Careers services:
supporting international students
World rankings aside, word of mouth is one of the most effective marketing tools for encouraging students to consider a particular higher education institution (HEI).

Careers services are of particular interest to many international students who often choose to study in the UK to enhance their employment opportunities.

Providing inclusive careers support for all students can result in increased attraction and achievement of students and contribute to improving the institution’s ability to recruit future international applicants.

“International students are increasingly wanting to find out how successful students from particular courses and universities are in gaining employment once graduating. So they are asking, what happened to the international students before I invest my £20,000."

Staff member
This leaflet presents key messages, recommendations and practical actions that can be taken to enhance equity in careers service provision based on research findings from six Scottish HEIs.

Providing equitable careers support does not mean providing the same for every student, but recognising the different needs within a diverse group and making necessary steps to ensure that services are provided in a way that meets these needs as far as possible.

International students unfamiliar with the UK job market often require additional or specific information and support that UK students would know already or have access to through other sources and networks.

Further information and resources can be found in Equality Challenge Unit’s full report.

ECU (2012) Attracting international students: equitable services and support, campus cohesion and community engagement
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/attracting-international-students
Ensure the careers service can provide support tailored to the needs of international students

Staff were uncertain whether a generic careers service would be able to meet the diverse needs of different groups of international students. Many international students felt their careers service was not sufficiently internationally-focused or only relevant for EU students.

“A lot of the advice [was] useful, [but] perhaps targeted towards the EU and home students. It was hard to visualise how [it] would apply in my context.”
Non-EU international postgraduate
Careers staff stressed the importance of understanding an international student’s cultural context to tailor their advice and service to the student’s needs. Specialised attention to the career needs of different groups and nationalities is more productive than a one-size-fits-all approach. For example, some students might wish to have more structured work experience and internship opportunities, while others require advice and support on how to apply for work.

In general the expectations differ. For example, you know if you have American students, they would be expecting to work on campus because traditionally in America quite a lot of campus opportunities occur… so it’s very much about pointing them to where it does happen and broadening out their horizons, saying ‘well actually if you want to work in [city name] one of the best places is…’ Another example is that sometimes we have Chinese students who are very anxious about language issues and dealing with the local accent. So again it’s about kind of approaching that and building their confidence.

Staff member
The careers service hasn’t really grown commensurately with the international student population. We are sometimes an afterthought. But in terms of reputation maintenance, we have to ensure we are fully supporting the career aspirations of international students or it does filter back to the feedback on the international student barometer. 

Staff member

In some HEIs, staff reported that North American students are less frequent users of careers services, sometimes because they think that the service is unable to help them find employment when they return home.

Some international students indicated that more could be done to help them find employment in the UK. They suggested careers services could help students create a more Scotland-focused CV, signpost students to job centres, advise them to consider handing CVs to shops on the high street and create better links with local employers.

Some students perceived an inequity in how internal part-time paid jobs or tutoring opportunities are allocated between international and UK students in their HEI.

Service staff felt that greater investment in personnel for the careers services is critical if the service is to fully meet its obligations to international and UK students, and as student expectations of these services increase.
**Recommendations**
Consider whether the level of funding and organisation of careers services provides a balance between central and devolved advice (eg students' unions, international officers) and generic and industry and country-specific provision.

Review equity in support provision for non-EU international students in finding placement, internship and job opportunities, whether here in the UK or back in their home country.

**Actions**
- Emphasise the value of careers services by highlighting the progress and achievement of international students who use your service.
- Review the effectiveness of the structure and organisation of your service in providing specific support for both EU and non-EU international students.
- Work with your alumni teams to develop support for returning international students, particularly North American students, such as mentoring from former graduates possibly utilising tools like Facebook.
- Consider additional support for international students wishing to find work in the UK.
- Ensure transparency of recruitment and selection of students for part-time jobs or tutoring opportunities within the HEI.
- Work with senior management colleagues to ensure that adequate funding is available to support the increasing numbers of international students recruited.
Increase communication with students and collaboration with academic departments and other support services

Students expressed a feeling that their careers service provided more than it tells students and that there is a communication and information gap.

“When I went in to get their help about a job interview they said ‘oh by the way we have a big book of feedback forms for people who have been so you can look up a specific company and get the specific feedback on the company you are applying for’. And I was like ‘that is a really good idea’ but I never heard about it.”
EU international postgraduate
Careers staff reported they often work in partnership with academic programmes and subject areas to develop specific support; though this is frequently ad hoc and dependent on the goodwill or commitment of faculty staff.

Staff suggested there is often a need for careers staff to enable closer working with other service areas, such as the international office which has expertise on visa and immigration matters, to advise on employment and internship opportunities that depend on visa conditions.

Staff reported an issue with some employers, particularly small companies, being reluctant to work with employees whose first language is not English, or invest in a student they believe will leave in under two years.
**Recommendations**

Consider ways to distribute information to international students throughout the academic year to ensure that all students are aware of the careers support available to them.

Embed closer working between academic departments and careers services to ensure academic staff can promote the range of careers support available, and assist the careers service to develop discipline specific support to aid future graduate employability.

**Actions**

= Work with your international office to publicise the careers support available to international students throughout the year and avoid information overload at the start of term. This could include pre-arrival information, webpages, induction or freshers' week, social events and any ongoing provision of information, advice and guidance.

= Engage with academic staff to increase their knowledge of the support you can provide to international students.

= Work with academic departments to provide course-focused career events, lectures and workshops with both internal speakers and external employers.
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| Work alongside the HEI’s international office to facilitate graduate employability opportunities for international students with visa conditions attached. | - Develop working relationships between careers and international office staff to enable provision of up-to-date information to employers on visa conditions relating to employment and situations affecting international students  
- Counter stereotypes or fears relating to diversity through providing relevant information to employers, for example on religious or cultural awareness or regarding international students’ English language skills |
Improve connections and opportunities for international students outside the university campus

Some international students expressed an expectation that institutions would provide better opportunities for networking with graduate employers. Links with employers were seen as crucial in providing graduate employment opportunities.

“...I thought that, since it is a top university in the UK, I would see the university having links with various private sector enterprises and companies, have exposure to the people from the industrial sector, which I think this university lacks...”

Non-EU international postgraduate
Staff emphasised the importance of volunteering opportunities as a route into employment for international students. They also suggested that volunteering may be useful in helping international students get their bearings.

The majority of student respondents did not volunteer or know of local organisations to approach for volunteering opportunities. They indicated that their HEIs did not assist them with making links between their external involvement and their course of study or employability.

UK students were marginally more aware of community organisations to contact than international students. It was also noted that international students fluent in English had more contact and opportunities to interact with local communities. Students who had volunteered said that they had found opportunities themselves by making direct approaches to organisations, using search engines, seeing adverts and word of mouth.

I’d like to get more involved in the local community because I feel that we are sharing the town with them and it can’t just be about students. But can’t say that the university has facilitated many opportunities for that. The union has been more helpful in that sense but even then there is no, like, formal mechanism. EU international undergraduate
International students who did volunteer felt that it allowed them to:

- contribute to the community
- create greater connections with local host communities as part of the international experience by getting to know the local culture, customs, local people, the language and accent
- enrich their CV with work experience and gain contacts
- gain inspiration and have a more direct way to participate within the city

International students who did not volunteer cited the following reasons:

- opportunities are not advertised or only targeted at specific courses
- feeling guilty about the short-term nature of any potential contributions
- being uncertain whether opportunities would contravene visa restrictions

“Just to get to know the culture, the people here, like that’s one part of the learning, that’s why we came here. Non-EU international postgraduate”
Creating opportunities

**Recommendations**
Enhance links with local, national and international employers and provide information and networking opportunities inclusive of international students.

Encourage and facilitate international students to work with local and voluntary groups to benefit both their employability and their overall experience.

**Actions**

= Work more closely with local employers and bodies such as the local Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Scottish Confederation of British Industries to consider internship and employment opportunities for international students.

= Develop links with local voluntary organisations and employers to facilitate volunteering opportunities.

= Publicise opportunities and the benefits of volunteering to international students.

= Work with your students’ union or association to organise events such as a volunteering fair, to encourage students to consider community or international volunteering and buddying schemes.

= Provide information to reassure international students of the time commitments and expectations and what visas permit in terms of volunteering.
Equality Challenge Unit works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK, and in colleges in Scotland.

www.ecu.ac.uk
Twitter: @EqualityinHE

For further information see:
ECU (2012) Attracting international students: equitable services and support, campus cohesion and community engagement
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/attracting-international-students

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