Research Symposium on Graduate Outcomes: How can universities best prepare students for life after university?

Wednesday 25 March 2020
13.00 – 17.00
University of Kent, Grimond Building, Grimond Lecture Theatre 3 and Aphra Foyer, Canterbury CT2 7NZ

While the UK higher education sector has been paying more attention to students’ employability in recent years, HESA’s revised measure of graduate outcomes now enables a broader view of how well students are doing 15 months after university. This symposium explores what academics, staff and students can do to best prepare graduates not only for employability, but for personally-fulfilling careers and lives. Based on recent research, each speaker will take a different perspective on the symposium's title question. This event is sponsored by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Kent, with support from a grant from HECSU. The event is free and open to the public. To book your place, please sign up via Eventbrite by 18th March 2020.

Programme

13.00 – 13.30 Registration and tea/coffee – Aphra Foyer, Grimond.

13:30 - 13:45 Welcome – Dr Kathleen M Quinlan, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent.

13:45 – 14:15 Career Cartography and Student SatNav: Understanding Starting Points and Journeys
Professor Bob Gilworth, Director of the Careers Group, University of London

Much of the HE employability discourse in recent years has focussed on “destinations” rather than journeys. In particular it has taken the lagging indicator of destinations data (as measured by the DLHE) as a measure of “employability”- a long-term capability – when it is actually a snapshot measure of “employment” (an outcome at a moment in time).

Destinations data has undoubtedly been very useful in understanding the operation of graduate labour markets and that, in itself, is useful in careers education and guidance. However, the fundamental problem that we faced in HE careers and employability work until recently, was that we had no leading indicator. If we seek to help our students on their career journeys, we must understand that to offer anyone useful directions to get anywhere, it is essential to know where they are now. On reflection, it seems astonishing to observe that we had bumbled along without that information for as long as we could remember, until the inception of Careers Registration in 2012 and its widespread adoption since then. This session seeks to explain how and why that data revolution came about and
the difference that it is now making to our understanding of starting points and journeys, our capability to target resources and the transformation of institutional discourse around “employability” or, more accurately, careers and employability. We are in the thick of dealing with the impact of “Graduate Outcomes” - the survey and the resulting metrics. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that these are actually “Graduates’ Outcomes” – the career journeys of many thousands of individuals. Another feature of the employability discourse has been emphasis on the acquisition of employability assets – the luggage for the journey, with far less emphasis on the map or the satnav (career direction and purpose). This session will show why the latter is essential.

14.15 - 14:45 Where do our graduates go? Mobility, local labour markets, and key employability factors
Dr Charlie Ball, Head of Higher Education Intelligence, Graduate Prospects.

Drawing on extensive analyses of recent DLHE data, this presentation busts myths about the UK graduate labour market. This presentation will also address the top industries employing graduates and the relative importance of the choice of degree versus students’ degree classifications, with a particular focus on the local region, as many graduates either return to their home regions or stay in the area in which they attended university.

14:45 - 15:00 Refreshment Break – Aphra Foyer.

15:00 - 15:30 Preparing students for meaning and purpose in their work
Ms Helen Stubbs, Senior Consultant, Gallup.

This (virtual/video conferenced) presentation reviews findings from a study of U.S. college (higher education) graduates conducted by Gallup on behalf of Bates College. This nationally representative study examined attributes of graduates who have a strong sense of purpose in their work, mapping their work outcomes to their undergraduate experiences. Four seminal undergraduate experiences emerged in the analysis, in addition to graduates’ reflection of how their work aligns with their interests, values and strengths. These findings, along with others, will be shared to support U.K. leaders’ preparing graduates for forging professional lives of meaning and purpose.

15:30 - 16:00 Promoting students’ career interests: what influences career interest during university?
Dr Kathleen M. Quinlan and Mr James Corbin, Head of Careers and Employability Service, University of Kent

Helping students clarify their career interest and plans is a vital role for universities, yet responsibility for supporting students’ holistic interest development can fall outside the remit of both careers services staff and academics. Academics focus on students’ interest in their subject while career services staff focus on helping students plan for careers. Through a collaborative project funded by HECSU, we promote a more integrated view of students’ career development through a focus on students’ interests and how those can be supported. As UK universities are increasingly being held to account for students’ graduate outcomes, we need to understand how to support students to explore, develop, integrate and pursue their academic and career interests. We explore how students’ career interest develops during university, asking how much do students’ interests change? Why? How do different aspects of what students experience during university, particularly the curriculum, co-curriculum and career services, influence their career interests? We will report on findings from a survey of 665 graduating University of Kent students and also draw on more detailed surveys of nearly 1,000 first through fourth year students in three subject areas (psychology, biosciences and forensics), and narrative interviews with a subset of students in those programmes.

16:00 - 16:30 Panel Discussion facilitated by Dr Kathleen M Quinlan

16:30 - 17:00 Drinks Reception - Aphra Atrium