

The UEA Strategy for Enhancing Student Progression and Employability

Executive Summary

1. The UEA Progression and Employability Strategy has been developed in order to respond to the challenge that the University faces in ensuring that its new graduates make a rapid and successful transition to the workplace or a course of further study or training. Section I contextualises the challenges; Section II specifies the complementary roles and responsibilities of the University, Faculties, Schools, the Careers Centre and DOS; Section III outlines the means by which the strategy will be monitored and evaluated.

SECTION I

Background

2. Successive governments have made clear their view that HEIs have an important role to play in preparing students for entry to the labour market. This has stimulated the development of Performance Indicators (PIs) that measure the success of graduates in finding jobs or places on postgraduate courses within 6 months of graduation, using data gathered through the annual Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

3. The 'Prospects' PIs that are increasingly used by the media measure the proportion of home domiciled recent graduates who are working in 'graduate' jobs or studying on 'graduate level' courses as a percentage of all those who are working, studying or seeking work.

4. UEA's aim is to offer a high quality learning experience that includes a wide range of opportunities to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities that will enable students to:

- fulfil their academic potential
- prepare for a fulfilling and rewarding career, and
- continue to develop as learners throughout their lives.

Purpose of the student Progression and Employability Strategy

5. The aim of UEA's Progression and Employability Strategy is to ensure that all its students are provided with a broad range of learning and other opportunities, and relevant information, encouragement, advice and guidance to enhance their success in fulfilling rapidly their career aims.

Defining employability and progression

6. Many definitions of graduate employability can be found in the literature. The following might be considered as typical:

a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Higher Education Academy).

To be successful students also require career management skills and significant work experience, which, whether paid or voluntary, is highly valued by employers.

7. Many of UEA's students aim to progress to further courses of study or training after graduation. Such ambitions are explicitly acknowledged in both UEA's Employability and Progression and Learning and Teaching Strategies.

League Tables

8. UEA does not accept that graduates' 'first destinations' are a robust measure of their employability potential. However, given the wide currency and use of the 'Prospects' EPI in as a component of league tables, there is a need to drive UEA's rating upwards by helping students to progress rapidly to 'graduate-level' jobs or courses of further study or training.

The UEA approach: a developmental process

9. The skills, attributes and experiences that make a graduate employable need to be developed and practiced over a period of time. The UEA approach is therefore to ensure that all courses provide opportunities for skills and personal development in all years of study. The UEA approach is also to encourage students to consider a broad range of employment or other progression opportunities, consistent with diverse social and ethical positions and ideals.

Student diversity

10. Research studies indicate that some groups of students and graduates may be disadvantaged academically and in the labour market, particularly mature students, those from some ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. UEA is committed to ensuring that implementation of its Employability and Progression Strategy takes full account of the diversity of the student body so that all students may benefit from it.

SECTION II

Roles and responsibilities

The full version of the strategy document defines the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the University (p. 4), Schools of Study (p. 5), the Careers Centre (p. 6) and the Dean of Students' Office (p. 8)

SECTION III

Monitoring and evaluation

The implementation and effectiveness of this strategy will be monitored regularly. The activities and outcomes associated with the strategy will also be subject to equality impact assessments.

The UEA Strategy for Enhancing Student Progression and Employability

The UEA Progression and Employability Strategy has been developed in order to respond to the challenge that the University faces in ensuring that its new graduates make a rapid and successful transition to the workplace or a course of further study or training. Section I of this strategy document contextualises the challenges presented; Section II specifies the complementary roles and responsibilities of the University, Faculties and Schools on the one hand, and of the Careers Centre and DOS on the other; Section III outlines means by which the strategy will be monitored and evaluated.

SECTION I

Background

Over the last two decades, successive governments and government agencies have, through funding mechanisms ¹, endorsement of recommendations in a wide range of reviews, reports ², and codes of practice ³, made clear their view that HEIs have a very important role to play in preparing students for entry into the labour market. Explicitly assigning this role to universities has formed part of government strategies for improving and broadening the skills base of the UK population as a way of driving economic growth.

More recently, the government has stimulated the development of a performance indicator designed to measure HEIs' effectiveness in undertaking this role. The HEFCE/HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) Employability Performance Indicator (EPI) measures the success of graduates in finding jobs or places on postgraduate courses within 6 months of their graduation, using data gathered through the annual Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey. This EPI is a relatively simple measure of the proportion of home domiciled recent graduates who are working or studying as a percentage of those who are working, studying or seeking work. However, HESA also provides a benchmark figure for each HEI which modifies the raw data using an algorithm that takes account of subject of study, entry qualifications, ethnicity, gender and age.

The media are now commonly using a further measure, also based on the DLHE data, but incorporating a categorisation of graduates' jobs into 'graduate' and 'non-graduate' and a similar categorisation of postgraduate courses. These 'Prospects' EPIs give the proportion of home domiciled recent graduates who are working in 'graduate' jobs or studying on 'graduate level' courses as a percentage of all those who are working, studying or seeking work.

Employability is also high on students' agendas. They choose to come to university for a wide variety of reasons, but for the majority, advancing their career prospects is a key factor in their decision. In a recent survey of new UEA undergraduates, over

¹ For example, the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative, which offered significant funds to HEIs on a competitive basis. The aim was to 'establish and embed the concept and practice of enterprise within universities, and to increase the effectiveness of higher education (HE) in preparing students for working life' (Burniston et al. 1999: 1).

² Including: the Dearing Review (Dearing 1997), the Harris Review (Harris 2001), the White Paper on the Future of Higher Education (DfES 2003), the Roberts Review (Roberts 2002).

³ One of the elements of the QAA Code of Practice specifically addresses career education, information and guidance (QAA 2001).

seventy percent of the respondents indicated that they had come to university because they thought that a degree would help them to get a better job.

UEA's aim, set out in its current Corporate Plan, is to meet and also to broaden students' expectations of their period of study through the provision of a high quality learning experience. The University's intention is that this latter should include a wide range of opportunities to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities that will enable students to:

- fulfil their academic potential
- prepare for a fulfilling and rewarding career, and
- continue to develop as learners throughout their lives.

Purpose of the student Progression and Employability Strategy

The aim of UEA's Progression and Employability Strategy is to ensure that all its students are provided with a broad range of learning and other opportunities, and relevant information, encouragement, advice and guidance in order to enhance their success in fulfilling rapidly their career aims. This document:

- outlines the main elements of UEA's strategy to enhance its graduates' employability and/or ability to progress to a chosen course of further study or training
- assigns clear responsibilities for the provision of the key elements within the strategy
- provides ways of measuring the institution's success in achieving its employability and progression goals.

Defining employability and progression

Within an extensive literature, there are very many definitions of graduate employability. The following might be considered as fairly typical:

a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Higher Education Academy)

the capacity to move self-sufficiently into and within the labour market; to fulfil potential through sustainable employment (University of Newcastle).

There is also much discussion of the particular skills, knowledge and attributes that make a graduate 'employable'. These often include: oral and written communication; numeracy; information technology; problem solving; the ability to be an effective member of a team; the ability to evaluate data, facts and opinions critically; and knowledge of relevant employment sectors and the workings of a business environment.

However, the possession of employability skills does not necessarily make a graduate employable. To be successful, students and graduates also require a range of what have been broadly defined as career management skills. These include self awareness, decision making, career planning and an ability to describe, articulate and demonstrate skills, abilities and knowledge during recruitment processes and in employment.

A further crucial element in developing 'employability' is significant work experience. Work experience (whether paid or voluntary) is highly valued by employers, and also provides opportunities for students to develop their knowledge of the world of work,

their abilities and their confidence. To that end, UEA is committed to strengthening and extending links with business and the regional economic community.

Although most of the discussion about graduate progression focuses on employment, the desired next step after graduation for a significant proportion of our undergraduate and Masters students is not a job but a place on an academic or vocational course. While many of the same sets of skills, knowledge and attributes are as valuable in an academic context as they are in the workplace, for students who wish to undertake further courses of study, particularly at a more advanced academic level, high level academic skills, including research and information handling, are required, often together with detailed subject knowledge. Students wishing to gain places, particularly funded places, on competitive vocational courses, for example in journalism and the law, are likely also to require relevant paid or voluntary work experience. UEA therefore explicitly acknowledges such ambitions in its approach to both its employability and its learning and teaching strategies.

League Tables

Despite the widespread use of the results of the DHLE survey as the basis of EPIs and as a proxy measure of graduate employability, UEA does not accept that the first steps of new graduates onto the career ladder are a robust measure of employability potential. Indeed, longitudinal research undertaken at this and other comparable institutions have unambiguously demonstrated the poor correlation between graduates' first jobs and those that they are in 2 to 5 years later. However, supporting and encouraging students to make a rapid progression after the completion of their course (at whatever level) to fulfilling employment, or a place on a course of further study or training, can lead to very significant benefits for the graduate and for the reputation of UEA.

The UEA approach: a developmental process

UEA places great importance on the processes of orientation and induction as the crucial starting point of a student's academic and their longer-term career. The University's responsibility for its students and their academic, personal and career development begins as soon as a student first registers for his or her course of study. A significant proportion of the resources provided to UEA from the HEFCE learning and teaching enhancement funds is being devoted to a three-year project to enhance students' transition into higher education. A 'transitions' programme for research postgraduates is well established at UEA.

The skills, attributes and experiences that make a graduate employable need to be developed and practised over a period of time. The UEA approach is therefore to ensure that all courses provide opportunities for academic and personal development in any subsequent years of study.

This strategy is not prescriptive about the ways in which career development opportunities are provided for students at School level, nor does it seek to define particular skills as necessarily having universal relevance, although the section above on defining employability provides a strong steer. The UEA approach is to encourage students to consider a broad range of employment or other progression opportunities, consistent with diverse social and ethical positions and ideals.

Student Diversity

The institution is committed to ensuring that all aspects of the activities, services, opportunities and information provided for students take full account of: the

diversity of the student body in respect of students' nationality, age and gender, their ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and their physical and mental health; and of the potential impact on individuals of serious illness, disability or specific learning difficulties. Research studies and analysis of HESA data indicate that some groups of students and graduates may be disadvantaged academically and in the labour market, particularly mature students, those from some ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. UEA will seek to make the appropriate adjustments to the learning environment and to provide information and guidance to such students to help equip them with the confidence and skills to overcome any prejudices or other barriers to the fulfilment of their career aims.

SECTION II

Roles and responsibilities

In order to ensure that UEA makes rapid progress in achieving its employability and progression aims, the following roles, responsibilities and accountabilities have been defined.

A. The University will:

- build its careers education, information, guidance and employability aims into Faculty Plans and its Corporate Plan
- develop its Learning and Teaching Strategy to ensure appropriate alignment with the Employability and Progression Strategy
- seek to ensure that students make an effective and rapid transition to UEA's academic and social environment at the commencement of their studies (whether these be at Foundation, Undergraduate, Masters or Doctoral level) through the provision of structured induction programmes
- facilitate the dissemination of relevant good practice within and between Schools and Faculties
- foster relationships with a wide range of employers and professional bodies able and willing to offer advice, guidance and feedback on the development and success of this strategy
- maximise student job opportunities, particularly those that allow students to demonstrate 'graduate-level' skills, on campus
- monitor best practice elsewhere and investigate the feasibility and desirability of introducing compulsory and/or accredited embedded career development programmes across the institution (the Reading model)
- undertake periodic monitoring of institutional adherence to this strategy and evaluation of its impact on UEA students and graduates
- undertake equality impact assessments to ensure that the strategy and the activities that it drives have the potential to have equal value for all UEA students.

Institutional Performance Indicators and Supporting Evidence

Performance indicators

1. (KPI) Institutional Employability Performance (Prospects) Indicator and graduate employment league table positions.

2. National Student Survey results (academic support and personal development).
3. Growth in numbers of high quality, on-campus student job opportunities.

Supporting evidence

4. Institutional Corporate Plan (2007) and Learning and Teaching Strategy (2007).
5. Extent and level of involvement by employers and representatives of professional bodies through, for example, contributions to key committees and working parties and curriculum review processes.
6. Outcomes of equality impact assessments.

B. Schools of Study will:

- provide a variety of opportunities within each of their courses for students to develop, demonstrate and be given feedback on a wide range of skills that include both those that have only academic relevance, and those that have broader applicability within the workplace ⁴
- provide appropriate guidance and opportunities for students to develop the relevant skills and knowledge that will enhance their chances of success in gaining places on courses of further study or training, particularly those that offer funding
- take account of relevant labour market information and employers' views in the process of curriculum review and development
- seek to increase, where appropriate, assessed work placements, work-based learning, project work with employers/external bodies and/or employer contributions within their curricula
- encourage their students to see the benefits of early career planning and facilitate their relationships with the Careers Centre by:
 - providing opportunities for careers advisers to communicate with students through talks, workshops and the display of posters and other printed materials
 - actively promoting relevant Careers Centre events (central workshops, careers fairs etc.) to their students
 - referring students with concerns about their future careers and/or finding part-time work to the Careers Centre
- ensure that through the advising system, students are encouraged to reflect on their learning, take opportunities to strengthen their CVs, and devise and implement career plans
- encourage through advisers and staff-student liaison committees student use of resources that help students to *monitor, build and reflect on their*

⁴ Schools will define the 'employability' and progression skills that have particular relevance and value for their students. It is recommended that the relevant QAA subject benchmark statement and the HCA (2006) guide to *Student Employability Profiles* are consulted in the planning of this process.

personal development (Dearing, 1997) (for example, UEA's APD resource (<http://apd.uea.ac.uk/>))

- provide a brief annual report on their progress in fulfilling the responsibilities outlined above, constructed around the PIs and supporting evidence detailed below, for consideration by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

Performance Indicators and Supporting Evidence by School

Performance indicators

1. (KPI) 'Prospects' Employability Performance Indicator and graduate employment league table position for the subject area(s).

2. National Student Survey results for the subject area(s), specifically for the academic support and personal development sections.
3. Proportion of students gaining places on graduate level postgraduate courses including those gaining funded places, where such data are available.
4. Proportion of each School's students who use the services offered by the Careers Centre (see also CCEN PI 2).

Supporting evidence

5. Student use of personal development planning tools and/or take up of UEA's APD resource.
6. Evidence of increase in appropriate career-related activities within the curriculum, employer contributions to the curriculum and School-specific CCEN events offered to students (see also CCEN PI 3).
7. School engagement with DOS learning enhancement and disability services (see also DOS PIs 1 and 2).

C. The Careers Centre (CCEN) will:

for Schools

- provide each School with a named careers adviser as the chief point of contact
- work in partnership with Schools to support them in the achievement of their employability goals (see above)
- advise and support Schools in embedding career management skills within their curricula, offering training when requested
- contribute sections to School handbooks and web sites on career possibilities
- provide relevant labour market information to the University and Schools
- develop and maintain relationships with employers and alumni, and facilitate contacts between Schools and relevant employment sectors (in collaboration with RBS and the alumni office)
- offer advice to Schools on personal development planning, including the effective use of UEA's APD resources

- undertake the annual Destinations of Leavers Survey and analyse and provide comment on the data gathered; provide Schools with detailed analytical data and comment on the destinations of their graduates

centrally

- offer central and course-specific talks and workshops on career-related topics ⁵ appropriate to students at different stages in their university courses (foundation, UG and PG)
- provide centrally opportunities for students to further develop their career-relevant skills
- offer individualised careers guidance and skills development advice to prospective students, current students and recent graduates
- provide a wide range of web- and paper-based self-help information and guidance materials appropriate to the aspirations and backgrounds of the diverse UEA student population
- maintain up-to-date information on a wide range of employment areas, and work and further study opportunities
- provide information, advice and guidance of specific relevance to International Students and others who plan to work abroad
- provide information, advice and guidance to recent graduates, and in particular to those who stay on in Norfolk after graduation

in respect of part-time work and volunteering provision

- in collaboration with the Students' Union, continue to develop high quality part-time work opportunities for students
- source and promote opportunities for work placements/work experience
- source and promote voluntary work opportunities

in respect of feed-back and reporting

- seek structured feedback from Careers Centre users and non-users
- submit annually to the Student Experience and Learning and Teaching Committees an analytical report on its progress in fulfilling the responsibilities outlined above, constructed around the PIs and supporting evidence detailed below.

CCEN Performance Indicators and Supporting Evidence

Performance indicators

1. (KPI) 'Prospects' Institutional Employability Performance Indicator and graduate employment league table positions (see Institutional PI 1).

2. Use of Careers Centre resources by UEA students, broken down by School and year of course (see also Schools' PI 4).

⁵ Including, for example, skills development, job search, CV writing, applications and interviews

3. Number and range of course/School specific activities and events provided by CCEN (see also Schools' supporting evidence 6).
4. Number of work experience, work placement and voluntary work opportunities offered to, and taken up by, UEA students.
5. Number and quality (measured by career relevance and level of responsibility) of part-time work opportunities offered to UEA students.

Supporting evidence

6. Range and number of substantive contacts with graduate employers, including contributions to careers fairs and other employer-led activities.
7. Feedback from users and non-users, including Schools, on the impact of the Careers Centre.

D. The Dean of Students' Office (DOS) will:

- chair and provide leadership for an influential and active Careers Centre Steering Committee, which will advise and give feedback on CCEN and School activities, particularly those involving employers
- offer central and School- and course-specific talks and workshops on academic skills development appropriate to students at different stages in their university courses (foundation, UG and PG)
- provide a range of learning enhancement resources to support the achievement of students' academic potential at all levels of study
- provide advice and resources to students wishing to develop their numeracy skills in order to achieve their academic and/or career aims
- offer individual guidance to students with disabilities, specific learning difficulties and mental health difficulties with a view to increasing their independence and success as learners, and confidence in making a successful transition to the workplace or further study or training courses
- offer advice, guidance and training to faculty, including advisers, on appropriate responses to students experiencing personal and academic difficulties in order that such difficulties can be quickly addressed and resolved
- provide a range of specific resources and guidance to international students and facilitate referral to other service providers and in particular to the Careers Centre
- provide support for the implementation and further development of this strategy at institutional and School level
- submit annually an analytic report on its activities undertaken in support of the Progression and Employability Strategy, constructed around the PIs and supporting evidence detailed below.

DOS Performance Indicators and supporting evidence

Performance indicators

1. Use of learning enhancement and dyslexia services by UEA students, broken down by School and year of course (see also School supporting evidence 7).
2. Number and range of course/School specific interactions (see also School supporting evidence 7).
3. Academic and career success of students with disabilities.

Supporting evidence:

4. Evidence of the activities and effectiveness of the Careers Centre Steering Committee.
5. Feedback from users and non-users (students and Schools) on the impact and value of the relevant services provided by the Dean of Students' Office.

SECTION III

Monitoring and evaluation

The implementation of this strategy will be monitored by means of annual reports and the relevant performance indicators and supporting evidence specified in the previous sections.

The effectiveness of this strategy will be evaluated through:

- student feedback, including that obtained from the National Student Survey and the proposed internal second year survey
- annual graduate destinations survey (DLHE)
- periodic additional surveys of new graduates undertaken at the time of graduation and 2 – 5 years later.

This strategy and the activities and outcomes associated with it will be subject to equality impact assessments. The strategy will be periodically reviewed in order to maintain its effectiveness in the changing HE and external environment.

References

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