

Ready, Set, Future...

University of Southampton's Employability Strategy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the University of Southampton's strategy for supporting all our students to achieve successful futures and positive destinations through our student enterprise and employability offerings. It is our aim to provide a varied, comprehensive and transformative offering to support our students in their journey towards success. In doing this we will:

Facilitate the delivery of an excellent and exemplary student experience that enables every student to effectively design their own future and reach their full potential.

- 1.2 In order to achieve this, employability will be a structural imperative at the University. This strategy aligns with other institutional strategies¹ and also supports the University's wider strategic goal of achieving top 10 and top 100 national and international rankings by 2022. The language within this document is reflective of current thinking and will be kept under review to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

2.0 Context and Drivers

- 2.1 Employability is a key driver within the University's Institutional and Education Strategies. We have historically performed well in the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) surveys:

- In 2016-17, 95.5% of our graduates were in employment or further study, six months after leaving the University, outperforming the national average across all universities (94.65%).
- 74.6% of our graduates said they felt their course had prepared them 'well' or 'very well' for employment.
- Placed second highest within the Russell Group of university leavers in employment.

- 2.2 In order to maintain and improve our high rates of progression we need to:

- Continually develop and enhance our employability and student enterprise offering.
- Deliver focused programmes of activity to support non-traditional students into appropriate and successful outcomes, closing the visible gaps in progression for those students with a disclosed mental health disability.
- Take steps to ensure we close any other identified gaps in progression over the period of this strategy and beyond.

¹ University Strategy, Education Strategy, Enterprise Strategy, Student Services Strategy, Arts Strategy, Sports Experience Strategy, Alumni Strategy and Social Impact Lab Strategy

- 2.3 We also recognise the need to continue to support our students in their career planning and remind them of the value of work experience especially given the Department of Education² report on careers readiness which identified that the three factors most important to guiding graduates to a positive outcome are:
- Undertaking paid work whilst at University or in the six months immediately after
 - Focusing job searches exclusively on graduate level jobs and making most applications whilst still studying
 - Having a career plan upon leaving University.
- 2.4 All of this will allow us to provide our students with the support they need to achieve a successful future no matter what year and level of study or programme undertaken
- 3.0 Targets**
- 3.1 The University's Key Performance Indicators are to achieve a positive destination result of 83% on publication of the equivalent of DLHE data (now Graduate Outcomes) in 2020. At the time of writing these KPI's, 83% would have achieved top ten status for positive destinations.
- 3.2 Given the move to Graduate Outcomes, we are unable to baseline our performance until after the publication of survey data in 2020. At this stage, we will be able to develop explicit key performance indicators and targets.
- 4.0 Supporting Students**
- 4.1 The Office for Students has a stated ambition that 'future generations should have equal access to opportunities to access and success in higher education and to achieve success and rewarding careers'. Our strategy coalesces with that ambition.
- 4.2 The changes to careers advice provision in schools and further education has resulted in a reduction in the quality and availability of information to students about their future studies. The Value for Money in Higher Education report³ comments that 'Students lack sufficient high-quality information to make informed choices about higher education and the career paths that might subsequently be open to them. Decisions to take on a financial burden lasting most of a working lifetime are often made by students without adequate information or advice. The long term implication of an adverse choice can leave students in a vulnerable position.' We also recognise the need to support potential students and to prepare them for roles that do not

² Shury, J., Vivian, D., Turner, Catherine., Downing, C. – IFF Research, Department for Education Research Report 'Planning for success: Graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes.' March 2017

³ House of Commons Education Committee 'Value for money in higher education' Seventh report of Session 2017-2019 printed 24 October 2018

yet exist, to understand their drive for entering university and to ensure we meet the changing needs and demands of our future students.

5.0 Careers Readiness and Employability

5.1 We will use the concept of ‘careers readiness’ to support our students in achieving a successful future. Employability⁴ is a combination of ‘capitals’ (or resources) that enable and empower students to: develop a professional identity; recognise and reach their potential beyond university; become confident global citizens, able to make successful transitions into the world of work and manage changing career environments throughout their lives. Capitals can be defined as ‘key resources that confer benefits and advantages in the labour market.’⁵ In applying the ‘Graduate Capital Model’⁶, a University of Southampton graduate will typically demonstrate a combination of the following⁷:

- Graduate level knowledge and skills and the ability to apply these to the graduate job market.
- Development of networks and social relationships to enhance their knowledge and access to target employment.
- An appreciation of the unique culture of sectors and organisations and the confidence to present themselves and their profile in a credible way.
- An understanding of the value of their experiences, achievements, personal attributes and personal values relative to their career plans.
- Capacity to adapt to changing environments and withstand challenges and pressures.

6.0 Guiding Principles

6.1 In order to meet our aim of ***enabling every student to effectively design their own future and reach their full potential***, our strategy has a number of guiding principles. Those principles are based on research⁸ which shows that successful strategies focused on improving the employability of students include:

- i. Embedding employability in the curriculum and ensuring that students are able to make a connection between employability outcomes and their discipline.
- ii. Encouraging reflection and increasing students’ capacity to articulate and communicate their learning to employers
- iii. Supporting students to increase their confidence, self-belief and self-efficacy through their studies

⁴ Developed by the University of Southampton Careers and Employability Service curriculum working group

⁵ Tomlinson, M.B (2016)

⁶ Tomlinson, M.B. (2017) *Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability*, Education + Training Vol.59 Issue:4, pp338-352

⁷ An optimal combination of capitals will be relative to the goals of each individual

⁸ Artress,J., Hooley,T, and Mellors-Burber, R. (2017) *Employability: A review of the literature 2012 to 2016*.

York: Higher Education Academy. Available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/employability-review-literature-2012-2016

- iv. Providing a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students to enhance their employability.
- v. Building links with the labour market and encouraging students to do the same.
- vi. Providing students with real connections to employers and actual experience of the labour market.
- vii. Encouraging student mobility and fostering a global perspective

6.2 In addition, we will also ensure:

- We are data driven to determine priority areas to support and be responsive to changing requirements.
- Partnership working between the central services and Faculties and Schools to determine approaches fit for their discipline cultures and linked professional sectors.
- We work collegially to define realistic action and delivery plans.
- We provide diverse and varied opportunities to ensure all students can have a fair chance of a successful and rewarding futures.
- We develop and deliver programmes that enhance and ensure the careers readiness of Southampton students.

7.0 Delivery of a holistic approach

7.1 Key to the delivery of this strategy will be ensuring faculty and the central service have an equal responsibility in ensuring its success. Instrumental to this will be truly embedding employability into the lifecycle and the central service continuing to provide meaningful and high quality support.

7.2 Embedding Employability

7.2.1 The HEA views⁹ embedded employability as providing students with the opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, experiences, behaviours, attributes, achievements and attitudes to enable them to make successful transitions and contributions benefitting them, the economy and their community.

7.2.2 We will embed employability into the design and delivery of all our programmes, ensuring that we involve key stakeholders in its delivery.

7.3 Central Service Provision

7.3.1 The central service will support the delivery of this strategy in a number of ways including:

- Providing a professional, high quality, information advice and guidance provision.
- Increasing the number of opportunities for students to undertake professional development experiences.
- Looking at mechanisms to increase the number of students experiencing international development opportunities at home or abroad.

⁹ HEA Framework for Embedding Employability in higher education 2016

- Exploring and implementing additional tools to support careers readiness.
- In combination with our Careers Readiness Test, using careers registration to provide data on students' careers readiness.

8.0 Priorities

8.1 Our priorities for the lifecycle of this strategy are:

- i. Make employability a structural imperative at the University of Southampton by truly embedding it in to the curriculum and in the student lifecycle.
- ii. Identify and support students who need additional help to reach their full potential.
- iii. Take steps to ensure we continue to maintain and improve our strong performance to ensure the progression of our students.

9.0 What impact will our strategy have on the student experience?

9.1 In delivering our strategy our students will:

- Be aware of their current phase of career readiness at each stage of the student lifecycle.
- Be supported to become the best they can be in whatever field they choose, be it globally or closer to home.
- Have an understanding of how their employability has developed and how this transfers to life after University.
- Be supported by an offer which is flexible, cohesive and scalable.
- Be supported in their future journey from application to post graduation.

10.0 Governance and Measures of Success

10.1 In order to deliver our strategy we will implement comprehensive action plans both within faculty/school as appropriate and centrally. Those actions plans will be monitored via relevant governance boards and committees and their success and that of the strategy will be determined by the following measures:

- i. Capitals – through the use of our Careers Readiness Test¹⁰ we will see an increase in pure usage of the test but also an increase in the modal scores as students engage in activity that increases their capitals.
- ii. Confidence – through the use of Careers Registration, we will see students become more decisive and engaged in their career planning and in their careers readiness.
- iii. Achievement – through the Graduate Outcomes Survey, we will see an increase in positive destinations for University of Southampton

¹⁰ <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/staff/employability-exchange/career-readiness-test.page>

graduates. Furthermore, we will also see ongoing improvement in our graduate voice metrics¹¹.

- 10.2 We will see a closure in progression measures for students who disclose a mental health disability and beyond the lifecycle of this strategy and we will see a removal in the absolute gap in progression for students with a mental health disability. We will also see no gaps in progression to employment for care leavers and will continue to have strong performance in the progression of students from non-traditional backgrounds.
- 10.3 We will consider the appropriateness of using Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data as a measure of success.

¹¹ The graduate voice metrics of the Graduate Outcomes survey captures three areas:

- How meaningful or important they feel their activity to be
- Whether they are using the skills they gained from their qualification in their current activity
- How they are progressing towards their future goals.