



Universities Scotland statement on the Career Review

Universities Scotland welcomes the publication of the Career Review, and we support the emphasis on a forward-looking careers ecosystem for individual learners.

The past couple of years have been very challenging for learners of all ages, whether that's a school, college, or university student, due to the disruption and lost learning caused by the pandemic. It has also been a very unpredictable time for Scotland's workforce, leading many to re-engage in lifelong learning to support a change in career. Looking ahead, our economy will continue to face major disruption and evolution as a consequence of increased automation, geopolitics and a just transition to net zero among other factors. Good, bespoke, careers advice is an essential part of supporting our talented people.

Universities have a highly professional careers service in place to support their students and graduates. We are delighted that the Career Review noted this as a strength in current provision. In addition to careers advice, institutions also deliver comprehensive programmes of meta skills to support students, across all disciplines, and work with their students to develop wider skill sets that will equip them to be effective global citizens. Scotland's graduates are highly sought after by employers in Scotland and around the world. Scotland's graduate talent is often cited by industry as a factor in choosing to invest or locate here in Scotland.

This statement touches on a few elements that will be important to the implementation stage of the Review as well as commenting on specific recommendations. Many of the recommendations relating to learning and teaching build upon work already in place within universities. We see this strategic direction of travel as an opportunity to further enhance and improve consistently across the sector.

Our position is complementary to that made by the higher education network of careers services, AGCAS Scotland and AGCAS Scotland have worked with us as we developed this statement.

Active partnership

As universities, we have a lot to contribute to the implementation of the Review's recommendations and we want to be an active partner and co-producer in shaping the way forward. We are very open to sharing our expertise, insight, and good practice and to learning from others. We welcome the recognition that clear leadership is essential in order to enable change across the ecosystem and we are ready to work with the Programme Board to co-design the recommendations. The pace of change is ambitious, and we may need to review it. Representation from senior leadership in higher education will help ensure an effective design from the start and will further empower the sector to make change.



Higher education students are a diverse population of all ages and stages of life.

We welcome the ambition of the scope of the Career Review and inclusion of young people under the age of twenty-five. However, more than a quarter of all undergraduate students are 25 years of age or older¹ and it is important that we continue to support their inclusion and needs within the new careers “eco-system”.

Mature students are a diverse mix of learners, some experiencing higher education for the very first time and some returning to university to either retrain or develop their careers further. There are a variety of options available to them including undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and shorter courses such as certificates and diploma and, increasingly, short upskilling courses

Our HE students are a diverse mix of learners from different educational backgrounds and different geographical locations, with 64% of our students from Scotland and 24%² from outside of the UK. Our student population includes those who study undergraduate courses as well as postgraduate taught courses and postgraduate research degrees. These students have very diverse and sometimes highly niche career aspirations and advice needs. University careers services work hard to ensure they offer the right support for every student. This includes supporting learners who want to live and work outside of Scotland as part of a globalised economy.³ To serve our students and graduates to best effect, the implementation of the Review’s recommendations must recognise and respond to this highly diverse and international context.

We welcome the emphasis on equality, diversity, and inclusion within the report. We know that different student characteristics such as a widening participation background, race, gender, disability (and indeed the intersections of these) still has an impact on career choice and outcomes, including salary⁴. This is everyone’s responsibility to address.

Response to recommendations

As we consider working on this, in partnership with other stakeholders, we think the following points are important in regard to achieving the best possible outcomes. We have the most to say on the Review’s recommendations 2,4 and 9 and we have therefore addressed these recommendations first.

Recommendation 2: Developing skills and habits essential for the future world of work

Career education and services should be designed to develop, recognise and accredit the skills and habits essential for the future world of work.

We welcome the recognition that the development of career management and employability skills is an important part of the curriculum. Universities already have wide experience of embedding career education and soft skills/ meta skills development across the curriculum, however unlike a national curriculum in schools, every university is responsible for designing, teaching, and assessing its own curriculum and awards. Even where the same disciplines are taught, the subject content can vary significantly between universities. University staff have expertise in developing resources and the curriculum and teaching is enhanced through continuous improvement through the [enhancement-led approach to quality](#) in Scottish Higher Education.

¹ HE student enrolments by personal characteristics <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>

² HE student enrolments by domicile <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from>

³ Many of those graduates (though not all) who wish to work outside of Scotland will have come to Scotland to study. HESA Graduate Outcomes data shows that just over 90 per cent of Scottish domiciled students who study at Scottish institutions and are in work at the time of the survey are working in Scotland. Just over a quarter of English domiciled students study at Scottish institutions and are in work at the time of the survey are working in Scotland. [Graduates in work | HESA](#) (Figure 16)

⁴ Scottish LEO data shows pay gaps based on gender, disability and SIMD (but does not split the data on the basis of race) [Graduate Outcomes \(LEO\) - subject by provider: 2018-2019 tables - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). UK data indicates a race pay gap: [Graduate outcomes \(LEO\), Tax Year 2018-19 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)



This means that an approach that produces one-size fits all modules or resources for universities is unlikely to be useful or to get buy-in.

We welcome the opportunity for broader external recognition of this type of activity and would like to understand further the mechanisms for accreditation and what that might mean for university students and graduates. Many university degree programmes are already accredited by a range of professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), which represent employers and, in some instances, completing an accredited degree is a necessary pre-condition for entering the profession. In addition, the university careers network, AGCAS, operates a membership quality standard which outlines and demonstrates the levels of professionalism with which member services fulfil their purpose.

Given the specialised nature of university courses, it would be advisable to also include academic staff in the development of the proposed on and offline tools to ensure relevance to the more diverse learners at university. Students who transition from school in Scotland to university in Scotland will expect to see a progression in resources that are relevant and age and stage appropriate to them. This will require additional funding and a shared understanding of how these skills progress across the settings. We would suggest that existing resources, already developed by agencies such as AGCAS and QAA, are included in the development work. We would further suggest those leading the implementation stage make full use of existing mechanisms for collaboration such as AGCAS Scotland, QAA Scotland enhancement work and/or Advance HE so that their expertise can be harnessed will ensure that the ensuing tools are relevant and immediately effective for the HE sector. These organisations have experience of collaborating with each other and with other organisations including SDS and colleges. However, this work will require appropriate funding.

Recommendation 4: Experiential career education

There should be dedicated curriculum time for experiential work-related learning in all settings.

We broadly welcome this recommendation and support the underlying principle of fairness in ensuring equality of access to all opportunities, including work-related learning.

We welcome the extension of the meaning of experiential career education to include work-related learning as this activity is already happening on university campuses. Work-related learning is consistently embedded in degree programmes, and indeed is required by the UK [Quality Code](#) and [Subject Benchmark statements](#). We value the opportunity for this work to be externally recognised. Given the very different nature of learning at university across vocational and non-vocational programmes, the variety of existing types of work-related learning is wide ranging and valuable to students. Many of our students proceed into careers outside of Scotland and work-related skills and experiences should also be relevant in that context.

The formal articulation of additional work-related experiences will be helpful, and we would support the formal engagement of professional AGCAS and QAA colleagues to ensure relevance for the HE sector. The capacity of employers to offer quality, relevant and meaningful workplace experiences for all school, college and university students should be considered in this work.

We welcome the ambition for further employer engagement in work-related opportunities for learners at all levels of study and how this can inform curriculum development. Through professional networks and involvement with accreditation bodies, university teaching staff already regularly connect with employers, and we welcome the intention to build on this.

Scotland's universities have been working successfully to widen access to university and this commitment does not stop at admissions. Careers services in Scotland's universities have been working to support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in a variety of ways including targeted mentoring and internships. We believe that building on this existing practice will be helpful.



Recommendation 9: Strengthening evaluation and continuous improvement

The effectiveness and impact of the whole career system should be measured using a suite of outcome-based measures that are integrated in all settings, supporting the delivery of responsive and flexible services.

We support this recommendation especially relating to ensuring a high-quality service is delivered and being able to evidence the difference made. Universities have long experience of external reporting in this area of their activity, such as returns via [HESA annual monitoring](#) (for example HE Graduate Outcomes Data), [QAA Scotland](#), and [NSS](#) surveys. The Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) quality expectations require periodic institution-led reviews of careers services (with external expertise), and the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard needs to be renewed every three years. We will be happy to share our experience and provide examples of existing good practice.

We recognise the need for a cohesive understanding of a new career service "ecosystem" however we would strongly favour working with existing data sources to produce similar measures rather than developing a new measurement. The existing university measurement frameworks are robust, efficient, and consistent data collections and will provide most of the data that will be needed for continuous improvement. It may not be cost effective or efficient for a common framework across all settings. The Career Review recognises the strong national external drivers of the National Student Survey (NSS) and HESA Graduate Outcomes survey in terms of student recruitment (including rUK and international student recruitment). These measures are important for universities for a variety of purposes (including in quality systems) and allow universities to benchmark themselves with institutions across the UK as well as in Scotland, which can be very valuable. The SFC requires universities to participate in both these surveys and we do not think it would be helpful or efficient to introduce a second very similar collection.

We recognise the desire to measure outcomes consistently however, care should be taken in terms of defining what is to be measured. Embedding career education within the curriculum is already a core part of the learning and teaching experience and it's important that any new outcomes measures do not incentivise separating work-related learning from other learning outcomes, which will detract from a fully integrated learning and pedagogical experience.

Recommendations 1,3,5-8,10

The following comments take the remaining recommendations in numerical order.

Recommendation 1: A new career development model

A simple model should be established that defines career services, bringing definition to the variety of career services across Scotland

We think this needs to be co-designed with university sector input and that it should be possible, within a simple model, to have some flexibility in the use of language to accommodate the different ages, stages of life and learning that people engage with careers services, and institutional distinctiveness. We would welcome clarification of the level of funding available to enable this recommendation.

Recommendation 3: Creating person centred career services

Individuals should be involved in identifying what they need from career services based on their own circumstances and context, which leads to a flexible and personalised service offer.

We support this and the recommendation reflects the approach already taken in university careers services. A person-centred service allows universities to consider the subject/discipline context in the provision of careers education, information, advice, and guidance.



Recommendation 5: Community based services

Career services should be delivered within communities in a way that is aligned to social justice values and provides access to consistent national services.

We strongly support social justice values. We would welcome more detail on the Programme Board views on maintaining 'consistent' services while aligning with a person-centred approach.

Enabling recommendation 6: Exposure to fair work:

People should have a right to have a wide range of meaningful opportunities to experience work and understand what fair work is.

We are very supportive of this recommendation. University careers services work to ensure this through the education of employers and students, management of vacancies and operation to legal and ethical standards.

Enabling recommendation 7: Digital enablement, empowerment and engagement

Enhanced digital services and online tools should be developed that present information about the world of work in an inspiring and accurate way.

Whilst we support this recommendation, we need to ensure it is age and stage appropriate. We also think it should make use of existing expertise in this area, e.g., the [Prospects website](#), which provides careers information for graduates across the UK. It is also important to recognise that universities have different digital learning & teaching and support service infrastructure from schools and indeed from each other.

Enabling recommendation 8: Clear roles for the delivery of career services

Where appropriate, the roles across career services should be defined to deliver the career development model in a coherent way.

We suggest it would be helpful if this were compatible with existing frameworks in universities, e.g., [AGCAS Professional Pathways](#).

Enabling recommendation 10: Creating a career services coalition

A coalition should be established that ensures the implementation of the review's recommendations and the coherence of career services across Scotland, where young people, practitioners, employers and stakeholders are represented.

We are very keen that universities are well represented in this coalition and we welcome clarification on how this will be created and taken forward.

