



WEBINAR: LIFELONG GUIDANCE AND EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION¹

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HIGHLIGHTS

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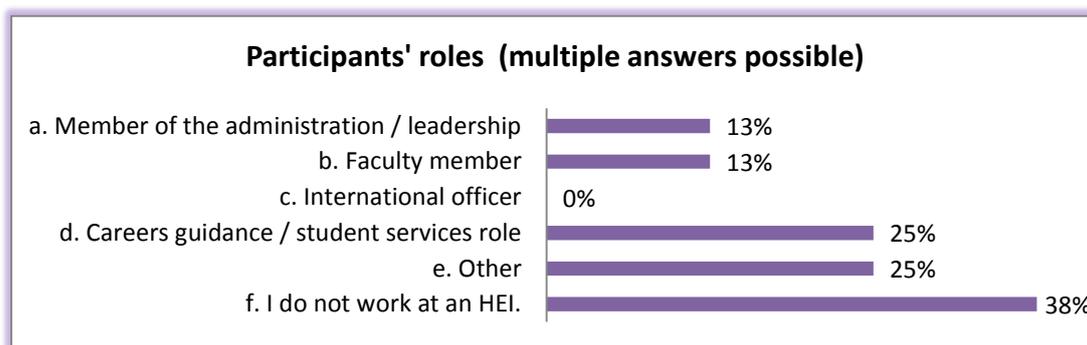
Background

Recent OECD and EU policy documents in both the education and employment sectors highlight the importance of aligning the skills supply with labour market demand. Higher Education has a critical role within this broader aim in supplying high-level skills. However, the transition between higher education and employment is often challenging and many countries have concerns about the increasing numbers of graduates are unemployed or underemployed.

The graduate labour market is strongly influenced by issues of both supply (how many graduates are produced and in what subjects) and demand (how many jobs are available and in what sectors). However, it is also possible in many countries to observe the under-utilisation of skills and the emergence of protracted transitions in which it takes graduates a number of years to become established in the labour market. These issues suggest that it is important to pay some attention to the process of transition and to consider what can be done to better align skills supply and demand.

Before the webinar presentation, participants were polled² regarding their roles at their home institutions. Around a quarter of participants work in careers guidance or student services. Others were members of the administration or faculty members. Some were non-academic staff. A number of participants did not work at an HEI.

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1. Note: This paper is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.
 2. Some participants did not respond to some of the polls. The charts in this document reflect only the answers received.



In some countries (perhaps most clearly in the UK), the issue of graduate employability has become both a policy issue with higher education institutions being tasked by governments to ensure that their students find work (see, for example, BIS, 2011). It has also become a factor in students' decision making about which higher education institution to attend. Some governments have sought to encourage potential students to view employability in this way and have developed a range of tools to frame and facilitate this kind of market behaviour (see, for example, Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2012 and Hooley, Mellors-Bourne and Sutton, 2013).

However, the privileging of employability as an outcome for higher education has also been criticised, with some writers arguing that it ignores issues of social class, gender, ethnicity, age and disability through the creation of an imaginary level playing field (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006 and Morley, 2001).

The tradition of lifelong guidance in higher education in some countries (notably the UK and the USA) has been closely bound up with the needs and interests of large graduate recruiters, who have utilised higher education careers services as a key channel through which to access potential applicants for graduate schemes. Many higher education careers services retain strong links to such employers, although increasingly their activities have broadened to cover a broader range of destinations, as well as supporting the acquisition of career management and employability skills.

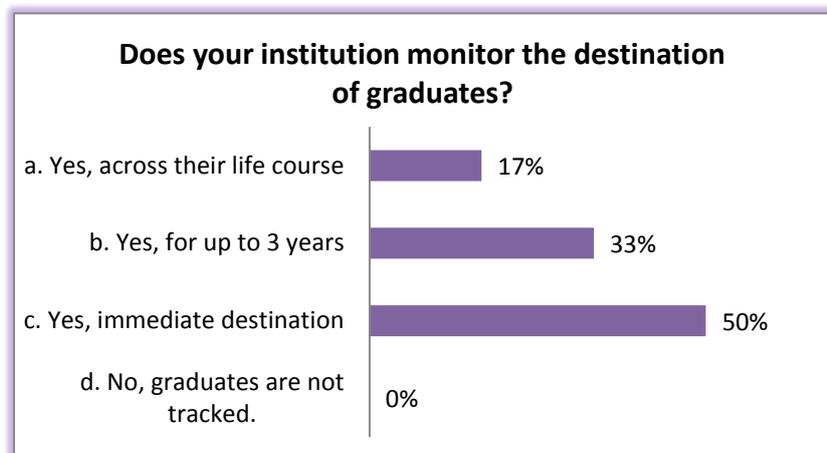
It is possible to define "employability" in a number of ways. Within the practice of higher education teaching and learning it has often been defined as a range of skills and learning outcomes that equip students for making the transition to the labour market and succeeding within it. However, a more concrete definition is offered simply by measuring the level of employment and/or the level of "graduate employment" (Elias and Purcell, 2013). Watts (2006) has argued that it is also important to examine these issues over the long term and to seek to develop approaches to career and employability learning in higher education that influence not just immediate employments, but also sustainable employability or individual's capacity to build and sustain successful careers. This leaves us with three main definitions:

- Employability as skill
- Employability as immediate outcome
- Employability as a lifelong attribute and outcome

The concern with employability asks questions about what it is possible for higher education institutions to achieve in this area. What changes can be made to the practice of higher education that are capable of influencing the employability of graduates? Clearly there are a range of issues about programme mix, mode of study and curriculum that could potentially influence this.

Participants were asked if their institutions monitor the destination of their graduates. Of those who work at an HEI or know of the practices at HEIs in their countries, no one answered that graduates' destinations are not

tracked. Half of the participants reported that graduates' immediate destinations are tracked while others monitor for up to 3 years or (a few) for their life course after graduation.

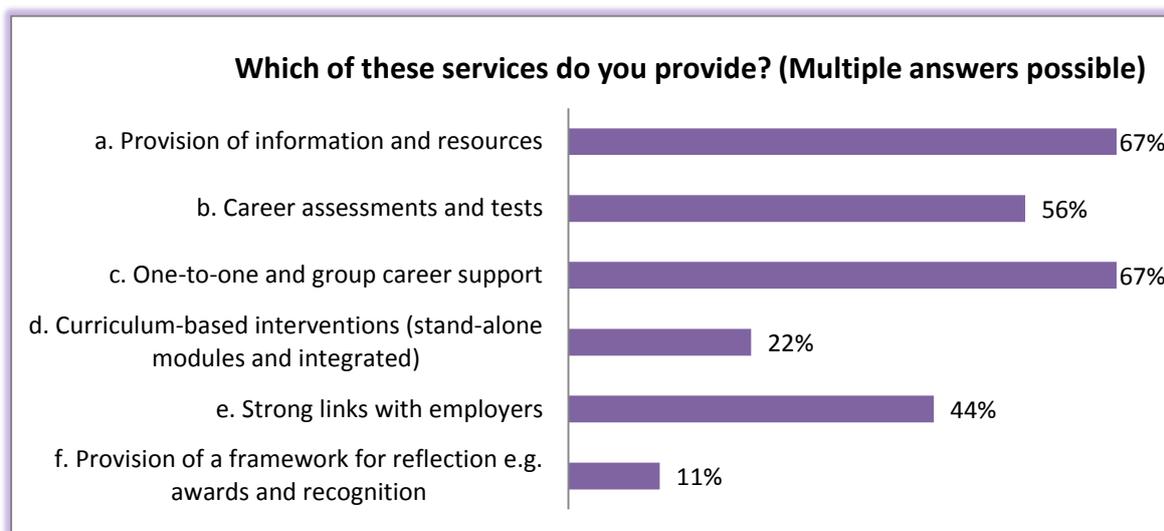


Lifelong guidance

Lifelong guidance in this context refers to a range of activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to: identify their capacities, competences and interests; make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and or used. Lifelong guidance is provided in a range of settings: education, training, employment, community, and private. The services may be on an individual or group basis; they may be face-to-face or at a distance (including helplines and web-based services). They include career information (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education and career management programmes, taster programmes, work search programmes, and transition services.

According to Watts (2009) lifelong guidance services act as a bridge between HE programmes and the world of work, by empowering students as active agents in their own transition. Lifelong guidance is not about a crude matching or placement approach, but rather about providing students with an opportunity to get acquainted with different career possibilities. The role of guidance is to ensure that students are well-informed in terms of labour market needs and to support them to operationalise their aspirations. This means that services need to be supported by high-quality information on current options and skill needs.

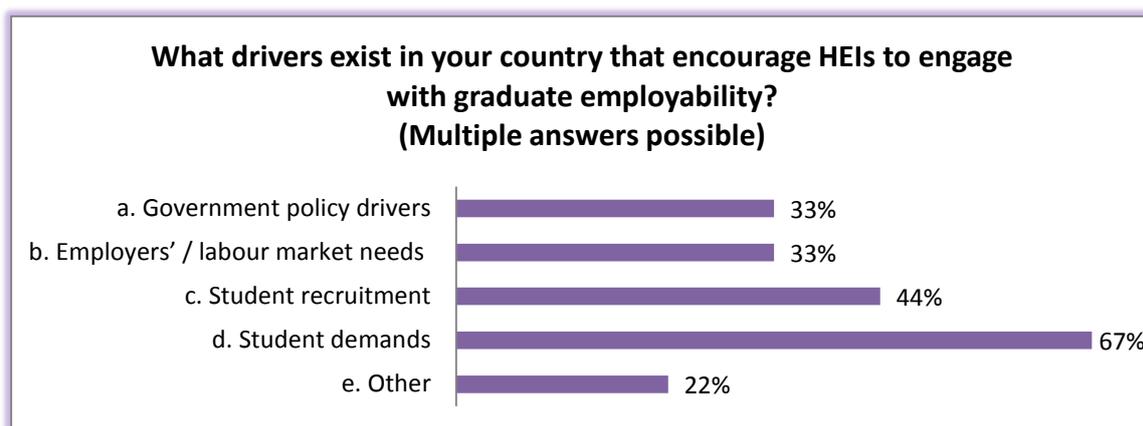
Participants were asked about types of lifelong guidance services they provide for students. The most frequently provided services are provision of information and resources, one-to-one or group career support, and career assessments and tests. Several participants reported providing strong links with employers and curriculum-based interventions and some provide a framework for reflection, such as awards and recognition.



The evidence base on lifelong guidance in higher education

Career guidance has a strong tradition in higher education within some countries, though less so in others. Higher education careers provision is often delivered by a careers service inside the institution, subsumed within the institution's general running costs, although there are other ways to resource such services, through public employment services or students' unions, for example. A summary of guidance across Europe is given by Katzensteiner, Ferrer-Sama and Rott (2007), including country reports and some analytical summaries of provision.

Among the webinar participants, a number of drivers exist that encourage HEIs to engage with graduate employability, including: student demands, student recruitment, government policy drivers, employers' needs, etc.



Cullen (2013) used a mixed-methods approach to review guidance across a range of European countries and made a series of proposals for best practice. The review was particularly interested in exploring how guidance could support non-traditional students to engage in higher education and make successful transitions to the labour market. The review found a high demand for guidance services. OECD (2004, pp. 52-54) also highlights the range of different approaches that are taken with respect to higher education career guidance across

OECD countries (which it describes as counselling services, integrated student services, placement services and specialised careers services).

Evidence on the impacts of higher education career services is still emergent. A recent study in Latvia highlights the need for the further development of guidance services in higher education (Jaunzeme, 2011). It argues that the development of robust monitoring and evaluation is essential for the further development of the sector and proposes a series of performance indicators to support this.

Other research suggests that work experience, work-based learning and employer involvement in higher education impact on graduate employability (Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009). Guidance can have a strong relationship with work experience, preparing students for placements, and supporting them to reflect on what they have learnt and to operationalise their career learning; though this is not always the case (Taylor and Hooley, 2014).

Further research explores the direct impact of guidance on higher education students. A study in the USA found that both career counselling and career courses could have positive impacts on higher education students (McClair, 2010). The study of 269 students participating in guidance activities identified impacts on career thinking and effective decision-making. The overwhelming majority of participants were also able to identify at least one change that they had made over the semester in reference to their career, including declaring a major, applying to a job or internship, or deciding on a career.

Research on higher education has tended to emphasise the following features of effective career guidance:

- pre-entry provision, including a range of different services that are provided to individuals before they enrol at the institution
- provision of information and resources, including careers libraries and websites, vacancy information and broader kinds of labour market information
- career assessments and tests, including psychometrics, personality tests, interest inventories and other kinds of career assessment
- one-to-one advice, coaching and counselling services, including approaches delivered through a range of media including face-to-face, phone and online
- one-to-many/group interventions, including workshops, webinars and group counselling interventions
- curriculum-based interventions, including both stand-alone careers/employability modules and interventions which align with the existing subject-based curriculum
- provision of employer engagement opportunities, including careers fairs and employer talks and workshops
- provision of work-related and work-based learning, including placements and voluntary work
- provision of a framework for reflection, including e-portfolios, personal development planning (PDP) processes and other interventions designed to support reflection
- awards and other mechanisms to recognise and accredit experiences related to the development of career management skills
- graduate and alumni services, including a range of services provided to individuals following their graduation from the institution.

Conclusion

In the webinar we discussed the role of lifelong guidance with respect to higher education. The graphs above reflect responses webinar participants gave to a series of polling questions throughout the session. A recording of the full webinar is available for IMHE members interested in further insights on the evidence base and potential ways lifelong guidance can intersect with the higher education curriculum.

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