Where have all the graduates gone?

Achieving Industry Best Practice
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Chair’s notes

Speakers:

- **Keith Bartlett** (Chair)
  Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Media, Norwich University of the Arts
- **Prof. William Latham**
  Co-Director of MSc Computer Games and Entertainment Course, Goldsmiths University of London
- **Dr Kion Ahadi**
  Head of Research and Evaluation, Creative Skillset

Prof. Latham’s case-study of the MSc Computer Games and Entertainment course and group discussion:

- There is a key focus on addressing students’ need to gain employment at the end of course.
- Links to commercial research projects within the course and linking students’ work to current research in the industry
- Computer games hacks and student-led short projects support preparation for going into industry.
- The course focuses on industry as much as possible.
- Social media is a key driver in recruiting and then tracking students/graduate destinations.
- Social media connectivity is a key factor. Even before they start the course, students are engaging with the course Facebook page, it is also actively used by current students and alumni. High activity on Facebook from lecturers as well as students increases interactivity.
- LinkedIn is seen as more appropriate for professional networking after students have graduated.
LinkedIn represents added value for graduates as they are able to connect with lecturers and gain access to their contacts – this is becoming an increasingly important way to monitor alumni activity.

Graduates also have a profile on the main Goldsmiths website which gives them an incentive to keep their profiles up to date and keep in touch once they have finished the course. This includes biographies capturing what former students have been doing since completing their course.

Having this dedicated space for alumni as part of the university website allows them the autonomy to create their own content about their stories, as well as a platform to support their professional profile.

The course team needs to be able to update the content of the course web pages on the university website. This is key to attracting new students because - if they like what they see, they are more likely to apply.

The course does not yet use Twitter, although students and University marketing/press office do.

**Group discussion:**

- A key challenge with social media is that a lot of time can be spent on updating the website, replying to Facebook etc. from the course's side – but once the framework is there, it is more about editorial activity and therefore less time intensive.
- Alumni access needs to be easier and more attractive - sense of value in keeping in contact after graduation needs to be instilled in students to maintain that link.
- Issues regarding social media – e.g. students may complain if they don’t receive feedback immediately; social media etiquette and activity can often be at odds with the formal academic record of University. Student expectations about social media need to be managed; e.g. regarding the turnaround time for assessment and feedback.
- Some courses don’t use Facebook for interaction as such but more for postings and as an information source.
- Social media can be a good way of gathering anecdotal evidence regarding graduate destinations but this may not correlate with Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) evidence.
- Code of conduct could be developed around social media etiquette to avoid problems or issues. For example, an induction could be given at the beginning of the course regarding online profiles, how this relates to their professional image in the industry, etc.
- LinkedIn records data from several years back and so can be used as a good source of data tracking. Students should be encouraged to use LinkedIn actively by the course for professional purposes.
- Does cohort size affect social media contact of students/alumni. The answer is no for some courses; e.g. up to 100 students per group appears to be manageable for some course leaders.
• Could Facebook be too intimate and not appropriate for tracking graduates? General feeling was yes and that LinkedIn is preferable. Facebook should only be used for posting information rather than professional networking.
• Should each university compile a set of protocols for the use of social media in graduate tracking? Some might already have these in place. Such protocols could complement other university policies, e.g. IT acceptable use.
• Each university will decide which social media it uses. Use LinkedIn (and/or others) as a key component in the entire student life cycle (applicant, student, graduate) and as a mechanism/site for teaching and learning.

Dr Kion Ahadi’s presentation on Evaluation Strategy and group discussion:

• Consideration of number of years for which data on student progression should be collected. It is recognised that it takes time to establish patterns and also that there are particular challenges for new courses which will only be able to draw on data from one year in the first instance.
• Levels of meaningful data around graduate destinations - can be hit or miss over a long period of time, how can this be channelled into a framework?
• Should lobbying be carried out for the creative sectors in terms of the work DLHE delivers?
• Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes feed into official data but occupations in the creative industries change rapidly and these codes often don’t reflect the landscape correctly or take the economic climate into consideration, etc.
• Data that universities collect needs to be systematic over a period of time to be really meaningful with regard to graduate destinations.
• Official data sources (e.g. DLHE) are sometimes the only ones that are available but they form only part of the wider picture and therefore there is a need to look at a wider spectrum for gathering data.
• Can this type of data be used as a diagnostic tool around issues such as diversity and widening participation?
• National viewpoint on diversity would help in terms of diagnosis of issues and to support on-going tracking of activity post-graduation.
• How do you frame the information so that it is meaningful? How do you ensure that institutions see the value of being involved in this capturing of information and ensuring that the overall resulting narrative is comprehensive and meaningful?
• The current vision for the strategy is very employer focussed and also needs to be HE focussed in order to engage the range of audiences which Creative Skillset needs to reach.
• Importance placed on ability to have a direct relationship with students and allow them to see the value of providing their destinations post-graduation.
• Creative Skillset could set a benchmark for the creative industries to illustrate the complexity of the employment landscape. Creative Skillset could provide a narrative around this to support and contextualise the gathering of graduate destination data.
• Need to recognise that there is different but equal value in tracking graduate data from both new courses and long-running courses. However it takes at least three years for the most useful industry-specific graduate destinations data to become available.
• Universities which have both Creative Skillset accredited and non-accredited courses need to adopt a consistent approach – i.e. track graduate data in the same way for all courses in the creative disciplines.
• Creating positive messages about the benefits of courses with the Creative Skillset Tick is an important step in attracting prospective students to Ticked courses (suggestion that during accreditation visits, Creative Skillset could explore this with students?)
• Anecdotal evidence from courses suggests that awareness is growing and there is a view that, within institutions, courses that are not accredited are also benefiting from the positive association and enhanced institutional reputation brought by the Tick.
• Much of the value of the Tick derives from the rigorous accreditation process undertaken by courses and institutions.
• The Tick has encouraged universities to think more about the collection of graduate destination data.
• The majority of users on the Pick the Tick Facebook page are in the 13-17 or 18-24 demographic, which demonstrates the reach the Tick campaign is having.
• Parents also make enquiries about the Tick, e.g. at open days.
• Applicants and students are increasingly focused on employability.
• Should there be a grading system in relation to graduate jobs, e.g. working for Microsoft versus call centre?
• Setting up alumni opportunities on a regional basis – for example Birmingham City University.
• Could Creative Skillset obtain student contact information for graduate tracking through the accreditation process? Could they collect graduate data and act as a hub for tracking students after they have left higher education?
• The amendment of course titles (but not content) should not hinder the recording of graduate destinations and their currency with regard to course accreditation.

Conclusions and recommendations (compiled by the Chair following the event)

• Tracking graduate destination data is important but creates numerous challenges for both established and newer courses. There are also different but equal benefits to be gained from tracking graduate data for both established and newer courses.
• Tracking graduate destination data is time-consuming. This should be recognised at course and institutional levels, with course staff working in partnership with alumni offices.
• Graduates from creative disciplines often take longer than others to establish their careers. Creative Skillset could lead on developing government’s
understanding of this, illustrating the complexity of the employment and freelance landscape, and contextualising the limitations of DLHE data.

- Institutions and courses should foreground to students the value and benefits of remaining in contact following graduation.
- Effective use of social media is key to effective graduate tracking and networking – indeed, for many courses and institutions; it is an essential component in the entire student life cycle. Prospective students are invited to join course Facebook groups before making applications; courses and institutions use social media as a crucial support for teaching and learning and, when students have graduated, to facilitate professional networking and the tracking of graduate destinations.
- Courses may need to develop protocols or codes of conduct for the use of social media in the following:
  - By students and graduates in professional networking, e.g. students may need induction into online profiles and how best to present a professional image.
  - By institutions/courses in graduate tracking
  These may complement other university policies, e.g. IT Acceptable Use
- The Creative Skillset Research and Evaluation Strategy is appropriately employer-focussed, but Higher Education, and the contributions which it COULD make to Creative Skillset’s research and which it DOES make to the workforce, are conspicuous by their absence.