



EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

Adapting Student Career Development for the Gen Z Era

Critical Investments To Distinguish Your Institution from Alternative Options



Student Experience
and Well-Being

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Executive Summary

Gen Z Prioritises Career Outcomes and “Life Success” in Their Enrolment Decisions

Across the coming decade, universities will be forced to confront growing challenges, such as intensified competition for students with ever-greater needs and expectations. University leaders must recognise that Gen Z students considering whether to enrol in HE are increasingly concerned about “life success”, which includes traditional measures like job security but also fulfilment and an overall sense of thriving. All too often, HE leaders delegate student career development and outcomes entirely to the campus career centre. Career centres alone, however, cannot meet these demands, especially with staffing shortages and limited financial resources. Career development not only needs to be embedded across the university experience, but it also requires strategic direction and focused attention from cabinet leaders.

Status Quo Career Services Not Producing Desired Outcomes

Despite evolving student needs and rapidly changing workplaces, university career development has remained relatively the same across the last decade. As a result, alumni are increasingly underemployed and dissatisfied, often regretting their academic decisions due to universities not meeting their career needs. As HE outcome measures fail to show student successes, prospective students and their families are more seriously weighing the cost of attending university against its perceived return on investment.

Ignoring Career Development Has Mission-Critical Consequences

EAB research illustrates a trend that HE writ large has been hesitant to embrace: career development is essential to student success and the university experience. The status quo approach, however, is no longer sufficient. Students want and need more than resume workshops, career counselling, career fairs, and mock interviews. Because student career outcomes affect mission-critical priorities around enrolment, student success, mental health, and alumni engagement, cabinet leaders can’t afford to take a passive approach to these emerging concerns.



Enrolment Strategy

Career outcomes and services influence enrollment decisions



Student Success

Real-world applications in coursework enhance student engagement



Mental Health

Career development prepares students to thrive post-graduation



Alumni Engagement

Good experiences with career services promote engagement and giving

Critical Investments in Career Development to Make Your Institution Distinctive

Rather, they must provide leadership and investment across key dimensions of career development to better meet student needs and fulfil the university’s mission. Those dimensions are (1) provide industry-focused education, (2) articulate a clear career payoff to prospective students (3) prepare students to thrive across the university-to-career journey, and (4) build social capital to level the playing field for underserved students.

Is HE to Blame for Graduates' Failure to Launch?

Life After Graduation More Unstable, Unpredictable than in the Past

Unfortunately, the outcomes for recent graduates suggest that HE is often failing those who do enrol. A rising number of degree holders regret their academic decisions. The reason being:

22% | Of graduates in the UK are not using their degree in their current employment

50% | Nearly half of US university graduates ages 22 to 27 are underemployed

30% | Almost 30% of graduates in Australia can't find a job due to lack of work experience or jobs in their expertise in their region

47% | Of underemployed workers in New Zealand are 20-34 years old

Three-quarters of US Gen-Z professionals are considering changing jobs in the next year, 91% of UK Gen-Z are stressed at their jobs, and only 76% of Gen-Z Australians are happy with their job prospects.

For graduates from underserved backgrounds, the outcomes are also worrying. Only 30% of low-income or first-in-family students secure a well-paying first job or enter graduate school, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduates are 12% more likely to be unemployed than their white peers.

While inflation and the hypercompetitive job market have certainly contributed to these outcomes, many recent graduates blame their universities for inadequately preparing them for the workforce.

Status Quo Services Hanging On

Top Activities at Career Centers¹

33% | Providing resume & cover letter support

15% | Advising students on career options

15% | Offering students job search strategy

Some Changes to Career Services

With Reporting Lines and Budget

90% | Of institutions have career services reporting to VPSAs

10% | Of institutions merged academic & career advising in Student Affairs

26% | Increase in career center budgets between 2019 and 2023

Efficacy of Services Under Scrutiny

Across Stakeholder Groups

14% | Of students feel they received good advice from career centers

30% | Of alumni feel their alma mater provided helpful career advice

11% | Of business leaders feel colleges prepare students for success

For decades, bachelor's degree holders had a competitive advantage in the job market, often resulting in economic mobility. However, as the economic landscape has drastically changed, career development has not kept pace. As a result, current students, alumni, and employers alike are questioning the value of university more than ever before.

Source: Schaeffer, "10 Facts about Today's College Graduates," Pew Research Center, April 2022. Smith, "Gen Z and Millennials Are Leading 'the Big Quit' in 2023," CNBC, January 2023. Hatfield, "Young Adults in the U.S. Are Less Likely than Those in Most of Europe to Live in Their Parents' Home," Pew Research Center, May 2023; "Black Workers Endure Persistent Racial Disparities in Employment Outcomes," Economic Policy Institute, August 2023. Alonso, "Career Centers Get a Makeover," *Inside Higher Ed*, June 2023; 2020 National Alumni Career Mobility Survey; Capranos, D., Magda, A. J. "Closing the skills gap 2023: Employer perspectives on educating the post-pandemic workforce," *Wiley*; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Percentage of career professionals time spent in 2023

Investments to Make HE Distinct

Why Cabinet Leaders Must Focus on Student Career Development

Because student career outcomes affect mission-critical priorities around enrolment, student success, mental health, and alumni engagement, cabinet leaders can't afford to take a passive approach to these emerging concerns.



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To reclaim the ROI narrative and ensure the success of their graduates, universities must invest in three critical dimensions of career development. Those dimensions are (1) provide industry-focused education, (2) articulate a clear career payoff to prospective students (3) prepare students to thrive across the university-to-career journey, and (4) build social capital to level the playing field for underserved students.

Provide Industry Focused Education



- Offer career-relevant programmes and employability skills
- Provide experiential learning and co-curricular planning to enhance career readiness

Articulate a Clear Career Payoff to Prospects



- Craft a differentiated value proposition centred around life success
- Lead with outcomes and guarantees to demonstrate ROI to prospects

Prepare Students To Thrive Across the University-to-Career Journey



- Provide support to students nearing known moments of career stress
- Cultivate inclusive workplace environments among employer partners

Build Social Capital to Level the Playing Field for Underserved Students



- Increase exposure to employers for underserved students
- Deepen connections with young alumni professionals

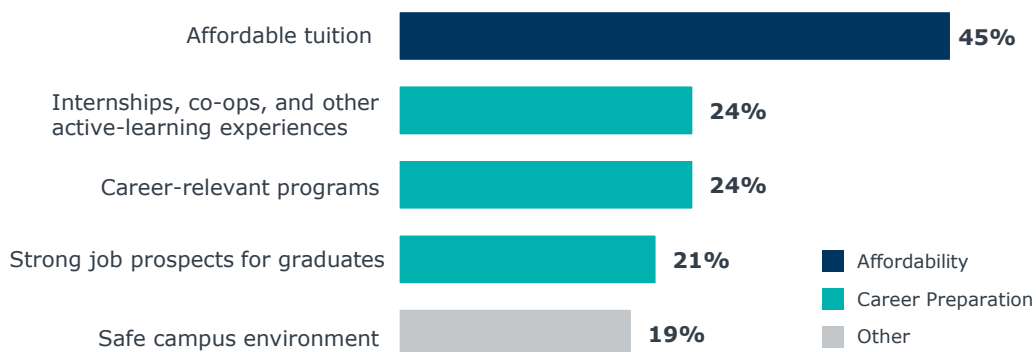
Status Quo Career Offerings are No Longer Enough

Everyone Does Experiential Learning. What Makes Your Institution Distinctive?

With so many graduates across the globe unemployed or underemployed, offering a list on the careers page of short opt-in unpaid internships where the student makes tea or poster will not cut it anymore. Career support such as industry-focused teaching and learning, guaranteed internship funding, facilitating industry exposure, or career counselling beyond graduation can be powerful tools in making that argument. However, many institutions do not make a strong enough case for what makes them distinctive.

Career Opportunities Heavily Influence Students' Search

Top 5 Responses to, "What are you looking for in your college experience?" in EAB Communication Preferences Survey n=20,324



By now, virtually every university strategic plan refers to experiential learning as part of their career development strategy. Some institutions have gone a step further, promising funding for at least one internship during a student's time on campus. But even these types of guarantees are becoming baseline requirements. In an increasingly competitive environment for students, every institution must articulate the "unique DNA" in their career development strategy. Highlighted below is one example of a UK institution embedding employability skills such as commercial awareness and recruitment skills into the curriculum.



Embedding Employability Skills into the Curriculum

Cross-School 2nd Year Module

- Commercial awareness video interview assignment
- Co-delivered by careers and academics
- Employers provided online talks, Q+As, and filmed interview introductions and questions

All Life Sciences Included
Module connected to existing Life Sciences Employability Week

Targets employability skills
Enhances students' commercial awareness and recruitment skills

Employer-led skills development
Authentic job application and interview experience

Impact on Career Readiness

62% increase in students engaging with employability week

30% increase in students commercial awareness

44% increase in student confidence in completing a video interview

Source: Gillian O'Brien and Darren Siggers, "Employer input to curriculum and assessment," How to Enable the Employability of University Graduates (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023); EAB interviews and analysis .

Connecting Campus Experiences to Careers

Map Extra-Curriculars and Experiential Learning for Career Readiness

Most programme heads can describe how the academic components of a course of study fit together. However department-generated plans often fail to communicate to students the many learning opportunities outside of the classroom that contribute to their overall career readiness and subsequent career confidence.

Similarly, too few students proactively plan their university experience in light of their professional and academic goals, especially as first years. Even fewer students incorporate co-curricular activities into these plans. Providing students with information on the co-curricular opportunities available and where they fit into a student’s progress towards graduation helps students understand which opportunities are the best fit for their goals

Experiential course maps offer a solution. They help students see their university experience as a journey in which they are in the driver’s seat. They prompt students to make informed coursework decisions, become involved with local and global communities, consider diverse career pathways, and remain engaged in career exploration or career preparation at critical moments along the path to a degree and their desired post-graduation destination.

Build Your Own Experiential Course Maps¹

History Bachelor of Arts EXPERIENTIAL COURSE MAP		EAB University	
	First Year	Middle Year(s)	Final Year
Build a foundation for success in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review programme requirements with your academic tutor Visit the Student Success Centre for an overview of support services Select electives that pique your interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with your academic tutor to check on progress to degree and discuss your area of focus Speak with a professor about research opportunities in the History Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete your final-year capstone project Submit your capstone paper to a historical journal for publication
Make your mark on campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend the Student Fair in October to learn about on-campus organisations Join a first-year students common reading group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take on a leadership role in your campus club or organisation Volunteer in the university archive or with the university oral history project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve on the Department Student Council Connect with a first-year history student as a peer guide
Connect with local and global communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign up to learn a foreign language, and join a foreign language club Visit the International Student Centre to learn about study abroad opportunities and on-campus events Participate in autumn and spring community service projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for a study abroad programme and funding through the Study Abroad office Visit the Centre for Service Learning and Civic Engagement to learn about becoming a community mentor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete an elective module with a global or local focus Earn the Intercultural Certificate through participation in multicultural seminars and service opportunities
Build your professional skill set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a first-year history skills seminar Stop by the Writing Centre for editorial guidance on essay assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for the Problem-Based Learning Fellowship Programme Consider adding a certificate in another field, such as business, marketing, or computer science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address professional skill and experience gaps with Career Services workshops and Career Readiness seminars If considering a postgraduate degree, take a scholarship-proposal writing workshop
Prepare for life after graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend a Campus-to-Career orientation session at Career Services and fill out a career interest form Speak with Career Services about on-campus and summer job opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with Career Services about internship opportunities Attend the 'Careers in History' alumni speaker series organised by the department Attend a Career Fair to explore postgraduation opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine your resume and interviewing skills during an appointment with Career Services Attend an alumni networking event Build your LinkedIn profile

Year-by-year path through curricular and co-curricular options

Focus on experiential learning, community-engaged learning

Career-awareness from first year

Career ideas in diverse fields

Four Elements of Effective Experiential Course Maps

- Logical sequencing of opportunities across the duration of a course
- Overarching institution-specific themes embedded across the student experience
- Detailed guidance and resources from academic, cocurricular, and support services
- Career outcomes information for linking course experiences with postgraduation opportunities

1) Adapted from Queen’s University in Canada’s major maps

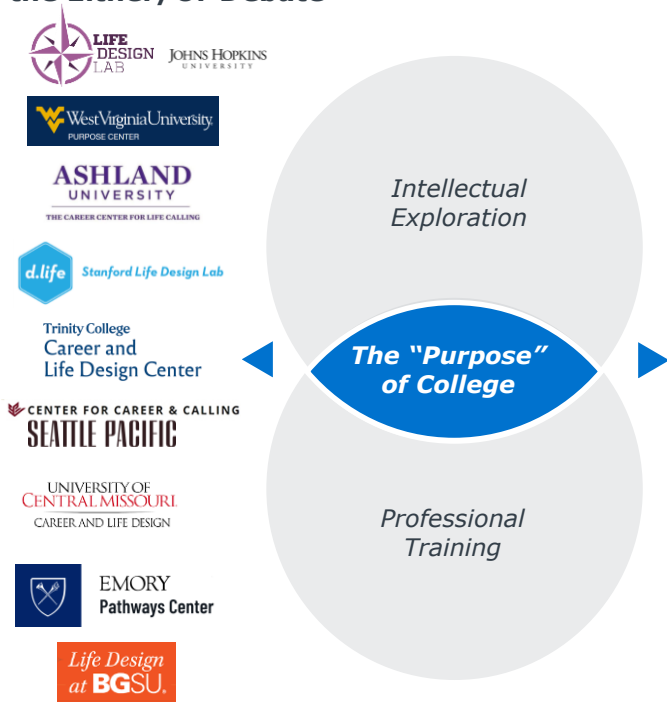
Source: EAB interviews and analysis

Adapting to Gen Z’s Focus on Career and “Life Success”

The Rise of “Calling” Centres to Address Both Intellectual and Career Exploration

As experiential learning has become table stakes, the discourse has now shifted to how pronounced these industry experiences will be in a student’s academic career. The either/or debate surrounding career development is dominated by two schools of thought around the primary goal of higher ed: intellectual exploration or professional training. As more institutions search for a middle ground, concepts like “calling” and “life design” centres are emerging from the debate. The goal is to integrate the models, structures, organisations, and services that help balance intellectual and career experiences throughout the student life cycle.

Rebranded Career Centers Emerge from the Either/Or Debate



"Calling" Centres Emphasise Career Development in Early Years

- ✓ **First-year, life design courses** help students align academics and career interests with values
- ✓ **Life design coaches** personalise interests of first- and second-year students into multiple career paths
- ✓ **Career action plans** are built to map academic and career development activities to ensure career readiness



Name-only changes with minor modifications **confuse and** potentially **alienate**, limiting use and impact of career services

Investing in Career Differentiators to Stand Out

Moving Beyond Status Quo Offerings for Transformative Career Commitments

To really stand out, institutions also need to articulate and invest in competitive advantages in the career space that go far beyond an array of experiential learning options and on-the-job experiences.

While internship stipends and employer project simulations can signal a commitment to job and economic mobility, it's a drop in the bucket if university leaders don't scale these commitments and embed them into broader institutional strategy. To do that, leaders must identify and build out career development "differentiators" that are distinctive to their institution. These initiatives must not only be accessible to all students but also be clearly articulated and attractive to prospective students and their families.

Differentiators to Demonstrate Your Commitment to Career

Status Quo	Get in the Game	Transformational Efforts
<u>Uneven Access to Experiential Learning (EL)</u> : Some, but not all, subjects offer EL and students must seek them out.	<u>Guaranteed Internship Funding</u> : Compensate students for their EL opportunities in industry.	<u>Trade-In for Credential</u> : Offer free graduate certificates to unemployed alumni.
<u>Career Services for Alumni</u> : Graduates can access job boards and career workshops after graduation.	<u>Last-Mile Support</u> : Coach unemployed alumni into well-paying job opportunities.	<u>Master's or Loan Pay</u> : Offer loan payments or free graduate degrees for unemployed graduates.

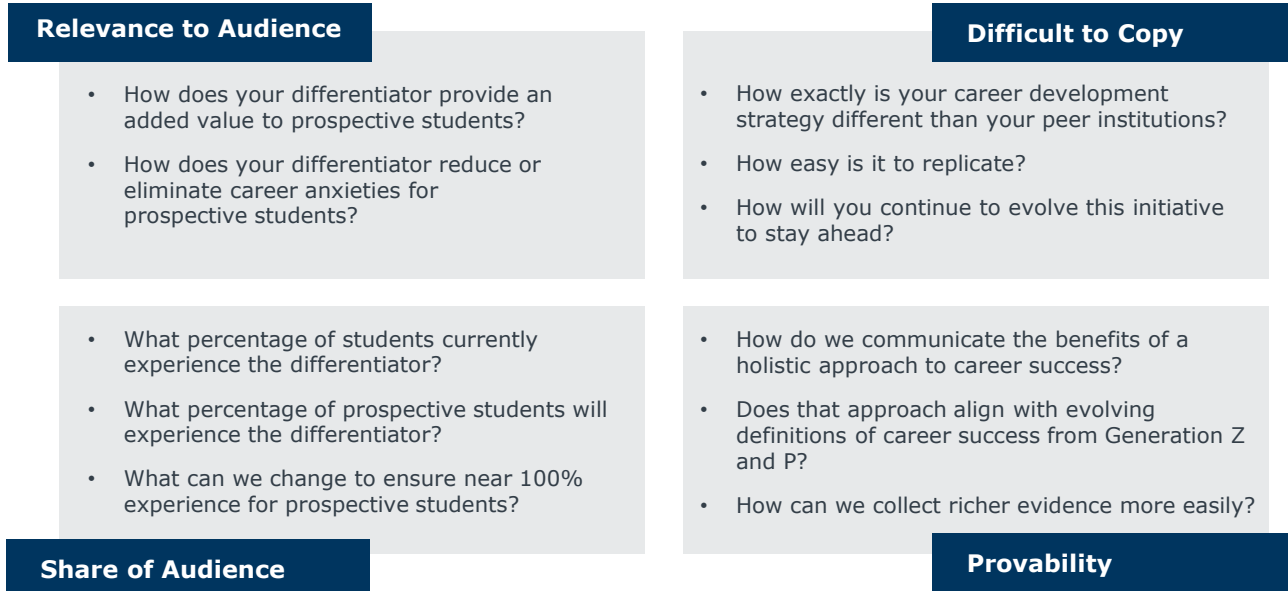
Central Queensland University's "Trade-In" Option Helps Alumni Find Work in Industry



Future-Proofing Your Career Value Proposition

Regularly Stress Test Differentiators to Ensure Your Institution is Distinctive

To do this exercise effectively, university leaders must pressure test their career development differentiators and critically assess how they share, market, and communicate these commitments with prospective students and their families.



This can't be a one-off exercise. Leaders must stress test their differentiators and analyse data on a periodic basis to identify trends and redesign services to better meet the career goals of prospective students. Only then will higher ed demonstrate its value and standout amongst the alternative pathways to career.

Helping Gen Z Succeed in the Workplace Transition

Overlooking HE's Role in Enhancing Mental Health and Career Wellness

The transition from higher ed to the workforce has long been recognised as a high-stress period for students. A new Handshake survey reports that 80% of recent graduates experienced burnout throughout the university, and most expect those feelings to carry over into their careers. What's more, the volatile state of today's economy only makes it worse.

As the class of 2023 entered their final year, early projections showed that employers were planning on hiring more new graduates than the previous class. However, by spring graduation, employers' hiring plans cooled and job openings contracted, causing graduating students considerable stress and anxiety, which can spill over into the workforce and ultimately impact job satisfaction.

The competition for job openings globally is increasing, in the UK there was a 36% increase in the number of applications per applicant before landing a job, and in New Zealand, applications for job openings increased by 11% in 2023. Unfortunately, universities often overlook the connection between mental health and career success, missing critical opportunities to improve long-term outcomes for students. As part of their student success initiatives, universities must play a bigger role here, especially since career decision-making is among the top stressors for the current generation of students.



HE Often Overlooks Mental Health Connections
Two Failure Paths

- 1** Failing to extend **resilience-building** programmes across the student lifecycle

▼

Deters students from completing career specific milestones
- 2** Overlooking **student agency** in reducing anxiety and fostering preparedness

▼

Inhibits students' ability to be proficient in human skills

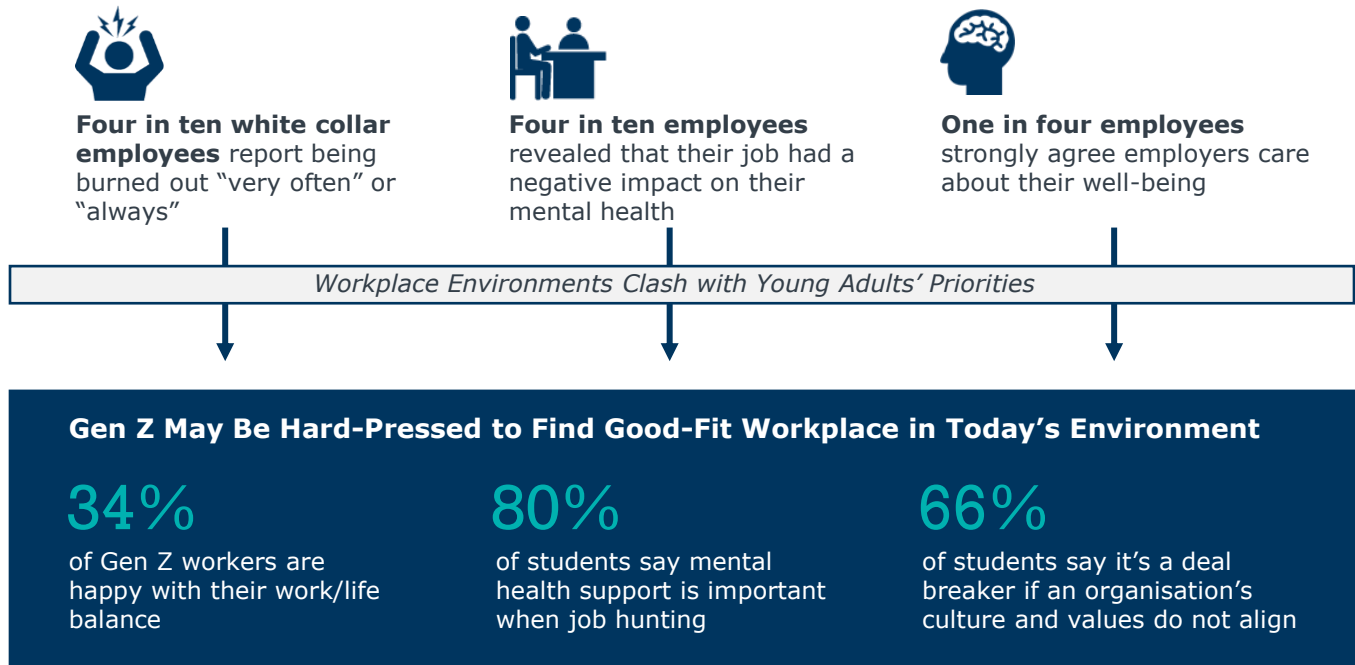
Where to Go from Here
<u>Just-In-Time Resilience Support</u> : Provide career exploration courses and resilience tips for students to ease anxieties.
<u>Career Confidence Bootcamps</u> : Build-in career workshops with alumni into the second-year experience for students to learn about career adversity and non-linear career pathways.
<u>Real-Time Responses to Evolving Needs</u> : Provide workshops on managing imposter syndrome, burnout, and stress for upper-level students.
<u>Self-Service Student Career Planning</u> : Facilitate autonomy for students by providing career decision-making action steps throughout the academic lifecycle.

Source: "The Class of 2024 sets their sights on the future", Handshake, August 2023. "Employers Expect Hiring to Be up 3.9%, but Lower than Fall Projections for Class of 2023," NACE, August 2023. "New Zealand jobs ads dip as applications per posting hit record high", HRD, 31 August 2023; ; "Some slack has returned to labor markets, but workers continue to hold power", LinkedIn, April 2023. EAB interviews and analysis.

Recent Grads Prioritise Well-Being in the Workplace

A Growing Expectations Gap between Employers and Gen Z

In a sharp contrast to earlier generations, today's graduates are actively seeking job opportunities that align with their values, one of which is prioritising mental health. While the pandemic shone a spotlight on mental health and well-being in the workplace, many employers haven't made significant long-term investments in this space. As a result, alumni are increasingly burnt out and dissatisfied. Until now, few HE leaders have viewed this expectations gap as their responsibility.



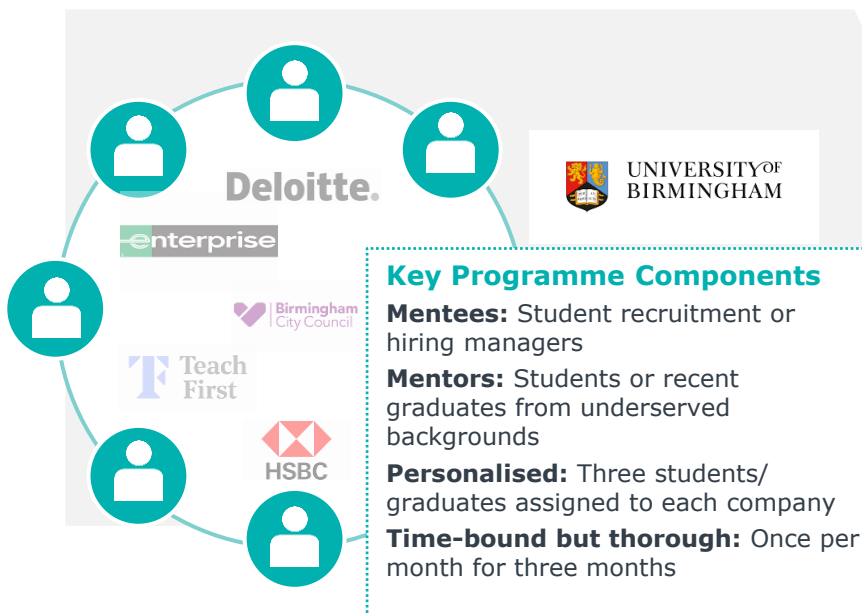
However, universities are in a unique position to influence workplace environments. While most institutions leverage employer partnerships for career fairs and internship or apprenticeship programmes, a handful of progressive institutions are going much further. These universities are working collaboratively with cohorts of local employers to build better workplaces, creating environments designed to foster well-being and success for their new graduates and alumni.

Collaborate with Employers to Build Inclusive Spaces...

...Where New Graduates Can Flourish

Employers are witnessing more attrition, particularly with employees from underserved backgrounds, than in years past. A recent report by Mine Share Partners indicates that LGBTQ+, Black, and Latinx workers, like Gen Z, are not only more likely to suffer from mental health symptoms than their peers but also leave roles because of it, making mental health an important EDI issue.

To combat this challenge, the University of Birmingham facilitates a 3-month reverse mentoring programme, engaging cohorts of employers to foster the development of inclusive workplaces. The programme involves students and recent graduates providing insights on employer-selected challenges (i.e., diversity and inclusion agendas, wider engagement and recruitment initiatives). It facilitates a more equal relationship between students and employees, thereby lessening the anxiety students face when approaching employers. Over 25 local and national employers have participated, and over 60% of students who were part of the programme have entered graduate-level jobs.



Companies bring a current challenge

- Engages underrepresented students in the process
- Students assigned to tackle the issue
- Students visit company offices to meet mentors and give recommendations



Establishes Recruitment Pipeline

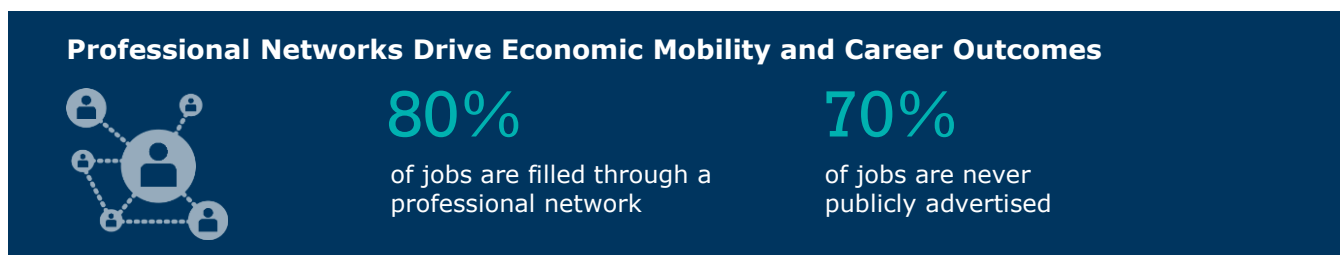
- New policies make workplaces more appealing to students
- Employers develop a strategy for recruiting diverse talent from University of Birmingham

Leaving Professional Networking to Chance

Current Opportunities and Programmes Rarely Focus on Building Social Capital

Social capital is typically defined as a network of social and professional contacts helping individuals navigate institutions. For students, this involves activating one’s network for internship and job opportunities as well as learning the written and unwritten rules of professional workplaces. Social capital is especially important given most jobs are filled through networks.

However, underserved students often lack an expansive list of contacts or – put simply – are network poor. Making matters worse, most university mentorship programmes and networking events leave professional connections up to chance. Underserved students often end up with random and haphazard interactions because of either poor matching criteria, misaligned goals, or unclear expectations.



Typical Efforts Focus on One-Off, Self-Motivated Experiences

Underserved students tour local industries and workplaces	✘	Jobs often in low-paying fields (e.g., amusement parks); interactions with employer do not extend beyond the tour
Institution forms BIPOC alumni-student networking group	✘	Programme growth stalls because of limited outreach to underserved students
Students invited to alumni networking events and dinners	✘	Students with work and family obligations can't attend; unclear expectations and next steps

Source: Jeffrey Ton, "Networking: It's Not What You Think," *Forbes*, 2023; D'Agostino, "Leveling the Playing Field for Social Capital," *Inside Higher Ed*, Susan. Aug. 4, 2022; EAB interviews and analysis.

Uncovering the Unwritten Rules with Alumni Help

Structured Professional Network Building Grows Social Capital

Rather than relying on networking programmes that place the burden on individual students, institutions must adopt a more structured approach to facilitate meaningful interactions and relationships with relevant professionals and industry gatekeepers. For many underserved students, industry exposure is limited to engagement with recruiters. However, university leaders must ensure these students have access to immersive industry experiences that include opportunities to work on projects on-site, connect with professionals in their field, and build valuable social capital.

University of Edinburgh's Insights Programme takes the industry tour to the next level. Rather than a one- or two-day event, Edinburgh hosts a five-day 'local' experience touring alumni workplaces in central Scotland and a week-long 'global insights' programme for students to visit alumni in major cities around the globe. These trips are fully funded for underserved student populations. In addition to the tours and networking experiences, the Insights Programme includes onsite projects to help students develop relevant industry skills.



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Local Insights

2-5 day experience in central Scotland, with small groups of students visiting alumni in key sectors



Global Insights

Full week of experiences in key cities across the world, with small groups of students visiting alumni in global business locations

Targeting Underrepresented Students

Partnership with "Widening Participation¹" team, international office, and career services ensures a cost-free experience for diverse students

Expose Students to Workplace Norms and Networks

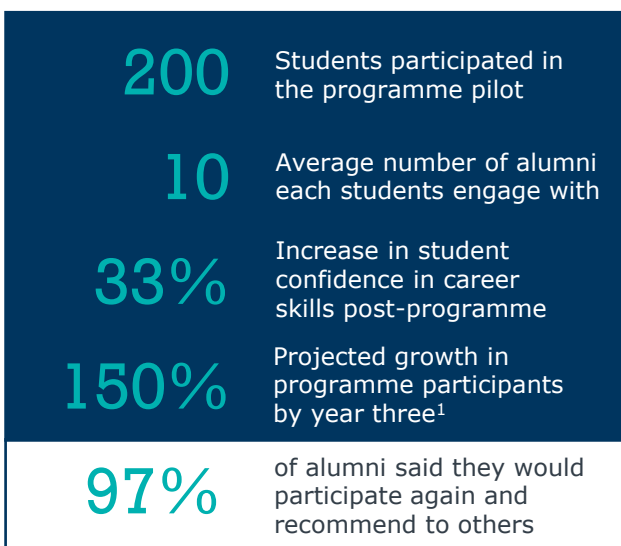
- ✓ Provides **career and workplace exploration** for students with limited networks
- ✓ Offers **experiential learning** through short-term projects to develop career competencies
- ✓ Builds **career confidence** and the know-how to engage industry professionals

A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

In-Field Experiences Yield Significant Returns for Students and Alumni

University of Edinburgh students who participate in the Insights Programme gain industry expertise and professional relationships leading to increased confidence in their career journey. Even though Insights Programme began less than five years ago, Edinburgh has seen exponential growth in participation. And it's not just students who are enthusiastic about the offering, alumni get just as much out of the experience. After imparting industry knowledge and easing career anxieties, alumni are happy to not only continue their involvement in the Insights Programme but also recommend it to their network.

Edinburgh's Work-Based Learning Programme Delivers High Impact Results



— “ —

“I learned about the worries students had about climbing the career ladder and the impact that their choice of study programme might have on their career direction and future prospects.

Allaying those fears, on the basis of my own experience, was a reward in itself.”

Alumnus, Insights Programme



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— ” —

1) Statistic based on data from 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

Conclusion

University Leaders Can't Afford to Be Complacent with Career Development

To date, career development has been countercyclical with attention and investment from HE leaders surging during times of economic downturns and dwindling when the job market stabilises. Despite growing student dissatisfaction and questions around ROI, the core set of career development services, such as resume writing and career fairs, remains the same.

Increasingly, university leaders must reckon with the fact that career services and HE fail to consistently address Generation Z's primary concern: thriving in career and life. In today's climate, the expectation of prospective students is higher than ever before. Failing to evolve from the traditional suite of career services puts an institution's enrolment strategy, student success goals, and alumni engagement initiatives at risk.



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Real-world applications in coursework enhance student engagement



Mental Health

Career development prepares students to thrive post-graduation



Alumni Engagement

Good experiences with career services promote engagement and giving

As a result, university leaders can't afford to be complacent in addressing concerns around career development and student outcomes.

To help institutions tangibly address the priorities of Generation Z, EAB research highlights how university leaders must tackle critical dimensions of career development (1) provide industry-focused education, (2) articulate a clear career payoff to prospective students, (3) prepare students to thrive across the university-to-career journey, and (4) build social capital to level the playing field for underserved students.

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At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.