather than prior attainment or other factors correlated with poor university performance.<sup>49</sup> Knowledge of the broad patterns associated with retention is growing, but little is known about how this is differentiated by discipline, the issue is underexplored at postgraduate level, and the voices of those who do not complete their studies is silent in most research.

**Figure 7: Differences in higher education retention rates by institution and students' socio-economic background (2014)**

Institution	Drop-out rate: young entrants from low-participation neighbourhoods (%)
Durham University	5.4
University of Sussex	8.2
University of Southampton	6.2
University of Oxford	3.6
University of Bristol	4.4
University of Cambridge	3.3
University of Exeter	4.3
Leeds College of Art	11.6
Newcastle University	4.8
Keele University	5.0

Institution	Drop-out rate: young entrants from other neighbourhoods (%)
Durham University	1.4
University of Sussex	2.8
University of Southampton	2.2
University of Oxford	1.3
University of Bristol	1.7
University of Cambridge	1.3
University of Exeter	1.7
Leeds College of Art	4.9
Newcastle University	2.2
Keele University	2.4

Institution	Ratio of drop-outs: low participants vs others
Durham University	3.9
University of Sussex	2.9
University of Southampton	2.8
University of Oxford	2.8
University of Bristol	2.6
University of Cambridge	2.5
University of Exeter	2.5
Leeds College of Art	2.4
Newcastle University	2.2
Keele University	2.1



## Extra-Curricular Opportunities

*“The value of extra-curricular activities is widely recognised and universities should support students who wish to engage in them. Furthermore, future programmes aimed at harnessing the capacity of extra-curricular activities to develop student employability need to give due consideration to strategies for enhancing inclusion and diverse participation.” – (Milner et al: 2016)<sup>50</sup>*

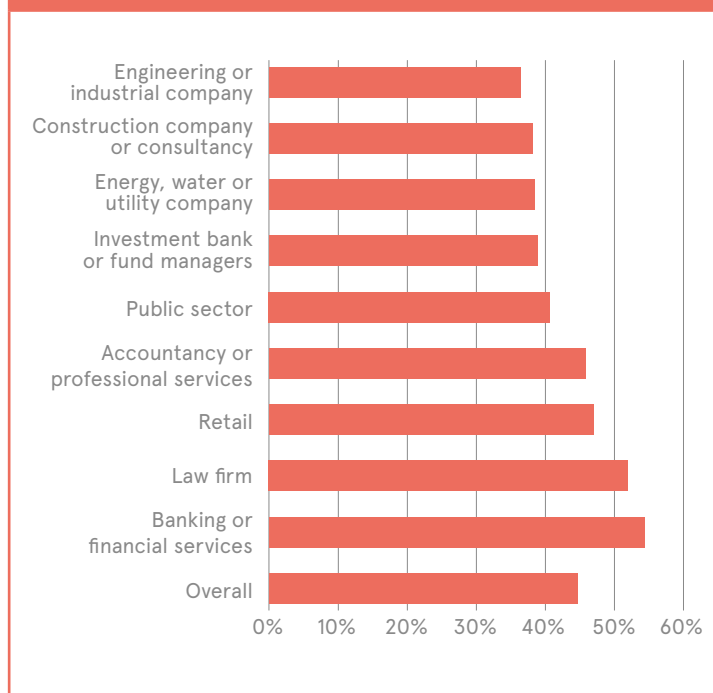
38. Employers are typically placing increased value on costly extracurricular accomplishments and high quality internships, which are disproportionately available to those from more privileged backgrounds.<sup>51</sup> Extra-curricular activities are also often ranked by social prestige, with sports that require high participation costs (polo, rowing etc.) often being favoured by recruiters over others.<sup>52</sup> Whilst much of this research is focused on large employers, a recent survey of over 500 SMEs highlighted that 70% of businesses believe extra-curricular activities make job-seeking school leavers and graduates stand out from the crowd.<sup>53</sup>
39. The NUS has campaigned extensively on the cost of higher education, and have highlighted that this can either prevent some students from participating in extra-curricular activities due to lack of funds, or a lack of time as a result of working part-time; their recent report on barriers to participation highlights this in more detail.<sup>54</sup> We are not aware, however, of any concerted effort to collect data on participation to illuminate this point further, and to provide further evidence for action.
40. In conclusion, the skills learned during study, but not necessarily through it, have been shown to affect graduate outcomes considerably.<sup>55</sup> Choice of degree course (and institution) play a role in this, but the lower levels of participation in extra-curricular activities amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is also emerging as a key differentiator of successful outcomes.<sup>56</sup> Lower levels of participation are due to a combination of individual student characteristics and preferences, the opportunities available at the institution attended, and the role of networks and work experience.<sup>57</sup>

*“The lower proportions of graduates from [lower socio-economic backgrounds] who have engaged in these activities, and the possibility that this is a result of exclusion based on personal characteristics, demonstrates the extent to which the ability to make full use of higher education experiences can further reinforce disadvantage, despite having the potential to enable graduates to overcome it.”<sup>58</sup>*

## Work Experience and Internships

41. Many studies stress the need to increase work opportunities for students to enhance graduate skills levels, and ensure smooth and effective transitions between university and the labour market.<sup>59</sup> Relevant work experience was recently rated by two thirds of recruiting employers as being a critical or significant factor sought in job candidates.<sup>60</sup> Amongst large recruiters, around a third of graduate positions are filled by graduates who have already worked within their organisations, through internships, placements or vacation work. In some sectors, over half of those students undertaking internships subsequently secure a graduate role with the same employer, as illustrated below. These internships are also increasingly taking place during a student’s first year of study, which is likely, for the reasons discussed earlier, to preclude a higher proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

**Figure 8: Proportion of interns that convert to graduate hires, by sector (AGR:2015)<sup>61</sup>**



42. The extent to which these experiences are accessible to all students, regardless of background, remains to be explored in sufficient detail. Alongside concerns that unpaid internships are an important factor in restricting fair access (more pronounced in some sectors), there is also the worrying practice of unadvertised internships. There is also an uneven distribution of work experience opportunities, with the majority being based in London and the South East.<sup>62</sup> Around a third of graduate internships are unpaid,<sup>63</sup> and graduates from outside London who are unable

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to access free accommodation while working in the Capital often face significant cost barriers to participating in unpaid internships (and even paid internships) given the higher accommodation and living costs.

43. A recent piece from IPPR,<sup>64</sup> for example, builds on the research in this area, including numerous studies that expose the extent to which unpaid internships are considered by many employers as “the way things are”.<sup>65</sup> Internships differ from work experience in that they last longer, with many placements running to six months or even a year. The clear majority of internships are in London where the cost of living is the highest in the UK. The problem of unpaid internships is acute in sectors such as the media, arts and fashion. The National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) found that 82% of new entrants to journalism had done an internship, of which 92 per cent were unpaid<sup>66</sup>; 40% of people who thought about applying for an internship have reconsidered because they could not afford to work for free, and 39% of people offered an internship turn it down for financial reasons.<sup>67</sup> In practice, the minimum wage legislation is not currently being enforced in relation to interns<sup>68</sup>, and ASET<sup>69</sup> also has an important role in ensuring good practices are adhered to.

### Global Experience

*“UK graduates must raise their aspirations for the global competencies that employers will increasingly demand. If UK graduates cannot fulfil these expectations, employers can and will recruit from outside the UK. Experience of working overseas and immersion in a different culture can catapult a graduate into being considered for rewarding and challenging roles.”*

– (AGR: 2014)<sup>70</sup>

44. The advantages associated with gaining a global experience whilst at university have been long understood; a study in 2008 highlighted that “educational institutions need to provide the right environments and opportunities for young people to develop not only sound employability skills but global competencies and a globally attuned mindset”.<sup>71</sup> International mobility can aid students in gaining additional language skills that are valued by some employers, but moreover, several studies highlight that these experiences also develop a range of attributes concerned with self-efficacy and personal effectiveness: “many of the skills developed through international student mobility initiatives are precisely those generic transferable skills sought by graduate employers”.<sup>72</sup>
45. A study on the impact of the Erasmus student exchange programme found that graduates with international experience were significantly more successful in the job market.<sup>73</sup> These students were half as likely to experience unemployment and, five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23% lower than their peers. Access to these opportunities is too often the preserve of the privileged. Participation rates in international mobility opportunities are heavily skewed towards the more affluent, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to need additional institutional support.<sup>74</sup> Overseas study and work experience opportunities appear to predominantly advantage those who are already advantaged by background.
46. While many studies point to evidence that transferable skills and capabilities are developed through international mobility, it may be the case that international mobility programmes appeal to students who already possess, or have an advantage in developing, these attributes. To extend the range of students who might benefit from internationalisation, the concept of ‘internationalisation at home’ has increasingly been recognised in recent years. This involves developing the home curriculum and learning experience in such a way to foster some of the outcomes gained through student mobility.



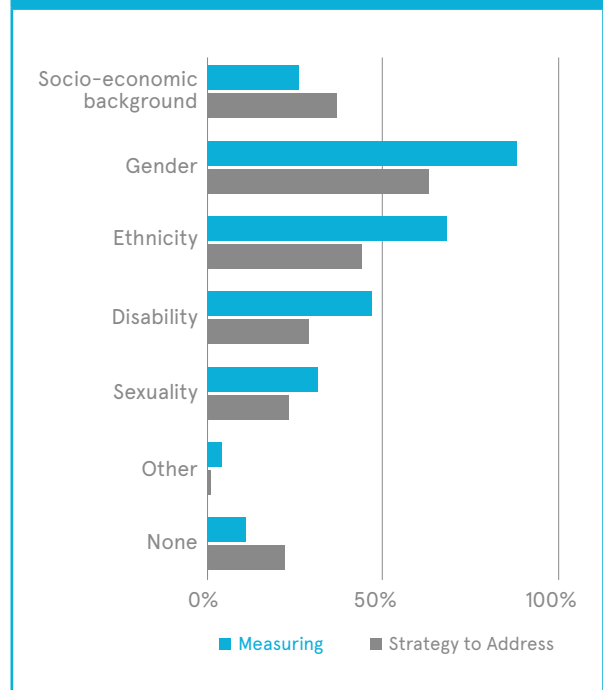


## Factors Affecting Outcomes: Employer Recruitment Practices

47. Whilst the key focus of this report is not on the actions of employers;<sup>75</sup> the evidence highlights that the attraction and selection practices of employers play a critical role in shaping graduates' outcomes. There has been much progress from some employers. Many have removed traditional entry criteria (that are often closely correlated with socio-economic background) and deploy data-driven approaches to attract and identify talent from across different groups. Around a quarter of leading employers monitor socio-economic diversity amongst their graduate intake, but many more have specific strategies to address it. A significant number of employers are, therefore, attempting to address socio-economic diversity without a proper understanding of: the scale of the problem they face; the factors behind any lack of diversity; and how then to evaluate the impact achieved.



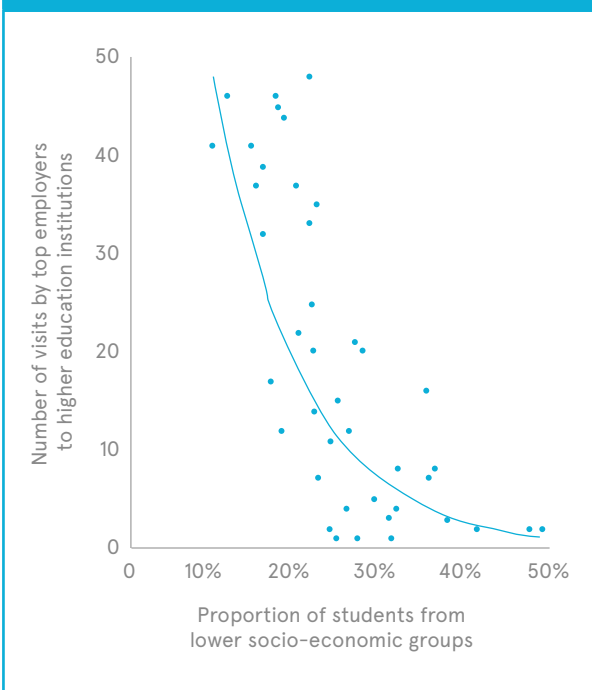
*Figure 9: % of employers that are monitoring diversity indicators, and have active strategies to address them (AGR 2015)<sup>76</sup>*



48. Lack of diversity in the professions is a construct of supply (who applies) and demand (how applicants are selected in the recruitment process). Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may self-select out of the application process in relatively high numbers, on the basis that they feel they will not 'fit-in' or that their academic credentials will not

prove strong enough. For example, a recent study into socio-economic diversity in the Fast Stream found that many candidates found the recruitment process “attractive but intimidating”.<sup>77</sup> Competitive employers target the most selective universities, and this indirectly focuses efforts on the least diverse populations, as illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 10: Number of visits to university campuses plotted against campus diversity<sup>78</sup>**

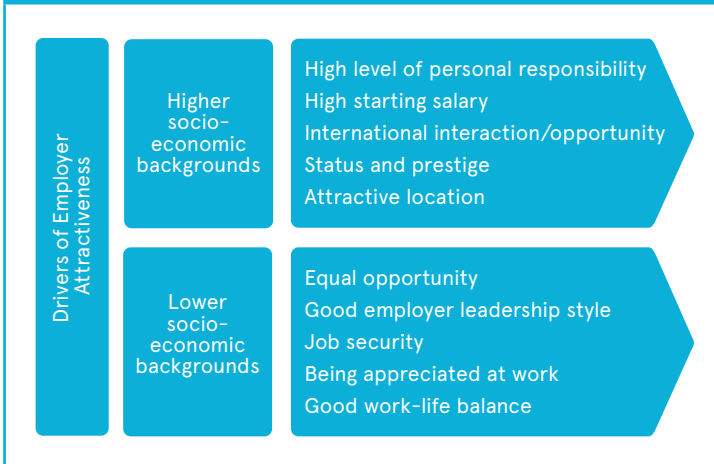


49. However, while the institution that a student attends in some ways reflects ability, it also encodes unequal advantage to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Students at the most selective universities, on average, have greater access to social capital, are given more support on their journey to university, have wider social networks, and more careers support. We can make a reasonable assumption that by favouring students who have had disproportionate access to these advantages, many employers are missing talented candidates who would perform exceptionally given the opportunity.

50. Encouraging student applications is about targeting, but messaging is also important. Graduate recruiters need to develop more sophisticated understanding about students’ views in relation to employment priorities, and how these might vary between socio-economic groups. The figure on the next page illustrates the main differences in the drivers of employer attractiveness between higher and lower socio-economic groups; these findings are supported by other research on this topic. We should be careful to homogenise the views of diverse segments of the community, but students from higher socio-economic groups appear to prioritise drivers such as salary, personal responsibility, status and prestige, whereas the lower socio-economic backgrounds groups prioritise work-life balance, leadership style, and job security.



Figure 11: Differences in drivers of employer attractiveness amongst different SEB groups (Trendence: 2015, n>40,000)<sup>79</sup>

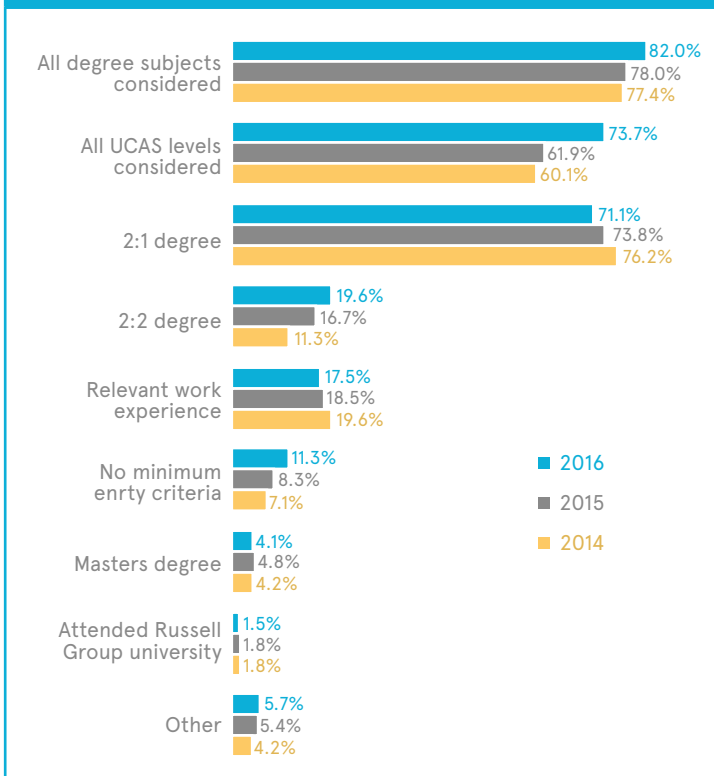


51. The way in which employers define talent, and the subsequent way in which this informs selection processes, is equally important. Candidate screening criteria is a significant factor contributing to the lack of socio-economic diversity in the professions, and changes in this regard are outlined in the figure below. Many employers have recently received positive press for removing the requirement for a specific UCAS tariff; the share of employers that will accept applicants with any UCAS tariff has risen by 12 percentage points in the last year.

52. It has been largely assumed that the consequence of employers reducing, or removing, aspects of screening criteria (including, in some cases, removing the need for a degree) will result in greater diversity amongst the candidates, both those applying and appointed. Amongst some employers, though, an increased focus on screening criteria has not been matched by a sufficient focus on the use of selection tools in the recruitment process. There is much evidence to show that candidates from lower socio-economic groups have less access to the opportunities and experiences from which to draw examples throughout the selection process. Competency interviews typically include a series of enquiries at the interviewer’s discretion, which creates opportunities for bias. There is a building evidence base to show that the combination of capability and motivation, tested through strengths based testing, is a strong predictor of future performance.

53. There is also increasing evidence regarding conscious and unconscious bias in relation to recruitment practices and candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and the way in which some employers might risk mistaking confidence for competence.<sup>80</sup> Studies have found that definitions of talent within the professions are closely aligned with characteristics such as “polish”, confidence and certain forms of cultural competence. These aptitudes or competencies are arguably easier to acquire for individuals from more affluent backgrounds. The lack of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds amongst some employers is only partly a consequence of targeting recruitment on elite universities. The way in which employers define talent, and the selection tools and approaches relating to this, must also be considered. Meaningful impact on socio-economic diversity requires a critical review of the whole recruitment pipeline, from attraction through to selection, induction and progression in the workplace. Crucially, this pipeline cannot be understood, and effective solutions designed, without the effective collection and analysis of data.

Figure 12: Methods used by employers to screen candidates’ applications (AGR: 2016)





# Closing the Gap: Recommendations and Examples

54. This substantive final section considers the previously explored literature, draws extensively on the new evidence derived from our interviews, and is punctuated with examples from these discussions. These are not shared here simply as exemplars of best practice (nor was this the spirit in which they were submitted), rather they are illustrations to support key points.
55. The sector is in the early stages of building an evidence base to understand effective practice in closing the gap in graduate outcomes by socio-economic background. Consequently, the innovative and flexible approaches that are being adopted by many careers services are to be welcomed. This needs to be accompanied by on-going evaluation and monitoring, to identify effective strategies to engage and support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds within each institution.
56. The higher education sector is becoming increasingly diverse and institutional context matters. We recognise that many models of working are not universally transferable: institutional strategy, available resources and course portfolio, all impact on the range of options available and their potential effect.

## **Institutional Investment**

57. There is significant variance in the resource available to careers services across the sector and, more generally, the overall levels of resourcing appear to lag significantly behind the increased importance of the careers provision. In exploring

the gap in graduate outcomes by socio-economic background, it would be valuable to have greater insights about how resourcing in those institutions serving the largest numbers of these students compares to those serving the fewest. Systems should be developed to understand better these variations in resource, and how it may affect students differentially. We support strongly the recent attempts to understand the patterning of resourcing in careers services, from AGCAS for example, and these efforts should be built on. Surveys of careers services resourcing (staff and operational budget) should explore how this correlates to the socio-economic backgrounds of student populations. We also need to improve our understanding of the variations in resourcing of careers services based on locality and region.

### **Recommendation One:**

*The 2016 careers service resources survey developed by AGCAS could be significantly built upon. This should be undertaken annually, be enhanced in its detail and level of analysis, and include bespoke reports comparing universities from different mission groups and locations, which can inform careers service planning. There is scope that such a survey could be developed in co-operation with ASET and NASES.*

58. A higher proportion of the resource associated with OFFA Access Agreements should be used to support evaluation and impact monitoring of careers activities. In view of the potential of effective careers provision to promote social mobility, far greater attention and resource needs to be given to analysing its impact. It is vital that



work is undertaken within, and across, institutions to build the evidence base; this is in keeping with OFFA's commitment to developing a 'whole institution approach' to widening participation, and to evaluation.

*The University of Leicester has a whole institution, strategic approach to supporting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the high proportion of widening participation students at the University, the majority of students start without having had explicit careers advice through family or school. For many pupils encouraged to go to university, it is promoted as a destination, not as a stepping stone towards a career. This means that on arrival at university these students often do not know how to work towards their future career from first year onwards. In the Career Development Service at the University of Leicester, it is believed that career education should be as thought out as academic education and development. The Career Development Journey was created; the journey aims to increase the skills and awareness in students and level the playing field between those from public and private schools.*

*The Explore phase has the student look at who they are, what they like doing and what their values and motivations are. The Plan phase helps the student look at what jobs would be a good match for those interests and values, and try an opportunity to see if it is for them. The Compete phase is what people view as more traditional career service activities, looking at applications including CV's and cover letters as well as interviews and assessment centres. These three phases are not unique to Leicester, however, what makes the CDJ distinctive is the learning outcomes embedded in*

*each stage. The learning outcomes are grouped into four learning objectives: career management and self-awareness; career planning; professional behaviour; and recruitment and selection. Each learning outcome is linked to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Using Bloom highlights the need to start with the basics of career planning early for students to build their knowledge over the course of their degree. This should help students become self-sufficient in their career planning and development for their first job and beyond. This is also useful as employers expect a reflective higher level thinker to come out of university.*

59. Impactful careers services also require the support of senior management, in devising, resourcing, and executing institutional strategies. An institutional strategic focus on employability promotes dialogue and information-sharing across professional functions and with academic departments; but it can also help to ensure that narratives about the importance of career thinking and planning pervade the student population.

*In 2016, London Metropolitan University appointed a Pro Vice Chancellor responsible for employment outcomes, who works closely with academic Schools to ensure that energy and importance is given to developing students' employability. At a strategic level, initiatives are in place to support students by both raising awareness of the need for them to reflect on their own employability, as a dimension of academic study and the wider university experience, and by providing accessible opportunities. For example, the University's strategic plan details five promises to students to help them get the maximum out of their time there. Three of the promises are centred on employability.*

All students have access to work-related experience during their course. The promise relating to 'Get to work' means that students are able to gain valuable industry-based experience during the course of their study rather than being expected to take the financial risk of dropping part-time paid work in order to take-up a short-term (often unpaid) opportunity. The second promise to students, to 'Earn it back', involves ensuring that the student community is given priority over any available job opportunities on campus. Finally, the promise, to 'Boost your potential', describes the Peer Assisted Student Success (PASS) scheme whereby second and third year undergraduate students are paid to mentor first year students on their courses. This improves the mentors' employability skills while supporting new students to feel a sense of belonging at the University and find networks.

### League Table Disincentives

60. University league tables can provide a powerful disincentive for institutions considering how to support students from a diverse range of backgrounds. The reforms associated with DLHE, and more widely with TEF, offer promising signs that rankings might be constructed of indicators that are more meaningful than simple input measures such as UCAS tariff, or reductive measures of graduate outcomes. University league tables do not currently take account of added value in any meaningful way, despite the potential benefit that measures of this nature could realise. Many of the national (and international) rankings risk reinforcing social inequalities, because they use measures which largely reflect historical institutional reputation, and proxies associated with available financial resource. We welcome the potential of HEFCE's Learning Gain programme and the experiments underway to understand better how to capture students' outcomes and the multiple and complex ways that they benefit through participation in higher education.

61. Brown's provocative paper in 2014 on this topic<sup>81</sup> gained little traction, but we encourage colleagues to revisit some of its principles, including the proposal to develop separate rankings for different types of institutions and courses that add value to students, in particular those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

### Recommendation Two:

**Far greater consideration should be given by the sector and by policymakers to the way in which university league tables disincentivise the important role of universities in tackling social immobility. Whilst developing discrete rankings that focus on social mobility and access are welcome, greater thought should be given to the current opportunities within**

**the main ranking to, for example, include 'distance travelled' metrics. The way in which universities are publicly ranked risks continuing to contradict key policy imperatives concerned with social mobility.**

### Boosting Career Capability in School Outreach

62. Although institutions already offer school pupils information and guidance about higher education through outreach and marketing teams, far fewer engage pupils in the importance of developing their wider understanding of career readiness while at school. Any outreach work focused on career thinking and planning needs to include information on both the benefits of participation in higher education, and of the challenges of entering the labour market, to ensure that all students fully understand that educational capital alone will not necessarily lead to successful employment. This will enable students to be better equipped when they arrive at university, and to harness the array of opportunities available, from careers provision to participation in extra-curricular activities.

*The Careers Service at the University of Newcastle works closely with the Marketing and Student Recruitment (MSR) team to ensure that careers support is embedded in university provision throughout the whole student lifecycle. It also enables the Service to reach students from a young age, even before they enrol at the University, through open days and outreach events, to introduce them to the importance of career planning and developing employability skills alongside academic study. By doing so, it hopes to increase the likelihood of students accessing the support and opportunities that the Careers Service offers.*

*One programme that demonstrates the close-working and collaboration of the Careers Service and MSR team, is called the 'Partners' programme. It is an outreach programme that engages schools that have a high percentage of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who also have lower than expected levels of attainment. The University has enhanced data on registered students who participated in the 'Partners' programme and this is harnessed by the Careers Service so that they can target them, share information, and ensure they are given priority over available opportunities. For instance, the 'Partners' mailing list is used to reach students and engage them in programmes like 'Careers Insight' which provides work experience and networking opportunities with employers.*

*By working collaboratively, the Careers Service has been better able to offer a bespoke offer for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds that fits with a whole lifecycle approach. This has proved more successful in terms of engaging larger numbers of students in comparison to previous models of delivery that relied more on an ad hoc approach.*

63. The recent focus by Government and OFFA on attainment-raising activities should not overlook the importance of supporting students to develop the capability to make well informed choices and be able to execute their plans given the evidence outlined here. University careers services should explore how they can devote more time and resource to school outreach work by means of OFFA Access Agreements. In this context, programmes that are designed in collaboration with employers are likely to be most impactful for pupils, as they highlight the relevance of further study whilst also building understanding of the requirements of the workplace.

### Recommendation Three:

*Whilst careers information and advice is often embedded in universities' outreach with schools, greater emphasis should also be placed on careers education and management more widely, delivered by university careers professionals (preferably embedded within outreach teams), often in partnership with employers, and funded primarily through Access Agreements.*

### Embedding Careers provision

64. A recurring theme from our interviews was the need to achieve an 'ecosystem' approach to careers provision, whereby narratives about careers planning inform the culture of the whole institution. This was perceived to be the most effective strategy for reaching students who might benefit most from careers services, rather than an approach that segregates students through discrete programmes. Achieving this is likely to involve significant structural changes in some institutions, to ensure that leaders of the careers service are involved in developing institutional strategies and agendas to embed initiatives 'within, across, and beyond the institution'.<sup>82</sup> In this model of working, careers provision extends across curricula and, importantly, is delivered by a range of people, including: careers professionals; personal academic tutors; lecturers; employers; and alumni. In this way, it might be possible to overcome some students' association of accessing careers provision with certain types of people, and thereby improve access to careers insights.

*The University of Lincoln has developed and refined the structure of the personal tutoring system to ensure that careers planning and employability is embedded into provision for all first and second year undergraduate students. The Careers Service has played a key part in this collaborative initiative to inject employability into the co-curricular and pastoral system to ensure it informs the student journey. This approach is notable for creating a mechanism to identify students most at risk*

*of failing to demonstrate career readiness, as personal tutors are uniquely placed to monitor students' attitudes and progress in certain key areas, like career readiness.*

*The new structure also adds purpose to the personal tutoring process and establishes minimum requirements for both individual and group interactions between tutor and tutee. Senior personal tutors are assigned at a School level who are responsible for monitoring provision in their disciplines and a senior tutor forum has been established where they can share best practice and address common challenges. The Careers and Employability Team link in with this structure and offer both resources and training for tutors and senior tutors to ensure services are understood and key messages are delivered to students in a timely manner, driving students' engagement with their career planning early in their university experience.*

*The Careers Service has been encouraged to adopt a creative and innovative approach to finding effective ways to enhance students' employability by the University senior management team. Such an experimental approach to employability has recently resulted in the Service winning a national award for Innovation in Employer Engagement. Additionally, it is flexible regarding its role within the personal tutoring structure to enable it to respond most effectively to students' and tutors' needs.*

65. Embedding employability and careers programmes into the curriculum removes the optional nature of provision, whilst also overcomes the issues associated with identifying and targeting specific groups of students, and treating them differently. This approach was widely adopted amongst our interviewees, and regular communication between staff and academics was a key feature of this work.

*The Careers and Employability Service at the University of Suffolk is small and has limited resource. As a result, it adopts a strategic approach to maximise the effectiveness of its small team of staff and to ensure that the students most at risk of becoming disengaged in careers planning are reached and given support. One of the most successful approaches, in this light, involves engaging students through the curriculum which relies on building strong links with academic departments.*

*Members of the Careers team work closely with academic staff to identify relevant curriculum sessions that they can contribute to, so that students are introduced to aspects of career planning and to the services and opportunities available at the University. These sessions are designed to make an explicit link between areas being studied within the module, and events, organisations, and opportunities that will enable students to find out more about how their learning is put into practice in the workplace. This then feeds into specifically targeted and supported networking opportunities, such as panel events and*

brokered relationships with employers. This approach is developed to make learning authentic and relevant by forging connections with employers but also to safeguard against students delaying career planning until their final year. By linking modules to events, students are supported to begin their career planning earlier and relate their academic studies to the employment context, developing their understanding of the types of organisations and roles that exist.

The curriculum sessions provide a valuable way of identifying and reaching students who show signs of lacking in confidence and career readiness. Members of the Careers team are often able to “pick up” on those who appear to need additional support and guidance at the end of sessions and therefore personalise the work of the Service and encourage follow-up activities.

In addition, the Careers Service works with academic staff to build employability elements into the curriculum. For instance, the Graphic Design course requires students to develop their self-awareness by including a critical review into the dissertation module. It asks students to reflect on their progression through the degree and deliver a portfolio and presentation analysing their postgraduate options and to demonstrate how practical and theoretical knowledge gained on the course can be used to best advantage in relation to future progression.

66. A common issue amongst careers practitioners is how to engage academic colleagues, such that they share a view about the importance and relevance of developing students’ career capability. To challenge assumptions and transform academic cultures, all departmental heads should be involved in strategic meetings that address careers provision, and specific activities to improve outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. They should be familiar with headline findings from analysis in DLHE and NSS data, to gain insights into the outcomes of their graduates by course and background.

#### **Recommendation Four:**

*Whilst there is much good work being undertaken to embed careers provision within the curricula (to make meaningful connections between study and competence in the job market, and to ensure all students are engaged), the following should be standard at all institutions: a dedicated, trained member of academic staff in each department with responsibility for partnering with careers professionals to embed careers provision (with the same status and time allocation as, for example, an academic colleague leading on admissions); disaggregated data available to individual departments; and a member of the senior leadership team (for example, a pro-vice-chancellor) to champion and have shared accountability for employability outcomes.*

#### **Recommendation Five:**

*More sophisticated research needs to be undertaken to understand better how academic colleagues can most effectively engage students from all backgrounds in careers provision and management. This will vary by discipline and by student populations, and builds on work from the Higher Education Academy.*

#### **Access to Extra-Curricular Activities**

67. This study substantiates earlier works that highlight significantly lower participation rates amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the types of activities that employers value. There are some data in the sector on participation rates in these activities, though it is patchy and mostly incomplete. The role of Student Unions is important here, since they are the body with whom students register to engage in clubs and societies. We encourage the NUS to guide institutional Student Unions to collate these data, to understand better general participation rates amongst students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (and, for example, by gender and ethnic group), so that the sector has a clearer understanding of the patterning of this participation in terms of type of activity, level of intensity, and which types of students are securing leadership roles within clubs and societies.

#### **Recommendation Six:**

*NUS should guide Student Unions to collate and submit diversity data with respect to participation in student societies and sports. This could be achieved by linking institutional datasets, and should be shared across the sector in aggregate to enhance knowledge of the characteristics of the students most likely to be gaining experiences that are often highly regarded by employers, particularly leadership and management experience.*

68. Building on the earlier section on data analyses, this information would form an important pillar in building institutions’ understanding about barriers to participation, and would highlight to employers how particular types of participation (those that are given weighting in selection processes, for example) are correlated with socio-economic background. This might also help direct employers’ financial sponsorship for student clubs and societies, as part of their strategies for engaging a wider range of students on campus. These data would also provide the basis for much more detailed qualitative work about the barriers to participation, which could subsequently be used to develop guidance to those running and managing clubs and societies. UUK and the NUS have undertaken some work in this area in relation to volunteering in support of social action, and



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the main barriers identified include: finance, time, perception, and access to advice.<sup>83</sup>

69. There is no simple fix to promoting participation in extra-curricular activities amongst students from lower socio-economic groups. Some practices are in place: for example, there are funds available in most institutions to support students in accessing clubs and societies (though our interviews suggest that these are modest in size, and accessed very infrequently), and the NUS is offering increased guidance to Unions about the importance of diversity and inclusion in the running of clubs and societies. However, the focus on this needs sharpening; the evidence base for effective practice needs strengthening; and more resource needs to be invested.

#### **Recommendation Seven:**

*Every institution, in collaboration with their Students' Union, should develop a specific and comprehensive strategy to close the gap in participation in clubs and societies by social background and other relevant background characteristics. These should draw on the research evidence and include: providing resources that help students to succeed (bursaries, technologies, coaching support); overt work to develop students' capacities to mobilise their resources effectively; and supporting the generation of social capital and valuable 'connections' on arrival.*

*"Engaging in these activities, like sports and clubs, is good for students. But they also need to be able to reflect on these experiences, and articulate this in a way that lands well with employers. Just as being president of the football club requires skill and precision, so too does talking about how that experience has prepared you well for the job market." – (Interviewee)*

70. Many interviewees added that while participation in extra-curricular activities is an important differentiator in the job market, students' ability to articulate their experiences in compelling ways to employers is equally important. One way in which this is being achieved is through programmes that formalise, recognise, and encourage students to reflect on their experiences. However, there is currently limited data available on the backgrounds of students who are participating in these programmes, and no consistent approach to this across the sector.

#### **Recommendation Eight:**

*Careers programmes that formalise, recognise, and encourage students to reflect on their experiences should be encouraged across the sector, and participation rates closely monitored to assess whether students likely to benefit most are accessing these programmes.*

*The York Award is a series of three interconnected certificates of achievement that recognise those students who undertake an active programme of personal development whilst at the University of York. It was the first university in the UK to introduce such an award 1998, and in 2016 a significant restructuring of the Award was undertaken that split it into three stages designed to be wholly inclusive and stimulate career development activities from arrival.*

*An early way to build confidence and gain experience for use in the labour market is for students to engage with a range of activities in addition to their degree studies. York has sought to maximise the number and type of opportunities for this kind of engagement through the cultivation of the College system, a proactive programme of community volunteering which attracts over 2,000 students a year and through support to the many student-led societies provided by the Students' Union.*

*Students are made aware of the Award before arrival and receive updates and encouragement to seek out new opportunities throughout their first year. The first level Award is assessed toward the end of the year and uses a format that introduces students to the concepts behind reflective learning as well as helping them recognise their experiences as potentially attractive to an employer. The first level Award is particularly valuable to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds or to those whose immediate family did not attend university. These groups may be less aware of the value of extra-curricular activities in the graduate labour market, and are more likely to rely, on their degree alone as a way to attain employment.*

*Surveying the 25% of those who gained the Award in its first year of operation showed that over 80% felt that their confidence in themselves had improved as a result of completing the application process and over 85% reported that they were encouraged to challenge themselves further in their second and third years.*

*The York Award Gold is aimed at second year students and builds on the first level York Award in terms of encouraging reflection on experiences and the learning to be gained from them. The Gold level also asks students to consider their own values and how these might shape their career decisions. The final level of the Award is 'York Award Leaders', aimed at final year students. This is a selective programme that takes a group of 70 students who have demonstrated leadership qualities over their time at York and helps them to explore these qualities further. The Leaders programme also includes a three day training course and is tied to the Chancellor's Awards, three prizes of £1000 to outstanding student leaders. In 2015/16 two of the three Chancellor's Awards went to students from widening participation backgrounds after they had fully completed the York Award.*



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## Reforming Internships and Access to Work Experience

71. As detailed in the earlier section, internships (and work experiences more generally) have been found to be crucial in facilitating transition to the job market, and there is much evidence to demonstrate that students from higher socio-economic groups are “far more able to draw upon family resources and had access to influential social networks to help them to get work experience and internships”:<sup>84</sup> These opportunities are created by employers, however university careers services also play an important role in supporting awareness of, access to, and reflection upon work experience and internship opportunities. An important aspect of this is ensuring that all students understand the importance of engaging early, which should be done as part of the induction process. Alumni can also play an important role in emphasising this to students (developed below).
72. Where universities are remote from large employers and/or where their students face issues regarding mobility, greater emphasis should be given to careers services working closely with SMEs to design internships that are practical for both employers and students. This type of collaboration can also be critical in creating internships for students who are reliant on maintaining a part-time job for financial security. Bursaries and financial support that cover the cost of undertaking an internship are part of the solution to this problem, but the take-up of internships can also place students in positions of longer-term financial insecurity. With the guidance of careers professionals, employers need to be more experimental in developing models of internships that recognise the challenges in accessing them by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. There are systemic challenges in the job market, including the continued proliferation of unpaid and unadvertised internships; it is not within the gift of universities to resolve these issues. However, we do strongly encourage institutional careers services, and the NUS, to engage with the proposed reforms.

### Recommendation Nine:

*Alongside several other organisations, we advocate the following with regards to internships, and strongly encourage universities and the NUS to join us: a four-week legal limit on unpaid internships; employers accessing the apprenticeship levy funding to generate quality placements for students; the publishing of accessible guidance on the rights of interns; and strongly encouraging employers to advertise*

*all internships. We are keen to promote flexible approaches to internships to enable more SMEs to deliver them and to ensure that students who rely on part-time paid work are not placed in a vulnerable financial position in order to take up a short-term role to enhance their employability. .*

73. Access to affordable and appropriate accommodation (especially in London) was also raised as a barrier to participation in internships by interviewees. One emerging solution to this is for a number of student accommodation providers to release summer rooms to house students from lower socio-economic groups (building on existing practices).

### Recommendation Ten:

*Where it is practicable, providers of student accommodation from the university and private sectors explore ways in which they can offer students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reduced or pro bono accommodation to enable access to internships during university vacations, especially in London.*

74. The availability of, and recruitment processes associated with, on-campus employment opportunities vary significantly across the sector. Many institutions are creating large numbers of substantial employment opportunities on campus, including entrepreneurial opportunities to run aspects of campus services. Whilst the range of opportunities appears to be increasing, we have not observed a similarly positive trend about the recruitment processes associated with these positions.

*The Kingston University Talent Academy recruits, trains, and develops students from target groups deemed to need support with employment. The Talent Academy provides paid employment opportunities and development for these students who support the work of the University, gaining meaningful and varied experience as well as guidance and staff support. The project links to the university-wide strategy to ‘enrich lives’, and the University has demonstrated its commitment to enhancing the social mobility amongst students by recruiting over 900 students into the Talent Academy work experience programme. Kingston tracks these students, and the success of the scheme is measured by how many go on to secure external employment. Those who secured roles through the Talent Academy also benefit from additional follow-on support and coaching, leading to 90% finding employment externally.*

*The Academy also utilises the latest recruitment methodologies and assessment criteria to select students for this internal scheme. Kingston has invested in video interview technology, to allow students to*

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experience this challenging process before applying to graduate schemes; they have also engaged employer partners to deliver skill workshops on video interview technique to compliment this activity. All students are guaranteed feedback on their video interview from the KU Talent team, so they can reflect on their performance and hone their technique in preparation for external processes. The programme aims to engage hard-to-reach students, so a uniquely student-centred flexible approach to selection criteria is adopted. For example, students can opt to complete an application form or video interview and receive comprehensive follow on coaching to support their development.

#### Recommendation Eleven:

**Universities should be much more ambitious in creating meaningful employment opportunities for students on campus, and adopt best practice recruitment and selection approaches for this, to promote diversity.**

75. More generally, the embedding of work experience opportunities into course provision is broadly to be encouraged, though the financial implications for students during a term, or a year, of study, should be taken into account.

*At the University of Aston, most students undertake a year's placement in industry. Student surveys and focus groups reveal the transformational nature of this work experience in terms of building students' confidence and their capacity to navigate the commercial/public sector. Students themselves have referred to it as "life changing". Aston University has offered placement years to its undergraduate students for over 50 years. As a result of the longevity of the programme, it has been refined to maximise its potential to enhance student employability. Considerable resource and attention is devoted to the placement year by the University because of the substantial evidence of its effectiveness in terms of improving the graduate outcomes for all of its students, regardless of their background. The Careers and Placement Team provides career support for first year students, this includes both curricular and co-curricular work to ensure that they are well informed about the purpose of the placement year and that they are helped through the process of deciding on the best placement for them based on their career plan. For those students who choose not to take up the opportunity of a placement year, or who are at risk of disengagement in their career planning, interventions are put into place and dialogues are opened with them.*

*Around 70% of undergraduate students pursue a placement year and hands-on support is provided by the Careers and Placement Team prior to the placement and through the transition period. It is this*

*support that is perceived to be transformational in terms of ensuring the effectiveness of the opportunity for students. Examples include timetabled placement preparation sessions, mandatory intercultural sessions for all students taking a placement overseas, allocation of Placement Tutors to support students academically, access to peer support via mentoring, blogs and advice resources online. Evidence from student surveys has demonstrated the benefits of the programme in terms of building students' confidence and understanding of how to navigate industry and the commercial and public sectors. For some students, it is perceived as a "life changing" opportunity.*

*While the Careers and Placement Team do not actively target students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, due to the University's intake, over 40% of students will be from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The team aims to engage all students to ensure that they all have the opportunity to benefit from a placement year. Evidence shows that placements increase chances of their students securing graduate level employment and decrease levels of unemployment, helping to level the playing field.*

#### Supporting Global Mobility

76. The quickest route to ensuring equality of access to international opportunities is to collaborate with academic departments (particularly those in which courses are studied that lend themselves to progression into careers that venerate international experience) to embed internationalisation. Further research should be undertaken to understand better students' perceptions regarding, and experiences of, international study and work experiences to develop the evidence base to inform planning.
77. Clearly, too, it is not possible to provide every student with an opportunity to gain international work experience (nor indeed will every student want, or need this), but for those with aspirations to work with most leading employers, it is an important way in which to stand out. Several interviewees discussed the potential for a greater number of 'virtual mobility opportunities', which typically included online coaching and engagement with alumni and other professionals based internationally, and engagement with webinars delivered by professionals based internationally. The consensus is that these opportunities are good stepping stones to physical engagement, and to follow up with experiences overseas, but are not a sufficient solution to the problem.

### Recommendation Twelve:

*Careers services should develop mechanisms to ensure that access to international work experience opportunities is not conditional on students having access to significant personal finance. Institutional options may include subsidy for eligible students through Access Agreement funding, fundraising for discretionary monies to support students, or encouraging employers to provide supporting funds.*

78. There are also untapped opportunities to engage alumni based overseas (both former international students and expatriots) to increase the volume and range of opportunities available to students, and to encourage access amongst a more diverse group of students. Stimulating and openly advertised opportunities created by alumni, and the extra level of care typically offered, can be especially encouraging to first year students who might not otherwise engage in international employment. These experiences can then act as rehearsals for more ambitious mobility programmes, such as Erasmus. Alumni are in a strong position to inspire students to think seriously about employability throughout their studies; this message may be especially powerful delivered by a successful graduate.

*The Careers Service at Sheffield Hallam University won a grant from the Cantor Trust to provide a Global Mobility Bursary to raise the aspirations of students and make global opportunities more accessible to them by providing a flexible bursary of up to £1000. It aimed to support Sheffield Hallam University students in becoming more ambitious in a global employment context and enhance their global mobility.*

*The scheme was available in the academic year 2015-2016 and was open to all students at the University, although widening participation students were given priority and marketing materials for students made this clear. Applicants were required to show initiative by researching their own work opportunity and making links with an organisation to get involved with, to gain experience for a minimum of 4 weeks. 218 applicants applied to the scheme and 90 bursaries were awarded. 73% of the students awarded a bursary were from a widening participation background.*

*In light of the success of the scheme, the University has been successful in fundraising to ensure that funding continues to be available to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ensure they are given access to opportunities to improve their graduate outcomes. The global mobility agenda is developing into a core element of the university strategy which is further ensuring that funding proposals are well received.*

### Recommendation Thirteen:

*Building on some established practices, alumni should be engaged more pro-actively to support global mobility, including by offering general information and support, 'virtual mobility' opportunities (including webinars and online coaching), and by providing international placements accompanied by support and contact before, during and after.*

*Global Graduates is an exclusive programme for students at The University of Manchester from lower socio-economic backgrounds, giving them the opportunity to meet with alumni in a host city across the world. The programme is possible because of the generous funding of donors (primarily alumni), and has sent groups of undergraduate students to seven cities across the globe (including Hong Kong, New York, San Francisco and Singapore), since the programme launched in 2012.*

*Students sign-up to a range of terms and conditions, and during the course of their visits, they visit a range of host organisations, meeting with alumni and representatives, to learn more about their businesses, roles, opportunities and their cities. They consider the economic climate, working culture, business practices and areas for future growth. Students are expected to play an ambassadorial role for The University of Manchester and share information about key developments for the institution.*

*Students have the opportunity both to practice and develop their existing skills, to start building professional networks and to increase their understanding of employability. On their return to the UK, participants are expected to deliver: a team report (3,000 words) on findings; an individual report (2,000 words) on how the experience improved their employability; and a team presentation (30 minutes).*

### Philanthropic Support and the Role of Alumni

79. Evidence indicates that engagement with alumni can help to raise students' expectations, and to see the relevance of their study, in turn improving academic performance.<sup>85</sup> Graduates can provide important role models for students and, where they do not have access to leading professionals in their social and professional networks, alumni can help to bridge the gap. Furthermore, several interviewees reflected on the way in which alumni can be deployed powerfully with first year students, emphasising the need to engage early in career opportunities; whilst this message is customarily emphasised by careers services, it also matters who this message is delivered by.

80. Alumni can also help to equip careers services with up to date labour market intelligence. They can combine their experiential knowledge of the institution, with their awareness of employers' expectations, and support students in articulating their academic and extracurricular experiences at interview. In providing careers support for students, it is important that alumni are partnered with experts from the careers service, and that their input is fully embedded in the wider work of the career service and not seen as tangential; alumni are unlikely to have sufficient expertise and time to provide sustained guidance and support.
81. Whilst there is consensus about the valuable role that graduates can play in supporting student outcomes, alumni are a significantly under-used resource in supporting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. There is positive ad hoc activity across the sector (including small-scale mentoring programmes and networking events, for example), but this is rarely systematised to provide students with easily accessible, consistent, large-scale and sufficiently meaningful opportunities to engage with alumni. During our interviews, a range of programmes that engage alumni were highlighted, and several points were raised in relation to how programmes can be run most effectively. The key items are summarised in the table to the right.
82. While formal careers talks or workshops from alumni can support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, a number of universities have demonstrated that promoting informal online and phone contact is often preferred by these students, is more flexible in its delivery, is scalable, and has the potential to develop into something more significant – including placements, consulting on job applications, and introductions to other professional contacts. There are a number of online platforms that exist in order to encourage these links online;<sup>86</sup> but a nationally coordinated online facility for connecting alumni and students, and standardised marketing and guidance materials would help to stimulate activity in this area.

**Recommendation Fourteen:**

*Building on established institutional practices, a nationally coordinated campaign should be launched to encourage and enable alumni to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds; this should include a national online platform, marketing and guidance materials. There are several third sector organisations well placed to deliver this.*

83. An increasingly significant way in which alumni are supporting their alma mater is through financial support. The latest data from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) highlight that in 2015–2016, institutions submitting to their annual survey raised over £1bn from philanthropic sources.<sup>87</sup> Donors to universities (many of whom are alumni, but many are not) are increasingly interested in issues of social mobility and equal opportunity in higher education. This is typically motivated by a desire to enable others to benefit from the advantages they experienced, provoked by the attention that social mobility is receiving in the press and in policy debates. Much of the philanthropic funds to support access are given to support undergraduate bursaries, an area in which there is much debate about whether this support has a meaningful impact in relation to university access.<sup>88</sup> However, from our interviews there appear to be an increasing number of programmes delivered by careers services in support of students from lower socio-economic groups that are funded by philanthropic funds, either from individual donors or corporate donations.

**Figure 13: Effective engagement of alumni to support student employability**

Programmes should be needs-driven, informed by the strategic priorities and needs of careers services, rather than driven by graduates' desire to provide support in specific areas, and ways.

Responsibilities between the alumni team and the Careers Service should be clearly defined at inception. While programmes are likely to be delivered in partnership between careers services and alumni engagement teams, careers services should lead on the operational design and integration of programmes, and the alumni engagement team should lead on managing relationships with alumni, including volunteer stewardship.

Programmes should be designed with scale in mind; this will typically involve some modes of online engagement, so that programmes can be expanded without facing unrealistic costs in terms of time and funding. It is also likely that, as this area develops, that some services will be available en masse (for example, connections via LinkedIn) whereas some services will be more intensive and available to a smaller population (provision of internships for example).

Quality control is critical in engaging alumni to support student employability. Graduates should be viewed as a resource to complement and support the expertise of careers service professionals; they are not a substitute for this. Alumni should be partnered with experienced careers professionals who can promote impartiality, and complement information from graduates with professional advice and guidance.



*“We have had a great deal of interest from alumni, asking how they can help to support students without connections, without access to a network of professionals through their family. Many give time, but now we are finding a good number are interested in giving financially to support our work. This feels like an exciting opportunity, and we are working much more closely with the Development Office to build a case for support in this area” – (Interviewee)*

84. We are keen to gain greater insights into the extent to which these philanthropic funding streams are aimed at promoting social mobility generally, and also to what extent, and how, this funding is enabling careers services to undertake more ambitious work in this area.

**Recommendation Fifteen:**

*The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) should collate more granular information in its annual fundraising survey to understand better where philanthropic funds are being directed. We are interested in the proportion of these funds that are underpinning, for example, student bursaries, and programmes delivered by careers services to support students from lower socio-economic groups. These data would enable us to benchmark fundraising in this area, and capture the extent to which philanthropy is supporting activity, including where, and how.*

**Recommendation Sixteen:**

*University fundraising professionals should explore with careers services any opportunities for fundraising from alumni and other stakeholders, to support the success and progression of students from lower socio-economic groups. There is some well-established practice in this area, but it is limited and modest in scale.*

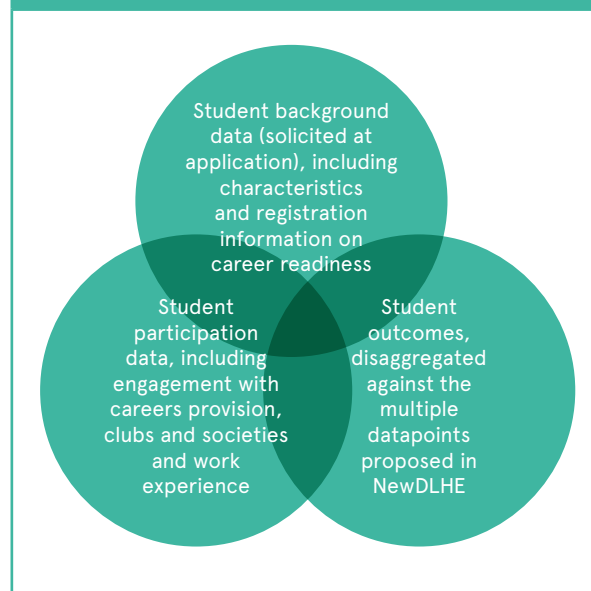
**Leveraging Data to Diagnose, Target and Evaluate**

85. An important theme in our interviews was the increased use of data by careers services to understand better the factors affecting unequal graduate outcomes; the University of Manchester, for example, includes a target for reducing the gap in outcomes by socio-economic background in its Access Agreement, and the University of Birmingham are engaged in a global consortium of universities that are exploring the use of data. Institutions appear to be making great strides

in this respect, though many also highlighted limitations of incomplete data (for example data on participation in extracurricular activities), or lack of connectivity between data sets (for example background characteristic data submitted during application, careers service participation data and DLHE outcomes).

86. An increasing number of careers services currently have, or are currently looking to recruit, data analyst specialists within the team, and are forging much closer relationships with those with responsibility for management information across the institution. In the best instances, institutions are now moving beyond analysing the effect sizes of factors affecting graduate outcomes (delivering statistical analyses such as regression modelling, and cluster analysis), and developing predictive analytics to help identify students at risk of weaker graduate outcomes. This enables data-rich careers services to engage early with students who may be at risk, based on factors that might include socio-economic background, subject, prior attainment and ethnic group. It also ensures a more personalised approach to sharing key messages and information about relevant opportunities. In this way, the datasets outlined in the figure below can be connected to provide insights into:

**Figure 14: Key datasets in developing predictive analytics**



- Patterns of participation in activities amongst students from different backgrounds, including careers service provision and clubs and societies data that might be collated by student unions;
- The relative effects of background characteristics and participation in specific activities on graduate outcomes (these analyses are likely to be more



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granular and insightful with the introduction a more sophisticated DLHE measures); and

- Any additional impact achieved by introducing new approaches.

*The Careers Service at the University of Edinburgh undertook a comparative study to understand better the destinations of its students. It followed work to examine the relationship between pre entry qualifications, backgrounds, other characteristics (widening participation and protected characteristics) and academic outcomes. As the University of Edinburgh was a pioneer of contextual admissions in 2002, it has many students it can survey in order to understand whether admitting students with lower grades has any influence over their academic outcomes and transition into employment. The Careers Service gathered data from 3 student cohorts (2008, 2012, and 2016) to understand better what differences, if any, exist between the destinations of widening participation and non-widening participation students. The findings have informed the provision of the Service to ensure that it offered strategic programmes to support students' success.*

Amongst the key findings from the studies are:

- No substantial difference between WP and non-WP students in terms of the likelihood of securing graduate level employment. In fact, the pilot study of 2008 revealed a higher proportion of WP graduates entering employment who were slightly more likely to be in graduate level employment and also working in Scotland.
- WP students tended to make more use of traditional, reactive job hunting techniques (responding to adverts) in contrast to non-WP graduates who tended to make more use of pro-active techniques (such as sending speculative applications or networking).
- In terms of further study, WP students were more likely to pursue training courses to enhance employment chances, such as the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). In contrast, non-WP students indicated a greater preference to pursue further study because they were interested in the subject and wanted to continue studying.

*Across the 3 studies, there was little difference in the percentage of WP and non-WP graduates in employment. But there were variations between the 2 groups in terms of the location of work and also the sector they were more likely to enter. WP students were more likely to be working in Scotland and to be pursuing careers in teaching. This research has influenced the Careers Service to devise a number of programmes to support WP students, for instance, in accessing PGT provision and developing skills in pro-active job searching.*

87. Nurturing the aspirations and success of students is not a science. Clearly there are some important limitations to this quantitative analysis (for

example, it is problematic to account for students' prior experiences of careers provision at school), but the findings should helpfully point towards effective practices, and provide a foundation for subsequent qualitative analysis (for example, student focus groups or surveys). And, critically, these data points are likely to provide a more compelling evidence base about approaches that are effective and efficient, thereby giving the debate about supporting graduate outcomes greater currency.

*The Careers Registration Learning Gain project was developed in recognition of the increased importance of employability as an aspect of the student experience, and to contribute to the HEFCE programme of work focused on 'developing and testing new ways of capturing educational outcomes and analysing how students benefit from higher education' (HEFCE 2016). Careers registration was first introduced by the University of Leeds in 2012<sup>89</sup>, and has now been adopted by at least 22 Universities in the UK, both within and external to the CR project. This is particularly pertinent with the roll out of the TEF as a measure of institutional performance and the need to use data to demonstrate impact. How is it possible for HEIs to meaningfully demonstrate their impact in supporting their students to achieve their personal career goals without first asking the students themselves what they are? The project therefore collected data throughout the student journey in higher education by asking 2-4 careers focused questions, in the compulsory student registration process and re-enrolment at the start of each academic year, in order to track progress in career thinking and employability. It honed the broad concept of 'employability' to focus on students' career choice, decision-making, and planning. This decision was informed by a consistent and growing evidence base suggesting that a key factor determining graduate success is career planning.*

*The CR learning gain pilot project, funded by HEFCE between October 2015 and October 2018, involved a consortium of 16 HEIs, and a large and growing data set collected from over 320,000 students at the point of writing. It asked questions of students at registration to understand better their work readiness learning gain. For instance, how prepared they are for the process of obtaining work beyond graduation and managing their career in the long-term. The two key registration questions centred on: career thinking self-efficacy and work experience. Within these questions students were asked to choose the statement that best fit their current thinking and experience from a selected list. Additional questions included asking students to identify sectors they were interested in working in, and if they had gained any experience in the sector.*

*The participating HEIs could harness the data to identify the groups most at risk of lacking career readiness. This led to targeted interventions through*

the personal tutoring system, academic departments, and/or the Careers Service. Project partners identified correlating data with widening participation indicators as the top priority to track student progression and successes beyond entry to higher education. In addition, participating HEIs were variously harnessing the CR data to: provide additional evidence for TEF assessments; inform strategic service planning and departmental engagement; measuring the effectiveness of employability initiatives; and to raise students' awareness of careers support opportunities.

The significance of the project is still being evaluated, along with the most effective ways to utilise the data to build understanding of variations in the employability needs amongst different groups of students. But the evidence emerging is of the determining influence of career planning on graduate outcomes and of the importance of improving understanding of students' career thinking.

88. These data, disaggregated within institutions by department, are also helping to provide the foundation for more meaningful and purposeful connections between careers services and academic colleagues. Quantitative evidence of differential outcomes by department provide an impetus and a robust evidence base for discussing solutions to weak graduate outcomes amongst specific groups of students.

#### Recommendation Seventeen:

**Predictive analytics and, for example, regression analyses, have the potential to leverage important information to support careers services in diagnosing student needs, and targeting and evaluating provision. This requires connectivity between multiple datasets, staffing capacity, and expertise to deliver. Quantitative analysis should also help to inform further qualitative investigation with students.**

#### Technology to Achieve Reach and Scale

89. A significant proportion of the careers opportunities designed to support students from lower socio-economic groups discussed in our interviews (such as employer mentoring or international work experience) are small in scale. Whilst impactful for those students involved, these programmes may have limited impact more widely. Interviewees reflected on the challenges of increasing the reach and scale of these programmes, most citing staff capacity, resource, and student demand (with demand amongst those students who might benefit most sometimes being lowest) as the key limiting factors. The most progressive route to increasing reach and scale is most likely to be found in embedding provision in curricula and wider student experiences, but technology also appears to be an underexplored route to this.

90. During our interviews, there was limited evidence of the way in which technology was being exploited to engage students. Whilst many careers services use social media platforms to promote events, there appears to be more limited use of mobile phone applications (for example, to connect students with advice from professionals, or to access profiles) and the engagement of students via LinkedIn. Digital engagement is likely to be most effective where it supports and augments face-to-face engagement, rather than replaces it. There is a range of products on the market that enable the delivery of online advice and support, or provide a platform for engaging students with professionals. Digital platforms and mobile applications have the potential to enable universities to: provide transition support for students from school into university; make information accessible and widely available; provide careers thinking and planning self-assessment and reflection tools; and to network students with employers and alumni.

*The Profiles and Mentors system at the University of York received an AGCAS Award for use of technology in 2016. The system allows students to read the professional profiles of alumni in a huge variety of careers. It also offers the option in many cases of contacting these alumni to access insight and information about organisations and sectors that isn't available through public media. This system is designed to offer a 'network' to those students who cannot rely on family and friends for career support.*

91. Technology can be harnessed to build understanding of students' attitudes and behaviour and ensure that messaging is as personalised as possible to target relevant careers activities and therefore influence outcomes. King's College London has devised a pioneering project in this context by working in collaboration with the Behavioural Insights Team.

*The King's College London Widening Participation Department and the Behavioural Insights Team have delivered a collaborative project examining whether behavioural insights can be used to improve the outcomes of non-traditional students in higher education. This is the first time behavioural insights have been applied in a UK university context. The project has sought to increase student engagement with key services and activities (including student societies, study abroad opportunities and an online study skills module) through randomised controlled trials (RCTs) by sending students behaviourally inspired text messages. These messages test both whether receiving a text will increase the likelihood a student will engage with the service mentioned, and also whether the type of message received will produce differential outcomes in behaviour. A range of behavioural insights approaches have been tested during the pilot trials, with a particular focus on whether the use of micro-affirmations could*

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be key to boosting student engagement. The trials have been supported by a pulse-point panel study which has explored student mind-sets and their emotional experiences during their first year in higher education, revealing key differences in WP and non-WP student journeys.

The RCTs have produced demonstrable evidence that behavioural science can boost engagement for undergraduates from widening participation backgrounds. Results also suggest that in some contexts the content of a message can have a differential impact on WP and non-WP students. While the project does not have a specific careers focus, this has potential implications for careers services and their promotion of activities and programmes. Full results of the study will be published by December 2017.

### Recommendation Eighteen:

*Much greater consideration should be given to how technology can be used to increase the reach and scale of careers services. Mobile applications, online professional connections, global webinars, and greater use of LinkedIn are all used modestly in some institutions.*

### The Critical Role of Employers

92. The Bridge Group has undertaken extensive research with a wide range of employers to interrogate graduate recruitment and selection processes, to understand better their effect on socio-economic diversity in the labour market. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide detailed commentary about the recommendations to employers but, as outlined earlier, the strategies and behaviours of employers (the demand side) are critical in shaping graduate outcomes. We summarise below several key employer recommendations that we have made elsewhere, and encourage readers to explore in more detail our research underpinning these areas. More information and detailed guidance is available online.

#### Key Recommendations to Employers:

- All employers should collect information about the socio-economic background of applicants and hires (using best practice guidance published by the Bridge Group);<sup>90</sup> including for internships (and where possible the background of students they engage on campuses) to understand better how attraction and selection strategies and contributing to diversity in the organisation.

- Where possible, these data should be shared transparently alongside strategies to address any negative findings. At a minimum, larger employers should be able, and willing, to share data relating to individual institutions with careers services at each university, to help institutional colleagues understand better which students are engaging in attraction activities, and where students from different backgrounds are succeeding, or not, in selection processes.
- Where employers are operating large internship programmes, they should ring-fence a proportionate number of places for students from under-represented groups, based on diversity data analysis.
- A-levels were never designed to indicate how well someone would perform in a job, and attainment is strongly correlated with socio-economic background. Unless there are strong reasons for doing so (for example, specific skills acquired in an A-Level are a pre-requisite for the job), employers should not preclude students from applying based on A-Level attainment.
- Employers should deliver more curriculum-based interactions with universities, to place less emphasis on 'prestigious' events at which students self-select to attend. These more inclusive modes of engagement: address the problem of student self-selection and reduce the likelihood of only speaking with those already aware of a particular employer; can showcase what is at the heart of the relevant role, rather than marketing about it; responds to universities' needs for 'real-life' learning within the curriculum; and develops relationships with academic members of staff, who are key influencers on students' career choices.
- More fundamentally every employer is encouraged strongly to undertake a critical review of the way in which 'talent' is defined and identified, and to consider carefully how precisely these definitions reflect the requirements for undertaking specific roles, and how characteristics associated with these definitions might correlate with socio-economic background.

93. There are also emerging models of working with employers that complement more traditional modes of careers service delivery. One such example is illustrated below, highlighting the potential for commercial recruitment consultancies within universities to provide additional, direct support for students.



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*Most students choose to study at Birkbeck to advance their career. Some students come to Birkbeck to start their career, whilst some are mid-level professionals looking to change career or advance their career. At the start of 2014-15, the Birkbeck Careers and Employability Service was transformed to adapt to the needs of a diverse student body with a variety of career aspirations. At the same time, an in-house recruitment consultancy (Birkbeck Talent), was successfully piloted during 2015, and then launched fully in 2016, as a complimentary service, to help students find meaningful work that could launch their new career.*

*The Birkbeck Talent team operates similarly to a commercial recruitment consultancy. Birkbeck Talent sources relevant roles through existing corporate contacts, alumni, and new contacts. From the outset, there has been an overwhelmingly positive response from employers in terms of a willingness to engage with the service. The College meets with each employer to ensure roles will be beneficial to students and the roles meet relevant working conditions standards. Birkbeck Talent only works on paid opportunities, to ensure*

*equality of opportunity across the student body, so that whatever a candidate's financial situation, they will be able to afford to access each opportunity.*

*Students register for the service on their student intranet, and can search and register their interest in roles using an integrated online portal. Birkbeck Talent Recruitment Advisers review student applications and search candidate profiles to create a shortlist of candidates to submit for each role. The employer then takes candidates through their recruitment process. Employers have emphasised that they value this approach, as they receive a shortlist of high-quality applications from candidates who are suitable for the role. The College ensures that the employer provides constructive feedback if the student is not successful at interview or assessment centre, so that the experience furthers the students' employability journey. Birkbeck Talent works closely with our Careers and Employability Service (CES), so that students receive relevant, tailored Employability interventions both online and face-to-face. If a student puts in an application for a role that does not meet the criteria set out in the job specification,*



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*then the student is referred for appropriate support with the Careers and Employability Service. This can include coaching to identify their skills, so they are able to select roles that may be relevant for them.*

*The benefits of this complementary approach include:*

- All students can gain paid work through Birkbeck Talent whilst they are studying and after graduation, to boost their career prospects and aspirations.*
- All students have access to practical, personalised, relevant careers support to enable them to improve their employability skills, CV, interview skills, job outcomes and earning potential.*
- Students who need support with their CV or interview skills, but are unaware that they need this support are given clear and constructive feedback to improve their employability opportunities.*
- Students who are applying for roles that they do not have the relevant qualifications or skills for are offered support to recognise their skills, so they can create career goals, and identify a path to reach these goals.*

*Some of this is possible online and supplemented with face-to-face support*

- Students who do not have informal networks to provide advice and support are able to access it from the CES, Employer Insights and Alumni Careers Clinics.*
- Improved retention of students – by helping students to gain relevant interviews, internships and full-time roles in their chosen sector they are less likely to disengage for financial or motivational reasons*
- Alumni careers clinics offer 'Insider' knowledge – Birkbeck students who are looking to change careers gain the chance to seek advice from a Birkbeck alumnus who has made a similar career change or is working in their chosen industry.*
- The CES, alongside Birkbeck Talent, partner with employers who wouldn't necessarily identify Birkbeck students as talent of choice, to bring these employers on to campus and offer students the opportunity to network with these employers*







## Concluding Remarks

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We are at an early stage on the journey to understanding how university careers services can support more equal outcomes by socio-economic background. In this report, we contribute new data, synthesise relevant literature, and highlight examples of existing practice. We also hope to encourage a greater sense of urgency around addressing the gap in graduate outcomes, and to engage a wider audience of stakeholders to promote cross-sector action to meet this challenge.

We know that students' background and prior experience influences attitudes towards higher education and career planning, and the propensity to pursue additional activities within, and alongside, academic study. The behaviours and practices of employers also impact critically on students' outcomes. Hence, it is vital to initiate a cross-sector approach to combat the current trend of students from lower socio-economic background arriving at university already on the back foot, and then subsequently engaging less in activities that endow greater currency in the employment market. It is also important to challenge some of the cultural assumptions in circulation that compound the problems faced by university careers services in improving the outcomes of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

This research highlights a general lack of evidence regarding delivering impactful careers activities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is therefore vital that universities have the resource

to invest in devising robust approaches to evaluation (quantitative and qualitative), and to sharing findings within, and beyond, the sector. This is not a simple task, especially given the equal importance attached to the need for varied and flexible provision throughout the student journey through higher education.

There is no silver bullet to narrowing the gap in graduate outcomes. A multiplicity of factors contributes to creating the gap, and the solutions may often be specific to a region or institution. Geographical inequality also has implications for defining solutions: some problems may require highly localised responses and, therefore, we recognise that several of the recommendations outlined here will hold more relevance for some institutions.

The recommendations proposed are wide ranging and demand that careers practitioners continue to develop work across campus services, and with academic colleagues, employers, and alumni. With current resourcing, for most careers services, difficult choices will need to be made to decide where best to devote attention to maximise results.

The student voice is noticeably absent from this report. It is the task of future work to capture the student perspective, and perceived barriers to progression in higher education and graduate employment. But it is hoped that this report will have value for graduates as it summarises key messages from recruiters and career services, which might shape behaviour and influence decision making. And, importantly it aims to give greater agency to students

by stressing the need to create environments where all can realise their potential, regardless of their background or where they live.

We are grateful to the large number of colleagues in the higher education sector who have given their time, insight, and energy in support of this work. They have helped us to identify the many effective strategies within existing practice, enabling us to offer colleagues practical recommendations to

pursue, at the same time as provoking the need for further debate. We will use this report as the foundation for further investigation and to guide future policy recommendations.



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# Appendix A: Scope, Methodology and Terms

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This report was prepared with the following aims:

- To build knowledge and understanding of effective policy and practice in careers services in supporting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- To share insights widely across HEIs in the UK to influence practice and ensure cost – effectiveness in provision for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- To explore the policy landscape and key implications, especially in light of the latest reforms pertaining to the Teaching Excellence Framework (and the Higher Education Bill more widely);
- To detail case studies from a wide range of institutions, and to outline key recommendations.

This study has been informed by:

- A review of the key academic literature, including pertinent studies from outside of the UK.
- Interviews with over thirty colleagues with responsibility for leading careers services at a range of institutions. A list of participating institutions, and the interview topic guide, is in the Appendix.
- Extensive previous work in this area from the Bridge Group, including studies with individual universities and employers, and a substantive report released in 2016.<sup>91</sup>

The scope of the study is on English universities (though we are grateful to colleagues at the University of Edinburgh for their insights), and on Home students, rather than international students. We also recognise that the predominant narrative does not fully consider the experiences and needs of part-time and mature students; the Bridge Group intends to cover this in much more detail in subsequent work.

The study necessarily considers the practices and policies of employers, and we primarily refer to large employers rather than small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This is a limitation of the study, but reflects the availability of evidence and data, and the dominance of large employers in pursuing collaborations with careers services, because they typically have the required resource.

The various debates about social mobility, widening access and graduate outcomes rarely benefit from a common vocabulary. We consistently refer to students from lower, or higher socio-economic

backgrounds. During our interviews, most colleagues referred to ‘widening participation’ students, drawing on the vocabulary associated with university admissions. We are precise where specific pieces of analysis require it, but generally our definition of lower socio-economic background means students from low participation postcodes, those eligible for free school meals, or those from low income families. Those readers with an interest in the classification of socio-economic background are encouraged to explore the Bridge Group’s extensive work in this area, which has been delivered in partnership with the Cabinet Office.<sup>92</sup>

The term ‘employability’ is used with a similar degree of imprecision across sectors. For many universities, ‘employability’ refers to a suite of ‘soft skills’, perceived to be of value to employers, such as networking or presenting. Those identifying with this definition may then point careers services towards providing interventions to equip students with these skills. This narrative can emphasise the need for remediation, where students are perceived to have a deficit in the types of social and cultural capital prized by many employers. This deficit model might helpfully be supplemented, or replaced, by definitions that are more expansive. Leaders in the sector are advocating a more enabling definition, typically defined as the capability to make well-informed choices.<sup>93</sup> This also emphasises the need to create environments where all students are able to realise their potential; capability does not refer simply to a set of “abilities residing inside a person, but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment”.<sup>94</sup> We adopt a number of terms throughout the report, but aim for precision in each instance.

Whilst we recognise team structures, size, and location within overall university structures vary, we use ‘careers services’ to capture the range of teams across the sector. The anonymised quotes included herein are derived from our interviews, unless labelled otherwise.

We provide web link references to materials wherever possible, for ease of accessing the wider materials.

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61. <https://www.agr.org.uk/AGR-Annual-Reports>
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78. Reported in <https://thebridgegroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/BG-Employability-Report-FINAL.pdf>
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90. <https://thebridgegroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SRA-FINAL-DISPATCHED-.pdf> (see p50)
91. <https://thebridgegroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/BG-Employability-Report-FINAL.pdf>
92. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/civil-service-pilots-new-social-mobility-measures>
93. See, for example, the work of Martha C. Nussbaum, (2013), *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, Harvard University Press
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## Appendix B: List of Interviewed Institutions

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- Birkbeck College
- City University, London
- King's College London
- Kingston University
- Lancaster University
- London Metropolitan University
- London School of Economics
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Newcastle University
- Nottingham Trent University
- Sheffield Hallam University
- University Campus Suffolk
- University of Aston
- University of Birmingham
- University of Cumbria
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- University of Huddersfield
- University of Leicester
- University of Lincoln
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of York
- AGCAS

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# Appendix C: Interview Topic Guide

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## Broad Views on this Issue

- What do you consider to be the main areas of policy (institutionally and nationally) that are affecting practices in this area?
  - Do you have any reflections on the way in which 'student success' is defined in relation to graduate outcomes?
  - What do you perceive to be the main factors affecting the graduate outcomes of students from lower socio-economic groups?
  - How can institutions most effectively engage students who may be harder to reach, or less likely to engage in careers services? Are there challenges associated with delivering provision for specific groups of students?
  - What is the role of employers in pursuit of improved graduate outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds?
- Programmes to engage alumni in support of students' graduate outcomes.
  - Interventions designed to promote access to international study and career opportunities.
  - Programmes designed to support progression to postgraduate study amongst students from lower socio-economic groups.

## Example of Practice

As part of the programme of research, we are outlining approximately fifteen case studies, from which we can draw learning and recommendations to share with the sector. These case studies will relate specifically to the main research question, and we are especially interested in examples where there is evidence of positive impact.

During the interview, we would be grateful if you could discuss between one and three examples of your work in this area, perhaps focused on one of the areas below. We will write up a short case study based on your comments, for you to review and edit.

- Institutional research (including data analysis) to understand better any barriers facing students from lower socio-economic groups.
- Programmes of employer engagement specifically targeting students from lower socio-economic groups.
- The development of work experience and internship opportunities.
- Engagement of students in on-campus employment opportunities.
- Careers support embedded in, or complementing, teaching and learning.
- Collaborative programmes with other universities, or third sector organisations.



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