University of Westminster Employability Strategy

2015 – 2020

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University of Westminster Employability Strategy

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Background & Context

The University of Westminster between 2010 -13 had an External Engagement Strategy. The KCG Internal Audit ‘Review of processes to support employability and graduate employability’ found this External Engagement Strategy had been so broad that there was “not strategy for Employability as such”. Equally Faculty Plans, whilst including employability, had “KPI’s at such a very high level that they did not support the faculty management of employability”.

In response to the audit the VC set up the Graduate Prospects Group to make recommendations to the University Executive Board on 16th July 2014. These were accepted and an ‘Employability Task Force’ set up to implement those recommendations as quickly as possible. The principal recommendation was for there to be in place a formal ‘University Employability Strategy’ in line with vision and mission for 2020.

Responsibility for the delivery of the Employability Strategy will lie across all areas of the University – Faculties, Corporate Services, Student Union, and programmes such as Learning Futures.

External Strategic Drivers

Awareness of the need for graduates to make an effective contribution to the labour market has been around for a long time. The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) highlighted the notion, as did the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, the Dearing Report (1997). These made explicit the importance of education for employability, and emphasised the value of core skills development and work experience in enhancing students’ potential for employment.

There have been a number of relatively recent national initiatives and policy documents highlighting crucial issues within HE that have brought these matters to the forefront, and have re-enforced the importance of the employability agenda for the University.

These include:

- The publication of the White Paper on ‘The Future of Higher Education’, which highlights the need for students to develop skills to meet the needs of employers.
- The recommendations of the Roberts Review and the Joint Research Council/AHRB generic skill requirements for all new Council funded research students.
- The changing criteria of employability performance indicators, especially the defining and subsequent weightings of graduate and non-graduate destinations that appear in university league tables;
- Increased numbers of students in HE are leading both to greater competition and a change in the nature of the graduate labour market where the distinctions between ‘graduate’ and ‘non-graduate’ jobs are becoming less and less clear cut.
- University league tables, which highlight the perceived success or failure of institutions and individual disciplines to lead to appropriate graduate employment destinations.
- Widening participation institutions needing to demonstrate that a concern for employability is an integral component of Widening Participation strategies. The experience of students who find themselves disadvantaged in the graduate labour market will, indisputably, have

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1 Kingston City Group Audit published 10th February 2014
the effect of discouraging others - particularly those from prospective applicants without a tradition of participation in Higher Education.

- Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) issued to graduates.
- BIS: Supporting Graduate Employability in Other Countries (2011) provides key recommendations and action points to ensure our global competitiveness in this area,
- Government requirements for universities to provide more detailed information for prospective students to use in order to enhance student choice brings a further focus on the destination of leavers from higher education (DLHE) information produced annually by all universities. This information forms a vital part of the Key Information Sets published by all HEIs since 2013.
University of Westminster – 2020 Vision, Mission & Employability

The University 2020 Vision:

“We aspire to be a practice focused university in the top half of HEI’s in the UK with some disciplines in the top 500 worldwide”

Employability is at the heart of the university vision. It underpins both ‘Learning Futures’ in all its strands (transforming learning and teaching, curriculum & assessment, Westminster distinctiveness and academic support) and is integral to our approach to Global Engagement.

2020 Mission, Key Indicators and Employability:

The 2020 Mission:

“To provide a vibrant global learning environment in the heart of London, inspiring the next generation of world citizens and helping shape a better future for all.”

- The University will contribute significantly to improving the employability of home students as engaged global citizens through the co-ordination of ‘outward student mobility’ in line with the new ‘UK Outward Mobility Strategy’ (Key Indicator 5).
- Through increasing the number of credit bearing placements as well as other extra-curricular work-based learning opportunities available to undergraduate the university will contribute to achieving an overall level of graduate employability of 70% by 2020 (Key Indicator 6).
- The Employability Strategy provides a framework to enable key stakeholders to make interventions to improve employability at key points in the student journey. Stakeholders will have clear and measurable goals. This oversight will improve both the overall level of graduate employability (Key Indicator 6) but will also assist in raising the satisfaction rating to 90% by 2020 (Key Indicator 7).

In terms of University of Westminster, this strategy seeks to:

- Respond to the progressive recommendations of the Wilson Review
- Improve the Student Experience Survey and National Student Survey scores by increasing options for student personal and professional development
- Raise Destination of Leavers from Higher Education scores on graduate employability and to target improvement for particular programmes
- Ensure all University of Westminster students graduate with the graduate attributes that enable them to be highly employable, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens
- Increase the number of UoW students involved in ‘Outward Mobility’ in line with the university Global Engagement Strategy to reach the UK recommended target.
- Attract more international students with demonstrable provision of support for specific programmes (e.g. MBA) and for international initiatives. See new QAA Consultation on Assuring Quality for International Students Studying in the UK.
- Contribute to the effective Implementation of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)
Assure university compliance with QAA Code B10 Managing higher education provision with others, which relates to work with employers and exchange partners which is credit bearing,
The University of Westminster Employability Strategy

The University of Westminster is committed to providing opportunities for its students to develop competencies, skills and attributes which will enhance their employability.

Over the next 5 years the University will:

- Build upon and extend relationships with industry and sector professional bodies;
- Establish the University as a leading institution for student employability in London – improving Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) year on year;
- Improve the overall quality of the student experience and graduate prospects though increased access to opportunities in the UK and abroad – to be reflected in improved league-table positions, particularly in the National Student Survey (NSS) results;
- Incorporate employability-related skills and competencies (including career management skills) across all academic disciplines - characterised as ‘Westminster Distinctiveness';
- Increase the range, availability and recognition of student placements, work based learning opportunities and volunteering of all types and durations;
- Establish and maintain high quality, co-ordinated links with leading global, national and local graduate recruiters and other opportunity providers (E.g. community organisations, charities, groups supporting entrepreneurs).

The University aims to achieve these objectives through:

- Involvement with ‘Professional Statutory Regulation Bodies (PSBR’s)’ for accreditation, approval and recognition of vocational courses;
- Entitlement to a range of opportunities for skills acquisition/personal development for students across all faculties and all levels of programme (E.g. Polylang/IT training);
- Presenting options and opportunities for curricular and extra-curricular work based and experiential learning at key stages in the student journey, making clear the relevance to the personal, academic and professional development of students.
- Recognition of achievement and progress through specific awards recorded on the student Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) and in other appropriate formats;
- Establishing organisational structures that enable the university to deliver, develop and support experiential learning across all faculties;
- Internationalising the Student Experience through access to a variety (type & duration) of exchange and outward mobility opportunities.

Our targets and milestones for 2020 are to:

- Achieve overall graduate employability of 70% (UK top 25% of HEI’s on this measure);
- Achieve overall student satisfaction of 90%;
- Support 2000 students to undertake an international experience;
- Embed ‘graduate attributes’ into the taught curriculum;
- Offer work-based learning/volunteer opportunities as an option for ALL students and recognise these through academic credit/HEAR/Open Badges.
Delivering the Employability Strategy

The University will work together to deliver the strategy and ensure that it is embedded and championed across the organisation.

This section identifies the principal goals for University stakeholders and programmes, projects and cross-cutting work streams that will contribute to the delivery of the strategy

University Stakeholders:

For the University:

- Ownership and monitoring of the effectiveness of the Employability Strategy by the Learning & Teaching Committee
- Ensuring that Corporate Services and Faculties assume responsibility for promoting, delivering and reporting back on the employability strategy
- Working towards recognising volunteering and work experience through assessment, accreditation or other forms of recording (Electives, HEAR 6.1 & Open Badges)
- Improving the routes and mechanisms for the sharing of identified good practice and for the dissemination of employment related skills and development opportunities.
- Incentivising and supporting students to participate in employability schemes (E.g. Travel bursaries for ‘Outward Mobility’).
- Providing academic staff with appropriate training and guidance on good practice.
- Establishing ‘Faculty Employability Task Forces’ bringing key staff together around SMART objectives and KPI’s.
- Bringing together key information on the web for both students and staff.
- Sustaining and improving links with international institutions who offer overseas employment or placement opportunities to our students.

For Faculties:

- Embedding in the curriculum skills and competencies that support students’ employability and global engagement, and promoting opportunities for work experience, placement or volunteering activities
- Engaging with employers, community organisations and institutions at home and abroad to support and enhance curriculum design and delivery, and provide opportunities for lectures, study visits, field work, volunteering, work-experience and placement activity.
- Promoting engagement of staff and students with the Career Development Centre to raise awareness of the opportunities for extra-curricular learning and skills acquisition as well as advice on job-seeking skills and accessing graduate job market.

For the Graduate School:

- Continue to deliver and enhance specific careers skills development as part of our Doctoral Researcher Development Programme (DRDP) which is based on the national Researcher Development Framework.
- Working with Faculties and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Knowledge Exchange to develop and implement an Early Career Researcher strategy within the University.
Embedding employability within our Graduate School Events programme to provide opportunities for networking, presenting and developing research career skills; both with internal and external partners.

**For the Careers Development Centre**

- Managing ‘Placement & Volunteering’ through faculty embedded staff
- Ensuring that placements and volunteering is monitored and recorded appropriately (E.g. on the HEAR and recognition in other formats such as Open Badges)
- Providing advice on ‘career-searching’ skills, and specific targeted ‘job-seeking’ skills
- Working with academics to embed career management skills in the curriculum
- Enhancing the provision and promotion of help available to international students through the Career Development Centre
- Developing a broader network of local SMEs and national employers who can offer placements and future graduate employment.
- Developing further the Westminster Distinctiveness Awards.

**For Polylang**

- Encouraging uptake of foreign language learning as a part of the mainstream curriculum or for extra academic credit.
- Offering students foreign language courses in order to develop their linguistic competence for the professional world and their intercultural awareness.
- Supporting the University’s aim to encourage students’ mobility abroad.
- Offering, as part of the summer school, the possibility for students to take an intensive language module bringing home and international students together to develop their linguistic competence, build transferable skills and share cultural perspectives.
- Strengthening students’ competence in English both for disciplinary study and for the world of work.

**For Alumni Office**

- Increase the number of tangible employment opportunities offered by alumni to current students, be it through work experience, paid internships or employment
- Establish new alumni initiatives such as niche mentoring schemes, department-specific alumni lectures, and alumni/student networking events, within each of the Faculties
- Establish a network of international alumni volunteers who can support employment prospects for current students and graduates from/ in the region
- Increase the number of alumni involved in recruitment and conversion activities, in order to attract and secure new students to the University, and to provide ongoing advice, insight and support to current student experience.
- Grow the number of alumni careers profiles and testimonies on the website, to improve students’ access to alumni advise and support
- Promote the regular and compliant exchange of alumni data between academic colleagues and the Alumni Office, to ensure the central alumni database is an accurate and useful resource for all
For University of Westminster Students Union

- Directly employing students therefore helping them develop transferable skills, gain qualifications and build their self-confidence
- Facilitating the election of students to serve in representative volunteer positions of responsibility (course and school reps, part-time officers, committee members and student committee members) where they develop transferable skills and build their self-confidence
- Offering a wide range of student activities, including clubs, societies, student media and volunteering through which students develop transferable skills, build their bank of life experiences and develop self-confidence
- Helping students understand, reflect upon and capture how they have increased their employability in all these activities.
- Complementary working with the Career Development Centre on volunteering (A ‘Compact Agreement’).

Cross Cutting Work Streams & Projects:

Outward Mobility

- Managing and monitoring exchanges through a partnership of Faculties, Registries, and the Education Abroad Team appropriately resourced
- Increasing year-on-year the number of UoW students involved in ‘Outward Mobility’ in line with the university Global Engagement Strategy to reach the UK recommended target.
- Encouraging students to participate in foreign exchanges, volunteering and work experience abroad through the establishing of travel bursaries administered through the Scholarships and Funding Office
- Increase opportunities for international experience outside as well as within Europe for short term and longer term experiences.

Enterprise & Innovation

- Setting up of an Enterprise Board with links back into faculties to lead strategically on student enterprise and innovation. This would link into the Academic Enterprise Board
- Enhance student creativity and innovation through the delivery of student enterprise events, opportunities, competitions and workshops
- Linking with national and local organisations to support student enterprise (E.g. NACUE, NCEE)
- Offering students support and facilities to develop self-employment, and business start-up and development skills.
- Increasing the numbers of International Students endorsed for a Tier 1 Visa

Learning Futures

- Define and articulate five graduate attributes which enable Westminster graduates to thrive in their personal and professional lives as highly employable, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens
- Embed the graduate attributes in the learning outcomes across the undergraduate curriculum
o Offer open and mobile forms of recognition of achievement of the attributes through extra-curricular activities, such as Westminster Distinctiveness Awards (to be recognised through the HEA) and Open Badges

o Establish an initial catalogue of cross-Faculty electives that enhance interdisciplinary learning, and learning through work placements, volunteering and international experience, supporting and recognising students’ entrepreneurialism, environmental and social awareness and global outlook

o Provide more opportunities to earn credit for work placements, internships and study abroad activities

o Provide more opportunities for students to be co-creators in learning, teaching and resource

o Provide students with excellent and accessible academic support that meets their needs throughout the ‘student journey’ and enables them to achieve their full potential at University and afterwards, as lifelong learners

o Provide support and guidance for staff delivering academic support, including personal tutors
Governance, Implementation and Outcomes

The strategy will be supported by the Employability Task Force whose membership will include ‘stakeholder’ representatives from Faculties and Corporate Services. This will task force will report into the Learning Teaching Committee.

‘Employability & Outward Mobility’ groups will be established in faculties.

The ‘Employability Task Force’ will construct and monitor an annual action/implementation plan with clear accountabilities, goals and timelines. It will report into the Learning & Teaching Committee as a standing item agenda and produce an ‘Annual Employability Monitoring Report’ in June in each year.

Measures of success will be identified in the implementation plan and will be the subject of monitoring and annual report.

David Shacklady
9th September 2015