



autumn 2012

# gmt

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Information, debate and research into higher  
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## Note from the editor



Autumn marks a time of change, leaves are turning red and yellow, the nights are getting longer and the cold chill of winter is fast approaching. Changes aren't uncommon in higher education these days but this autumn marks the beginning of a new era. Many will have mixed feelings about this academic year, with new student finance arrangements and every institution gearing up to reveal all via Key Information Sets (KIS).

It's at a time of change when information is most important to help ease the transition. Summer GMT featured an article which revealed what lies beneath the KIS. This issue puts the KIS in the spotlight to inform readers about what it is, how it came about and how it is going to impact upon the HE sector. We begin with an interview featuring Professor Janet Beer, Chair of the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group and Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University. Liam Owens, Head of Recruitment at Edge Hill University, explores the use of the KIS and Professor Geoff Layer, Vice Chancellor of the University of Wolverhampton comments on the KIS from an institutional perspective.

Providing students with information to make an informed decision is not a new concept and nor is

research into how students make decisions, what information they use to do so and who influences them. When it comes to the student decision-making process, Dr Yvonne Moogan is an expert. Her article gives insight into her research about decision-making and provides valuable context with which the effectiveness of the KIS could be evaluated.

Dr Zachary Hickman introduces a partnership project, to embed work based projects into taught postgraduate programmes. We also include 'The Employment Review' from *What Do Graduates Do?* to show how 2010/11 graduates fared in the 2012 labour market and finally, we feature an article about the innovative project, Higher Education Degree Datacheck (HEDD).

I hope you enjoy the autumn edition of GMT.

Kindest regards,

Jennifer Redman

# News In brief

## HECSU new releases

We have had a very busy summer at HECSU working on a number of projects. Here are some of the new resources available (September/October):

- *What Do Graduates Do? 2012*. Released on the 11th October, this annual review brings you the destinations of graduates from 2010/11, six months after graduation. With new and improved graphs displaying the data and new articles on regional graduate employment and graduates in further study. To download as a pdf or copies to purchase go to: [www.hecsu.ac.uk](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk)
- *Career Support for career developers: Literature review*. This HECSU review synthesises careers guidance and organisational literature to identify how universities can meet the careers and employability needs of part-time students in employment ('career-developers').  
[www.hecsu.ac.uk/publications\\_and\\_resources\\_research\\_reports.htm](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/publications_and_resources_research_reports.htm)
- *Discussion paper – graduates and social enterprise*. This discussion paper draws on findings from the 2011 Real Prospects survey to examine how graduates might benefit from engaging with social enterprise.  
[www.hecsu.ac.uk/publications\\_and\\_resources\\_research\\_reports.htm](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/publications_and_resources_research_reports.htm)

## UKCES reports on LMI

In the summer GMT article, *Using and sharing Career Related Labour Market Information (LMI): learning from the field*, Lindsey Bowes and Simon Bysshe detailed some of the findings from their research. (September) Here are the full reports:

- *'Using and Sharing LMI to Inform Future Choices – Good Practice Guide'*  
[www.ukces.org.uk/publications/using-and-sharing-lmi-to-inform-future-choices](http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications/using-and-sharing-lmi-to-inform-future-choices)
- *'Using and Sharing Career Related LMI – Research Report'* [www.ukces.org.uk/publications/using-and-sharing-career-lmi-research-report](http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications/using-and-sharing-career-lmi-research-report)
- *'Issues and Challenges in Using and Sharing Career Related LMI'* [www.ukces.org.uk/publications/issues-and-challenges-in-using-career-related-LMI](http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications/issues-and-challenges-in-using-career-related-LMI)

## New Unistats website

The official site to search and compare information on university and college courses in the UK is now live. Students are able to look at comparable information on the factors that students have identified as important when deciding what and where to study. (September) [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

## OECD Education at a glance 2012

This report shows how countries compare to each other in terms of their educational performance. (September) [www.oecd.org/edu/eag2012.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2012.htm)

## Follow up to the Wilson review

This report sets out what the government will do to support business-university collaboration through promoting employability, work placements and internships and research and innovation. (June) [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/ff12-903-following-up-wilson-business-university-collaboration-next-steps.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/ff12-903-following-up-wilson-business-university-collaboration-next-steps.pdf)

## Raising aspirations and smoothing transitions

This new report by The Work Foundation looks at the changes to careers education and guidance detailed in the Education Act and plans out how to ensure that young people can still access the careers support they need. (September) [www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports](http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports)

## CIHE: The value of public sector R&D

The Enhancing Value Task Force work in conjunction with the UK-Innovation Research Centre to look at how we make the most of the UK research base. The second report in the series looks at the value of public sector R&D, especially UK university research and highlights the many benefits of publicly-funded research. (August) [www.cihe.co.uk/category/taskforces/research-task-force/](http://www.cihe.co.uk/category/taskforces/research-task-force/)

## UUK report on the HEAR

After extensive trialling and consideration, in this report Universities UK and GuildHE outline the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) as valued by institutions, students and employers. (October) [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/introducingtheHEAR.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/introducingtheHEAR.aspx)

## Social Mobility Summit

The Sutton Trust have released a report bringing together the conclusions from the Summit held in May. The aim of the Summit was to discuss the reasons behind the poor social mobility in the UK and the USA and possible solutions to the problem. (September) [www.suttontrust.com/research/social-mobility-report/](http://www.suttontrust.com/research/social-mobility-report/)

## GMT interview

# The key information sets (KIS)

**Professor Janet Beer<sup>1</sup> explains the origins and implementation of the Key Information Sets. Professor Beer goes on to talk about why she has high hopes for its success and looks forward to continuing work to make it a responsive and reliable source of high quality information.**

The KIS, which became available to prospective students, their families and advisers on September 27th, has its origins in research which was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council and was published in 2010. The committee which I chair – the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group – has oversight of the information which is made publicly available in the higher education sector as well as the operation of the National Student Survey (NSS). It was our task to decide how to best use the findings of the research for the widest possible benefit of future students.

*‘Accessibility and visibility of information was the issue, not the provision of the data’*

The research, carried out by Oakleigh Consulting and Staffordshire University, engaged with more than 2000 prospective and current students from a wide variety of educational backgrounds. Also consulted were those organisations most intimately involved with higher education, including higher education institutions, further education colleges, careers advisers, employers and others. The most compelling reason for undertaking this research was to ascertain what prospective students were most interested in knowing about the university or college course they were applying for. In addition, my group was very keen to understand where prospective students wanted to see that information, who they trusted to provide it and how they envisaged using it when deciding on their course and their institution.

It was something of a surprise to discover that the majority of the pieces of information which students wanted to see were already in the public domain. The accessibility and visibility of those pieces of information

was therefore the issue, not the provision of the data. This fact helped to give comfort to many in the sector who were initially mistrustful of the value and verifiability of the kind of information that students<sup>12</sup> wanted to see. So, the KIS is now published on a new Unistats website (retaining the title from a previous incarnation) but they will also be accessed directly through a link on the individual course webpage of the university or college. The course based nature of the KIS will also allow prospective students and their advisers to make very easy and simple comparisons between the same courses at different institutions. The NSS was always intended to provide comparisons at a subject level and the use of the KIS will restore this primary purpose to the results of the survey.

*‘The KIS will be the first port of call for prospective students’*

When the Key Information Sets were being tested in an early incarnation one of the most often asked questions from users was about the reliability and truthfulness of the data. The provision of the information in one location, accessed directly at Unistats or through institutional websites, will not only simplify the process by which applicants get hold of information, it will also reassure them that it is reliable and easily comparable. This will significantly enhance their capacity to make informed decisions about where and what to study.

The KIS will be their first port of call. It will give them access to the information which was identified by the participants in the research, to which has been added the tuition fee – covering the areas of student satisfaction (derived from the NSS) and including a new question on the efficacy and impact of the student union, employment and salary data, learning, teaching and assessment methods, tuition fee and accommodation costs, and professional accreditation. Course by course this collection of information can then be compared with similar offerings at other institutions and used as a baseline from which to engage more profoundly through institutional websites

<sup>1</sup> Professor Janet Beer is the Vice Chancellor at Oxford Brookes University. Professor Beer is Chair of the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group.

with what lies beneath the headlines. Types of information on institutional websites will include the detail of the financial support available, the professional accreditation and the range of accommodation types and prices. The opportunity to investigate the structure of the course and whether it offers opportunities for placement learning, varied forms of assessment and learning styles will also be available.

***‘The advantage of the KIS is that the data is presented without comment – interpretation is up to the user’***

It was never intended that the KIS would replace the detailed information available at open days or other interactions with higher education providers but, always, that it would give a really good foundation for further research, especially for those students who do not have easy access to high quality careers or academic advice. The impenetrability of some of the websites where the data is currently located has, in the past, meant that prospective students were frustrated in their attempts to get a fully rounded picture of a programme of study; the KIS will go a long way to relieving those frustrations.

One of the developments that is likely to take place is that private providers of information will make use of the data. For example, website based organisations like the Student Room, and other more conventional providers of guides for consumers like Which?. Whilst organisations like these do a good job, the advantage for prospective students and their advisers of the KIS is that the data is presented without comment – interpretation is up to the user.

***‘Comparable data allows institutional staff the opportunity to look at work done by colleagues in other institutions’***

At every stage of the process that led up to the final development of the KIS the higher education sector was consulted and engaged in discussions about the format and the delivery of the information. Whilst it seems unlikely that careers advisers in universities will be called upon to engage in pre-undergraduate study advice and guidance, the comparative data now available through the KIS will provide academic and other staff the opportunity to look at the work being done by colleagues in other institutions in cognate discipline areas. Rather than having to rely on the somewhat blunt instrument of the league table, where the nuances of course provision in different institutions are not visible, academics will be able to see more detail about their peers and the way in which study is organised across their subject.

***‘Further user research will guarantee utility of information over the next few years’***

When institutions are visited by the Quality Assurance Agency as a part of the audit cycle which assures quality in British higher education, an important part of their consideration will be focussed on the provision of information and whether it is reaching and satisfying its intended audience. Expert working groups have been used during the development of the KIS to ensure that the language which defines and categorises the information satisfies the exacting requirements of the provider (the higher education institution), the auditor (the QAA) and the user. This does not mean, however, that the KIS is written in stone; we will conduct an early review of its effectiveness, looking at the experience of the user of the KIS itself, the institutional website link and Unistats as well as that of the higher education provider. Any immediate improvements which can be made in the first year of operation will be made but we envisage that a fuller scale review will be conducted in 2014 when we will have the opportunity to revisit the content of the KIS. The principle which has guided us throughout its development is that the pieces of information included in the KIS are those chosen as most useful to prospective students and their advisers by those very people. Their priorities may change over the next few years and so it is important to ensure that further research with the users is carried out to guarantee currency and utility of information.

***‘Prospective students wanted to know what the quality of the student unions was like’***

The KIS can be used in conjunction with the Student Charter, which most institutions now have, which is designed to ensure that the current students of an institution have access to the information they need in order to get the most from their higher education experience. The information must also be kept up to date by the university or college working closely with its student union. The only new question to have been introduced into the NSS since its introduction is as a direct result of the findings of the research that led to the development of the KIS and concerns the role of the student union.

Prospective students wanted to know what the quality of the union at their chosen higher education institution was like and we simply had no consistently applied means of determining this. So, for the first

time this year, individual student unions will be able to see how their members rate them. The real benefit of this will almost inevitably be a considerable effort by the National Union of Students, nationally and locally, to ensure that their members understand the role of the union and how that role has changed over the last few years. The focus has largely moved from entertainment and retail to representation and advocacy, and the new generation of students and their families and advisers need to understand this. The unions will have to work hard with their members to make sure that the student union understands the changing demands and requirements of the student body and, in turn, that engagement by the membership in the wide range of opportunities afforded by the union is likely to enrich both their student life and future career.

*'Direct comparability of postgraduate programmes is being investigated'*

It is possible that in the future a set of information for postgraduate students might be developed – something which would obviously have an impact on the work of higher education careers advisory services. A survey to gather current students' views about their postgraduate studies might be one means of providing information and work is currently being done to investigate whether such a proposition is viable. There are certain problems which will provide a fundamental challenge to the development of a nationwide survey for postgraduates, not least the smaller numbers of students on programmes leading to concerns about preservation of anonymity as well as the direct comparability of programmes across institutions. I look forward to the findings of the research with interest.

For more information about the KIS please go to: [www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/)

## GMT perspectives

# KIS and Tell

**In this article, Liam Owens<sup>1</sup> explores the use of the Key Information Sets to make higher education decisions. Liam explains how a lack of information, advice and guidance (IAG) in schools and colleges may make it difficult for prospective students to put the KIS into context. The KIS informs students about potential employment and earnings but who will inspire students to make decisions on what they enjoy and ensure they take full advantage of everything the HE experience has to offer.**

From this autumn, students who are applying for higher education courses will have a new set of data to help them decide where to go and what to study. It sounds simple enough, but will it really do the job that it's intended to do?

### What the KIS has to offer students

The advent of Key Information Sets was, in part, a response to the decision to raise tuition fees in England. If students are to pay more for their higher education experience, it follows that they should be better informed about what they can expect for their money... so if you are a student thinking about choosing a course you can find everything from an average salary for graduates of that programme, through to the cost of university accommodation and the number of hours you will spend in a classroom each week. Best of all, you will be able to compare sets of data from different courses and universities as part of your research to really help you refine and focus your decision-making.

On the face of it, it seems like an eminently sensible and laudable approach, yet somehow it feels so clinical – almost relegating choosing a degree to the same category as choosing your car insurance.

The first question is: Will students actually use the information available to them? The most important question is: Will students use the information wisely?

The problem is that it's all about, in fact only about, the information – hard data that will give you a percentage of 'students satisfied' or benign statements such as 'X% of staff are good at explaining things'. And sometimes, depending on a whole range of variables,

you might not get any information at all; just a message that says 'not enough data'. Which is fine if you understand what that actually means, but the issue is that some students, particularly those with no familial experience of higher education, might not understand what the information is telling them. That creates the potential for misunderstanding and could lead to some bad decision-making on the part of the student.

### Missing information, advice and guidance

The driver has been 'information, information, information'. But information on its own is next to useless. Information is passive. It only starts to mean something when it's accompanied by good advice and guidance and that's where the students might have a problem.

Whilst the sector has been busy collating data and developing widgets to show the data on university websites, the State has been systematically dismantling advice and guidance services. The Connexions Service has all but gone (although there is some localised provision still in place where local authorities have had the foresight to maintain a service) and is replaced by an online National Careers Service, which has no specific remit to help school-aged students and pupils. That is £450m worth of information, advice and guidance services that has been lost. The Aimhigher programme has finished (again with some localised provision where higher education institutions have continued to fund some projects) and those staff who would have spent time in schools and colleges working with pupils on their HE decision-making have disappeared. Further to this, the Government in England have abolished the statutory requirement for schools to provide careers education guidance up to the age of 16 and have abandoned plans to provide it up to the age of 18 (even though the school participation age is rising).

Now there's no doubt that lots of schools provide excellent advice and guidance services for their pupils and students. But not all do (and of course we need to remember that not all HE entrants are school leavers) and that leaves students with lots of information but no clear starting point about what to do with the information.

<sup>1</sup>Liam Owens is Head of Student Recruitment at Edge Hill University and UK Chair of the Higher Education Liaison Officers' Association. Liam also sits on the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG) and has contributed to the Sub-Group responsible for redeveloping the wording for the new Unistats website.

It's a crude example, but look at what happened to financial services in the 1980/90s. There was an explosion in the range of products available to consumers – a vast array of accounts and services and regulation meant that banks had to start giving you lots of information alongside your product (all that bumph that drops out of the envelope when you open your monthly statements). And what happened alongside that boom in products? There was a huge growth in the industry of Financial Advisers. Experts who were there to help you make sense of all of the information that was being made available to you; specialists who could help you make the decisions that suited your needs best. So whilst the KIS is to be welcomed, the information bit is only half of the picture.

### Putting information into context

Students are going to need to think carefully before using KIS as one of the key measures in their HE decision-making. What KIS does not do is replace the need for students to visit universities and colleges for themselves, to attend open days and meet staff, see facilities and get a feel for an institution. I meet so many students who tell me that institution X/Y or Z 'just felt right' - and you're not going to get that from a widget that tells you what proportion of your assessment will be done by coursework...

Scratching below the surface of the headline data is also essential. What difference does 18 hours contact per week versus 16 hours contact per week actually make when it's the content of the course that is most important? Yes, 90% of students may be 'satisfied' with

the course, but it's entirely feasible that only half of the students on that course actually rated it. What about the 'not enough data' trap? Not having enough data to show does not equate to there being a problem with that course. For example, it might mean that the programme has fewer than 30 students registered (which is the threshold for the National Student Survey) – which in itself is not a negative thing either – it may be a highly specialised programme with small but exceptional intakes. Where there are small cohorts the data is aggregated at JACS code level and, by doing so, it actually gives an entirely inaccurate statistic for some courses.

It is essential that students don't simply look at the headlines but understand the context in which the data is presented and decide whether the information shown are measures that are important to them.

### Encouraging aspiring applicants

Finally, there is the 'graduate salary' measure - my least favourite of all and the one that reduces higher education decision-making to a simple return on investment exercise. Earning potential is undoubtedly a factor in decision-making, but I don't think it should be the most important one. Higher education is a uniquely transformative experience and we should be encouraging aspiring applicants to think beyond the bottom line in the pay packet and to make decisions based on what they enjoy, what they want to achieve and a demonstrable passion for their subject. KIS can tell you a lot if you use it well. But KISing a subject is one thing. Loving your subject is quite another.

For more information about the KIS go to: [www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/)  
and for more information about HELOA go to: [www.heloa.ac.uk/](http://www.heloa.ac.uk/)



## GMT perspectives

# Informed Choice

**The Key Information Set (KIS) will enable students to gather information which will help them to make informed choices about higher education institutions. In this article, Professor Geoff Layer<sup>1</sup> comments on the KIS, detailing universities' use of it for market positioning and how prospective students' individual needs may impact upon their use of the KIS.**

Over the years there have been many attempts to seek to provide potential students with all the facts they need to make an informed choice about higher education. Given what appears to have been a lack of confidence in taking on a degree course by those who had already applied this year, the need for better information and communication of available options has never been more important. There are many factors to consider when seeking to provide the necessary information, such as location, length of course, type of university, nature of potential employment available and, of course, cost. The key objective must be to allow and enable informed choice.

### Enabling informed choice

Making such a choice is never easy and in this modern society, with universities having TV advertising campaigns, utilising social media and enhancing their websites, it has become more difficult to distinguish between promotional activity and information. Add to that the desire by some to make money out of helping prospective students choose a university, and the process can become very complex.

There should be key underlying principles behind enabling informed choice and these include impartiality, and accurate and consistent information. This is to be found in the Key Information Sets (KIS) launched in September 2012. This is a Government initiative, managed by HEFCE, and will be of tremendous value to those who seek to use it.

The KIS will provide information in a form that is user friendly and will be as comprehensive as any such service could be. But who will use it and what value will be placed on it? Time will tell, of course, but the evaluation and review of the take up needs to look well beyond simply the numbers of hits to the Unistats website.

### Use of the KIS for institutions

The KIS is aimed at students, advisers and families, yet it is probably a safe prediction that the first surge of users will be university staff, looking to see how their course compares to those at other institutions and what the overall market looks like. The KIS will be invaluable in terms of market intelligence and starting new forms of league tables. This will actually provide an excellent service for many universities as it will be much easier to make direct comparisons on the issues included, whereas many of the current subject-based league tables get a bit lost in the detail of trying to make them distinctive from each other.

### Use of the KIS for students

When we turn to students, the group it is really for, it will be interesting to see who uses it and for what purpose. Once it has become known within the international community there is no doubt that the KIS will have significant take up by overseas students, even though it is primarily designed for the home market. It is, though, within the domestic market that the take up will be most interesting to observe.

The KIS has been designed for all but it may well be used differentially by different types of students. We already know that there are patterns in the timings that students apply to university, with students from independent schools and large sixth forms being the earliest to apply and those from further education colleges applying later in the process. They will all have access to the KIS, but those in the early stages of the process are probably more likely to discuss the information in the KIS with advisers and parents than those applying later in the process.

The same will also be likely if the student has decided to study locally and this is where we may see crucial differences in utilisation. Students who are geographically restricted as to where they can study have probably already decided which institution they wish to apply to and they will use the KIS to find out about available courses, with less emphasis on comparing courses between different universities. When one also then looks at the make-up of the category of student who I am suggesting will be less likely to take up the KIS, it becomes clearer that these students are more likely to be from the lower socio-economic groups and from minority ethnic groups.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Geoff Layer is the Vice Chancellor at the University of Wolverhampton and is a member of the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group.

If this does turn out to be the case then the KIS will have been designed for a traditional model of higher education in which school leavers wanting to gain a degree will live away from home in a campus community. This emphasis simply reflects years of successive governments planning higher education on the basis that that is the system we have and want to maintain. This is very different to many other countries and is considerably more expensive but the KIS will meet their needs and it will be used by others as a valuable source of information.

### **In conclusion**

The KIS is here to stay and we need to welcome the transparency it brings. We should support students in using it to be as well informed as possible. The KIS will enable a shift away from media rhetoric about particular courses and universities, and let the informed student be at the heart of the system.

For more information about the KIS please go to: [www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/)

## GMT research

# The student decision-making process

**When informing students about university it is just as important to understand how they make decisions and who influences them as it is to have the information they need widely available. In this article Dr Yvonne Moogan<sup>1</sup> details her career's research into the student decision-making process. Today with the increasing financial investment made by students and the increased competition in the employment market, universities need to be more proactive in helping students make an informed decision.**

### Introduction

The expansion of Higher Education (HE) participation in the UK has been well documented with participants being found from a wider social spectrum over more recent years. However, many students who do make the decision to enter HE often make mistakes due to receiving limited advice and conflicting opinions, or because of a lack of accurate and relevant information to begin with. In addition many school pupils are completely unaware of 'university life' and what it can offer despite the growing efforts of HE institutions in developing links with local schools and colleges. Today there is even an increasing pressure to make the best possible decision due to the high level of tuition fees involved and the current economic climate whereby graduate jobs are most scarce. Studies involving the construction of models and theories of HE decision-making have been conducted but generally within the USA rather than in the UK market place, although this is changing especially as entering HE is viewed to be more 'risky' with students facing challenging times.

### The background

I have always been interested in student decision-making, recalling as a 17 year old pupil in a comprehensive school having to choose both a programme of study and a Higher Education Institution (HEI) to attend. At this stage I was relatively ignorant of the whole UCAS process and the HE environment I was hoping to enter, probably similar to many pupils' knowledge today. This

uncertainty was compounded as I was the first in my family to consider education beyond the age of 18 years old and I found it a daunting and intimidating period in my life.

Consequently it is interesting to examine if potential HE students today are better equipped than I was all those years ago and this is the enlightening aspect of my work. For example, the internet was non-existent in the 1980's as were mobile phones and the use of social networking. There was no access or widening participation scheme whereby the government 'pushed' pupils to continue their education beyond the age of 18 years old. More fundamentally there were no tuition fees but there were maintenance grants and graduate jobs were available, with high records of employment upon completion of a degree course.

### The research

Upon graduating, this longitudinal research started when I began working in HE as a lecturer, conducting research interviewing 360 undergraduate students as part of my MSc thesis. Investigating the variables that had affected these students to start university and the influence of marketing activities on their selections was fascinating. However, from the Masters dissertation, I wanted to know about those attitudes and perceptions of pupils prior to entering HE, in terms of what had motivated them whilst at sixth form college or school in the first place and who had influenced their decision to apply to university. This involved investigating their buyer behaviour, in terms of 'problem recognition' (who, why, what or when was the initial process activated), 'information search' (which sources are most stimulating) and 'evaluation of alternatives' (how does the choice selection occur and who or what is most dominant).

### The research studies

Consequently I began studying for a PhD analysing the student decision-making process in 16 to 18 year olds, covering various methodologies within three separate studies over five years. The three studies, incorporating over 800 pupils, summarised the

<sup>1</sup>Dr Yvonne Moogan is the National HE Product Manager at Kaplan Business School. Dr Moogan is now researching international students, looking at the whole process of integrating non-UK and UK students.

importance of freely available knowledge for pupils to make the best possible decision, from the role of careers and subject teachers in initiating the process, the importance of hard copy materials in providing information and the significance of open days upon making those evaluations. Other forces, such as the level of school infrastructure with parental support, also played important roles. Further details of each study are summarised and documented next.

**Study One** – this 1999 article (Decision-making Behaviour of potential HE students- Higher Education Quarterly) applied problem recognition and information search within the decision-making process, finding that potential HE students see the whole process to be complex and risky despite consuming much time in arriving at their selections. Collecting information when conflicting opinions exist was seen to be challenging.

**Study Two** – this 2001 article (Timings and Trade-offs in the marketing of Higher Education courses- a conjoint analysis approach- Marketing Intelligence and Planning) tries to establish weightings to the key attributes affecting decisions over time by concentrating on the selection and evaluation stages in particular, using the same sample cohort over two consecutive academic years. So for example, in lower sixth form, students focus on the programme of study, in terms of its content and structure, yet in upper sixth form, the emphasis changes to the location and reputation of the institution. Consequently departmental visits are crucial during upper sixth form, in terms of their impact, although course details, such as methods of assessment and choice of option modules, via the prospectus or internet are important during lower sixth form.

**Study Three** – this 2003 article (An Analysis of Student Characteristics within the Student Decision-Making Process- Journal of Further and Higher Education), highlights the impact of gender, school type and prior qualifications on the decision-making process. In addition, influential personnel are documented, such as forces of parental pressure, subject teachers, peers, and careers advisors, throughout the whole of the decision-making stages.

After completing my PhD I became fascinated with those pupils from lower socio-economic status and younger aged pupils in particular, and wanted to discover if and when they started to think about HE with a synthesis of the barriers facing them.

Consequently I was invited to join the widening participation team on the AimHigher Merseyside Project – 2003 for eight years analysing 13 to 16 year old pupils in deprived areas. Again conducting a longitudinal study over an 18 month period provided rich qualitative data, concluding that universities need to investigate both the needs and wants of these potential students with particular reference to the ‘institutions offerings’ throughout the decision-making process and to assess the impact of those influential factors during this process. For example, issues, such as living costs and distance from home, were of increasing worry, as were the ability to settle into a HE environment with the concern of retention and finding employment upon graduation. By offering taster courses (daily or week long), students from deprived areas can see firsthand what university life may be like, although this could be informative for all students as could university personnel visiting schools to develop links. The ability to ‘test drive’ this service and obtain a feel for university life may be a useful reassurance mechanism. Potential students are making one of the biggest decisions in their lives and the level of risk and uncertainty is higher for all students today than ever before.

### The variables

All the above papers highlighted the key attributes influencing the student decision-making process, such as course content, location of the university and the reputation of the university. Influencers, such as the role of the mother and the impact of the school, are debated as are the secondary factors covering financial concerns and awareness of careers opportunities. Events like open days or visits from local HE personnel seem to have an impact and increasingly electronic means of communication are significant forces. The role of marketing also becomes necessary as HEIs operate in this competitive pool of students and become more ‘business like’. If universities are to attract their ‘customers’ they should provide an excellent support service once enrolment commences and ensure that they create positive alumni at the end of the three or four years of study. Marketing activities can continue beyond graduation for example and most HEIs increasingly recognise this.

To summarise, undergraduate students are the dominant activity of most universities, creating a significant proportion of income and being the core element of teaching in the HE sector. However, HEIs can do more for potential HE students by offering accurate and appropriate information that will satisfy

each of their information needs for it is beneficial for all parties concerned that the 'right' decisions are made. Potential students need to be better informed and prepared to make those decisions, for they are planning to consume this "HE Service" over a relatively long period of time, and the financial risks with opportunity costs involved are substantial.

**Find out more about the research in the references below:**

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## GMT in practice

# Making the most of Masters

**In this article Dr. Zachary Hickman<sup>1</sup> introduces the project, Making the Most of Masters, which aims to embed work based projects into taught postgraduate programmes as part of the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) Learning to Work 2 (LTW2) initiative. The team working alongside Dr Hickman includes, Wendy Rudland (Aberdeen), Diane Gill (Edinburgh) and Dr Neil Lent (Edinburgh).**

### Introduction

Making the Most of Masters<sup>2</sup> (MMM) is an ambitious three year Scottish Funding Council (SFC) partnership between the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Stirling as part of SFCs Learning to Work 2 (LTW2) initiative<sup>3</sup>. The project helps taught postgraduate (PGT) programmes build relationships with employers and organisations of all sizes, and to successfully implement work based projects (WBPs). This is a means of supporting participating programmes in terms of facilitating increased 'work-readiness' and employability of PGT students, whilst increasing and strengthening academic-industry relationships.

Not only do these aims achieve our respective institution's strategic objectives in relation to graduate employability, but these have also been highlighted by SFC as part of their long term employability, employer engagement and entrepreneurship policy objectives. Therefore, within their LTW2 action plan, SFC identifies the value it sees in supporting national co-ordination and good practice development within HEIs and colleges, and sharing these between sectors. It also identifies strengthening links and aiding dialogue between student bodies, institutions and employers as a national level strategic goal.

To further these aims, the Scottish Higher Education Employability Forum (SHEEF) has been formed to support the LTW2 projects (including MMM) which is

steered by a management group comprising representatives from Scottish universities and a number of partner organisations including:

- Higher Education Academy
- Scottish Funding Council
- QAA Scotland
- Universities Scotland
- NUS Scotland
- Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE)
- AGCAS Scotland

### What are we doing, and how are we doing it?

Over the course of this initiative, the MMM team, on behalf of SFC and the sector, are testing out a variety of different 'models' for arranging and managing WBPs that can be utilised across all three institutions. This has included development of all good practice and quality assurance documentation, assessment and feedback methods, as well as practical resources for implementation such as an administrative manual, a WBP management database, student's educational support to prepare them for their workplace experience, and example staffing structures/responsibilities. A number of novel factors enter into this process, we must work cross-institutionally as a team, we must develop resources that are PGT specific, and we are developing material that ensures international and home students are fully prepared for their workplace experience. This includes programme specific workshops and 'signposting' and is generic enough for programmes to tailor them to their needs. It is envisaged that these resources will be placed within institution's own virtual learning environments.

All of these resources and tools are currently being tested by supporting at least 200 WBPs across the three partner universities, and will ultimately be made available to all Scottish universities when the project

<sup>1</sup> Dr Zachary Hickman is the Project Coordinator for Making the Most of Masters and is based in the Careers Service at the University of Aberdeen. The team working on the project include Wendy Rudland (Aberdeen), Diane Gill (Edinburgh) and Dr Neil Lent (Edinburgh)

<sup>2</sup> [www.mastersprojects.ac.uk](http://www.mastersprojects.ac.uk)

<sup>3</sup> MMM is one of four funded LTW2 projects

concludes in December 2013. Currently, we are working with 67 academic programmes as diverse as MSc Global Health and MSc Oil & Gas Engineering (University of Aberdeen), MSc Carbon Management and MSc in African and International Development (University of Edinburgh), and MSc Aquaculture and MSc Business and Management (Stirling University). We have thus far engaged with over 300 employers on an individual basis, and sourced over 200 projects for the academic year 2011/12. We are currently undertaking our evaluation and feedback processes to allow us to refine and streamline the processes involved, and to further develop our package of resources for 2012/13.

### **Establishing sustainability**

Our ultimate aim is to ensure that we are working closely with all engaging PGT programmes to embed these processes in a sustainable way so that work based projects can continue to be offered without additional resources from 2014 onwards. Thus, programmes will need to take ownership of the process and our emphasis rests upon achieving the required sustainability. We need to concentrate on developing the means to enable them to achieve this, and we need to be careful not to be overly concerned with the numbers of projects created in what is, in effect, research development and a pilot project for the sector. So whilst undertaking this establishment of long term sustainability within academic programmes,

we also need to undertake the same for long term and sustainable input from employers and organisations. One of the many ways we are doing this is by developing a network of engaging employers and organisations, establishing dedicated project sourcing events and, more recently, to establish long term agreements with relevant organisations such as the Marine Alliance for Science & Technology for Scotland (MASTS), Challenges Worldwide, Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA), and Energy Technology Partnership (ETP). It is too early to comment upon the final models of engagement but our aims are to establish processes within these organisations whereby a sustainable sourcing of projects can be undertaken and passed via these organisations to engaging programmes. This achieves a long term university-industry engagement, ensures a supply of projects, and helps engaging employers/ organisations/businesses to commit to helping develop student's employability and attributes.

### **Concluding remarks**

We believe this is a novel initiative, and we have only been able to highlight some of the more pertinent aims and methods we have been working upon. Please visit our website for more in-depth information about the structure of our initiative, case studies, and ongoing work, and please do contact any of the MMM team if you would like more information.

To find out more about Making the Most of Masters visit the website: [www.mastersprojects.ac.uk](http://www.mastersprojects.ac.uk)  
Or you can follow the project on LinkedIn <http://tinyurl.com/7yk5tnf> or via Twitter @LTW2\_MMM

## GMT research

# What do graduates do? 2011 employment review

**This article is taken from the HECSU/AGCAS publication, *What Do Graduates Do? 2012*. Here Jennifer Redman\*, looks at the destinations of graduates from 2010/11 in the context of the wider UK labour market and looks at where opportunities may arise for graduates from 2011/12 in sectors forecast to grow in 2012.**

The graduate labour market is complex because it exists within a wider labour market which is affected by changes in both the UK and global economies. When graduates from 2010/11 left university, the labour market was experiencing some turbulence as the UK economy struggled with negative growth and a dip back into recession<sup>1</sup>. In spite of this and trouble in the Eurozone affecting growth in the global economy, at the time of the survey 166,280 graduates from 2010/11 were in employment in the UK; that is 7,700 more graduates than in 2009/10. It is important to bear in mind that the destinations of graduates taken from HESA's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey were recorded six months after graduating from a first degree at a UK university and as such the destinations of these graduates may have changed since then as the economy and the labour market has moved on.

### Graduate employment and unemployment

The outcomes of graduates qualifying in 2010/11 are much better than had been feared after a weakening in the economy and further job losses from the cuts in public spending. As shown in Table 1, the number of graduates increased on the previous year; there was only a slight decrease in the proportion of graduates in employment and a slight increase in the proportion believed to be unemployed.

### Types of work

Looking at the destination figures for first degree graduates it may appear that all graduates have struggled in the labour market in 2010/11, but if you look at the subject they studied you can see that outcomes differ. There is an editorial for each category

of subject which explains in more depth the outcomes of graduates from each. Here are some examples of how graduates from specific disciplines have fared in the labour market.

### Example 1 – Engineering

There was a slight increase in the number of 2010/11 engineering graduates finding employment and a decrease in those believed to be unemployed, compared to 2009/10 engineering graduates, with the exception of electrical and electronic engineering graduates. The percentage of electrical and electronic engineering graduates in employment decreased and unemployment increased. However, of those electrical and electronic engineering graduates who did find work, 36.2% found work as engineering professionals<sup>2</sup> (compared to 30.9% the previous year).

### Example 2 – Computer science and IT

Engineering graduates were one discipline where employment outcomes appeared to be hit hard in the depths of the recession in 2008/09 (despite usually high rates of graduate employment). Another discipline which has seen negative outcomes in previous reports is computer science and IT. Overall this year's computer science and IT cohort has seen an increase in the proportion finding employment and a drop in those believed to be unemployed. There was an increase of 8.5% in the proportion of employed computer science and IT graduates working as IT professionals compared to 2009/10 computer science and IT graduates, accounting for almost half of computer science and IT graduates in employment (47.3%). So nearly half of those who studied computer science and IT and were in employment became IT professionals.

### Graduates in the public sector

The cuts to public spending continued to impact upon the ability of graduates to find entry level roles within the health and education sectors. It was clear last year from destinations figures for 2009/10 graduates that there were fewer opportunities available for new

\* Jennifer Redman is a Researcher for the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) and project manager of What Do Graduates Do?. The project is in collaboration with members of the AGCAS Education Liaison Task Group.



graduates to secure administrative work in the public sector, particularly in public administration and defence. This year it appears that there is a wider issue affecting the number of opportunities available in administrative roles in other sectors too. There were 20.5% (300) fewer 2010/11 graduates who secured work as counter assistants in banks, building societies and post offices compared to graduates from 2009/10. A recent report suggests that technological advancement is replacing the need for administrative personnel and, as such, these roles will continue to decline over the next eight years<sup>3</sup>.

It is not just administrative roles which appear to have been affected by the cuts in public spending there may have been an impact on recruitment of front line professionals too. The occupations which saw the largest drop in the proportion of graduates from 2010/11 compared to 2009/10 graduates, include occupational therapists, physiotherapists, medical radiographers, secondary and primary school teachers, probation officers and social workers. Each of these occupations saw a decrease of over 100 graduates entering in 2010/11, with social workers having the largest decrease of 420. It remains to be seen if the changes in public spending will hamper the efforts of next year's graduates aiming to find work in the public sector.

### Employment in 'graduate occupations'

The indicator which determines graduate occupations from non-graduate occupations will change next year, but for this cohort we have used the graduate job classifications developed in the Seven Years On report<sup>4</sup>. The number of 2010/11 graduates who obtained graduate level occupations increased by 4,190 graduates (4.2%) on the previous year.

The number of graduates who entered non-graduate employment also increased by 3,485 graduates (6.0%) compared to the number of 2009/10 graduates in non-graduate level occupations. A recent report found that there are more graduates taking on lower-skilled roles. This is partly because of the increase in the number of graduates over time, which has sparked 'credentialism' where businesses employ graduates in lower-skilled jobs<sup>5</sup>. Even though the number of graduates in non-graduate occupations immediately after graduation has increased, it is still more beneficial to be a graduate than not. Graduates earn more over time than non-graduates, and are less likely to be unemployed the longer they have been out of education<sup>6</sup>. Although graduates may begin in non-graduate level employment six months after graduation, they move up the ladder relatively quickly, often within months<sup>7</sup>.

### Salaries

The average salary for UK graduates in full-time employment in the UK six months after graduation ranged between £18,285 and £23,635, which represents an increase on the average salary of graduates in 2009/10. Average salaries for first degree graduates in full-time employment in the UK vary, depending on the types of work they are doing six months after graduation.

### Looking towards the future

It is not advisable to use historic data like the DLHE survey to predict what will happen in the future. The last five years of destinations figures demonstrate how different the graduate labour market can be when conditions in the economy change. Improvement in the labour market at the end of 2010 was uncertain and the end of 2012 is no different. Reports in July 2012 of a consecutive quarter of negative growth confirmed that the UK economy is fragile and, alongside the weak global economy, it is surprising that the UK labour market has remained fairly resilient during this double-dip recession<sup>8</sup>.

The 'types of work' section above described improvements in the employment rate of 2010/11 engineering and computer science and IT graduates. Looking forward, growth in the number of engineering graduates finding work in the construction industry remains uncertain, as the drop in public spending, and projects stalling due to wet weather, saw a further decline in output in July 2012<sup>9</sup>. However, the business services sector is anticipating further job creation for engineers for the rest of 2012<sup>10</sup>. Graduates from other disciplines look set to benefit from an increase in job creation in the business services sector too; the IT industry continues to grow as a result of businesses looking to decrease their labour costs by transacting more online so more IT jobs are expected in 2012.

While the AGR summer survey 2012 predicts a 0.6% decrease in the number of vacancies available in 2011/12<sup>11</sup>, there are signs that employment opportunities overall are increasing compared to those which were available in 2010/11. The Office of National Statistics reported that there were 471,000 jobs available for the three months leading up to June 2012, 12,000 more vacancies than the same period of 2011<sup>12</sup>. One report forecasts continued growth in higher-skilled occupations by 2020, including; managers, professionals and associate professionals<sup>13</sup>.

A report by the UK Commission of Employment and Skills suggests that these occupations are less likely to be filled by young people, but where they are, it is overwhelmingly by graduates<sup>14</sup>.

During the recession, the number of vacancies in the UK decreased as economic conditions worsened. Since the depths of the recession in 2008/09 jobs have been created in the UK, but the majority of jobs have not been created by large companies; during the economic downturn 71% of jobs were created by start-ups and small firms<sup>15</sup>. The recruitment practices used by small firms are variable and usually more informal than larger firms<sup>16</sup>. This suggests that, when looking for vacancies, graduates should widen their search to include small firms, and take advantage of local information and informal contacts. Some universities already have good links with local employers, and the Wilson Review recommends universities increase their efforts to make those links<sup>17</sup>. This should help students make contacts with local employers of all sizes before they graduate and thus increase their opportunities for employment.

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**Table 1. Comparison of destinations of first degree graduates from 2009/10 and 2010/11, six months after graduation**

	Numbers graduating (survey respondents)	Entering employment	Entering further study/training	Working and studying	Unemployed at time of survey	Other
<b>2009/10 graduates</b>	233865	62.2%	13.5%	7.6%	8.5%	8.3%
<b>2010/11 graduates</b>	244680	61.8%	13.1%	8.4%	8.6%	8.2%

Source: DLHE 2010/11

For more information about What Do Graduates Do? and to download the 2012 edition, please go to:  
[www.hecsu.ac.uk/current\\_projects\\_what\\_do\\_graduates\\_do.htm](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/current_projects_what_do_graduates_do.htm)

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# Combating degree fraud in the UK

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**The Higher Education Degree Datacheck (HEDD) has been developed as part of the HEFCE Shared Services Programme to**

- tackle the problem of degree fraud, and
- safeguard the reputation of UK universities

HEDD helps more employers and universities to easily check the credentials of applicants to employment and study at their organisation before they appoint – improving the quality of the UK workforce.

**All UK HE institutions are eligible to be subscribing members of HEDD and benefit from the two services:**

## **Institutional verification database**

- Lets enquirers quickly verify whether institutions are, or have been, recognised degree-awarding bodies in the UK.
- Maps antecedent institutions, mergers and name changes since 1990.
- Directs the enquirer to the correct institution for their query.
- Provides information on how each institution handles degree verification enquiries.
- Flags institutions that are not valid degree awarding bodies in the UK – to combat the rise of bogus colleges and degree mills.

## **Online candidate verification service**

- Registered enquirers can input data provided by applicants (name, date of birth, institution, graduation year, qualification, classification etc.).
  - In real time, the service checks the information given against a dataset from the institution's student records and verifies it, if matched.
  - It automatically forwards the query to the institution for resolution if an exact match is not made.
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## HEDD brings further benefits across the sector:

### Efficiency of resources

English universities alone spend over £2million on degree verification enquiry handling – a significant burden which can be saved by this automatic real-time service.

### Safeguarding students' interests

It will reassure both domestic and international students and applicants to UK Higher Education about the authenticity of a university and will protect the substantial financial and time investment of genuine individuals within Higher Education.

### Fast turnaround

Enquirers will receive a swifter response, can make multiple enquiries in one place and be able to track and audit their enquiries through their registered online account.

### Cost effective

HEDD is available to all institutions on a small annual subscription based on graduating numbers and they can then make enquiries free of charge. Employers and screening agencies will be charged a small administration fee for their verification enquiries and institutions will receive a share of this, recouping their annual subscription in many cases and generating a modest income stream.

### Reliable

Initially funded and supported by HEFCE, the service is run by Graduate Prospects, an agency of higher education which has been providing shared services to career services for over 40 years, thus giving credibility, security and sustainability over the long-term. The list of bogus institutions has also been endorsed by the Department for Business, Information and Skills and is being used as the UK's official directory of bogus institutions.

### Full reporting

Institutions will be able to monitor, audit and report on all their verification enquiries - incoming and outgoing - through their registered online account.

### Peace of mind

Consultation with HEIs, other sector agencies and the Information Commissioner's Office over the past three years has ensured that the stringent requirements of HEIs with regard to data security, processing and protection have been met.

**Further information about this service is available from HECSU and at [www.hedd.ac.uk](http://www.hedd.ac.uk)  
Please contact Sinéad McGovern on 0161-277 5256 or at [s.mcgovern@prospects.ac.uk](mailto:s.mcgovern@prospects.ac.uk)**

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