1 Scope of the Review and Panel

1.1 The scope of the Employability Thematic Review was to:

i. Identify the areas of priority and expertise required for future employability and careers provision for our students and graduates in line with the University’s strategy and to enhance retention.

ii. Evaluate the effectiveness of current careers and employability provision offered by professional services across the University, including within Student Based Services, RES, Faculties and Colleges and where relevant, the interface with the Students’ Union.

iii. Understand the comparative provision in peer universities and identify opportunities for innovation and enhancement at Lancaster.

iv. Consider the effectiveness of support and interaction with academics, Careers Tutors and other staff in academic departments (including support of employability initiatives within the curriculum).

v. Review the arrangements for support and development of placement, internships and work experience opportunities and identify ways to enhance access for students to this provision.

vi. Consider the effectiveness of use of our alumni networks to complement careers service provision.

1.2 The Panel of the Thematic Review of Employability consisted of the following members:

- Stephen McAuliffe, Academic Registrar, University of Essex (Chair)
- Professor Tom Ward, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Durham University
- Nicola Owen, Chief Administrative Officer
- Professor Mandy Chetwynd, Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and the Library
- Professor Colin Rogers, Educational Research, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
- Dr Nigel Watson, Lancaster Environment Centre, Faculty of Science and Technology
- Joe O’Neill, Vice-President (Education), Lancaster University Students’ Union

1.3 Prior to the review, the Panel considered a range of documentation including:

- The scope of the Thematic Review of Employability
- The self-evaluation analysis of employability from the strategic lead
- The self-evaluation analysis of the central Careers Service from the Head of Careers
- Data tables and commentary
- Stakeholder feedback (in the form of SWOT analyses) from pre-review discussions with key stakeholders, including students and graduate interns
- Organisational structure of employability provision
- Lancaster University’s Strategic Plan 2020
The Panel convened on 23 and 24 April 2015 and met with a number of academic staff from across a range of departments and roles, as well as professional staff working in careers and employability related roles in faculties, departments and central services, including the Careers Service; Research and Enterprise Services; the Alumni Office; and the Students’ Union, The Panel also met with a group of current Lancaster University students and graduate interns.

Introduction

Employability is one of the measures of success specified in the University’s Strategic Plan 2020 and is referenced as an important element of the University’s culture, which is characterised as “progressive, in continuing to improve academically, as seen in key areas such as research excellence, student satisfaction, and employability.” The University has also set itself targets to achieve and maintain a top ten league table ranking in the UK and a top 100 position in the world ranking. Graduate outcomes play a key role in national league table rankings, which in turn are important considerations for prospective students in their university selection processes. The University has further aspirations of exceeding a 75% rate of graduate employment and of achieving an average salary in the top quintile across the sector. As per the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, graduate employment outcomes for UK, full-time undergraduates have increased from 78% for 2012-13 leavers to 83% for 2013-14 leavers. Lancaster has also seen an improvement in graduate salaries from £16,000 to £20,000, placing the University closer to its comparator institutions.

Employability refers to a set of achievements – skills, knowledge and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain, and succeed in, graduate-level employment, and be able to move between jobs, thus remaining employable throughout their life, benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. Employability is a more broad and complex construct than those of ‘core’ or ‘key’ skills, and is evidenced in the application of a mix of personal qualities and attributes, understandings of one or more disciplines, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience, encompassing both academic and practical intelligence. It is therefore important to recognise the contributions of curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular achievements to a graduate’s employability.

Lancaster University seeks to produce graduates whose skills and knowledge are sought after in the national and international job markets by:

- working closely with employers and alumni to inform our activities and by providing opportunities for students to engage in placements, work experience and volunteering;
- enhancing enterprise skills and labour market awareness in our students;
- providing programmes of study and opportunities outside core learning activities which enable all students to gain graduate employment and/or successfully undertake further study.

There was significant discussion throughout the Panel Review around the importance of, and therefore the extent to which, employability and graduate attributes should be embedded in the curriculum in order to equip students to compete in and to achieve their full potential within the global community. Early engagement with employability and careers provision, and the nature of the offer, also emerged as key considerations, which are becoming more critical as employers are increasingly recruiting from a pool of graduates with experience of work placements and other valuable employability skills and activities. The provision of high quality placement, work experience and enterprise opportunities was also raised, in the context of employers, particularly top graduate recruiters, attaching greater importance to relevant work experience as part of their selection process. Other key themes discussed throughout the Panel Review related to student engagement, the co-ordination of employability activities and staff resource.
The Panel commended the professionalism, innovation and entrepreneurialism of the staff involved in delivering the employability agenda, and recognised the significance of their achievements and the provision offered within the current operating context. The Panel praised the range and quality of employability provision and the aspirational approach to the development of the University's offer but noted the lack of visibility of and access to some areas of provision across the institution.

Panel discussions on the above key themes raised the following issues:

i. Lack of structure and ownership to support the University’s employability agenda
ii. Uncoordinated approach to employer and alumni engagement
iii. Insufficient visibility of and access to placements and other work experience
iv. Reliance on external funding sources
v. Lack of clarity on the role of academic staff in contributing to the employability agenda
vi. Differences in the level of student engagement
vii. Limited analysis of data to inform the employability agenda

To effectively address employability at Lancaster, a University-wide response to the recommendations from the Thematic Review is required, from senior management, faculties, departments, Professional Services, the Colleges and the Students’ Union. Existing institutional documentation, including careers-based Subject Information Guides and the Student Employability Policy, should also be reviewed and revised as appropriate.

Lack of structure and ownership to support the University’s employability agenda

Employability support is delivered in a variety of ways across the University. The central Careers Service consists of three teams which work closely together on separate but inter-linking areas of responsibility, supporting students from all faculties and offering unlimited careers support to graduates. Feedback from the staff and student focus groups on the Careers Service was generally very positive, and stakeholders commented on the increasingly proactive, effective and visible approach of the Careers Service, particularly over the last two years.

Faculties have different approaches to supporting employability, which was recognised as a strength as it allows them to focus on their specific context. However, this variation in approaches can also lead to different levels of support offered and issues of inconsistency of service for students between faculties. The importance of league table position and accreditation for the Management School in a very competitive student recruitment market has given rise to a model of enhanced support within the School. This model of a strategic and integrated careers support service is not a model that other faculties are able to resource to the same extent and the Management School is distinctive in this respect. It was noted that the Careers Service has integrated a staff member within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with the aim of forging closer working relationships with faculty staff on the delivery of employability. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences also has a small enterprise and placement team, working closely with departments in developing placements and curriculum-based provision. A Careers Consultant (0.1 FTE) works exclusively with Medical students within the Faculty of Health and Medicine to meet GMC (General Medical Council) requirements but there are no other careers or placement staff integrated within the faculty. The Faculty of Science and Technology has no integrated careers staff but has a sizeable Business Partnerships and Enterprise team, with only one member of staff dedicated solely to employability. The Careers Service is generally seen as having good working relationships with the faculties due to the establishment of a specified link person for each academic department who works with academic colleagues to determine how they can best support careers provision. However, opportunities to foster stronger collaborative links with academic staff were recognised.
Each academic department and College also has a dedicated Careers Tutor but there is a variation in role as there is no standard job description and workload models differ, which impacts upon their engagement with students and the Careers Service.

3.3 Enterprise activity touches on many areas of the University, giving students opportunities during their period of study, and acting as a connector after graduation. Whilst the Panel noted that the range of the University’s enterprise activity is healthy, innovative and inspirational, the challenge of ensuring that enterprise networks are visible, coordinated and navigable was highlighted. The Panel recognised the diverse nature of enterprise activities at the University, and noted that the mapping project recently undertaken by Research and Enterprise Services should lead to areas working more closely together.

3.4 Research and Enterprise Services is the central service at the University for knowledge exchange and interactions with business, providing placement opportunities in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and works widely across the faculties. The team also provides self-employment support and enterprise-awareness training for students. The ‘Enterprise Champion’ project provides a central focus and co-ordination point for the University on the student and graduate enterprise development agenda, and helps support a culture of enterprise, in order to stimulate and increase the number of student entrepreneurs, and to support student and graduate start-ups. The Panel also noted the activities led by the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise in the enterprise space, particularly with respect to the project and work experience opportunities it provides for students. Other areas of strength include the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences’ Enterprise Centre, created to help foster the potential for enterprise, impact and partnership that exists in the Faculty, and the Faculty of Science and Technology’s Lancaster China Catalyst Programme which uses graduate talent to develop multi-disciplinary teams to support UK-Chinese company collaborative partnerships.

3.5 The Students’ Union has a team of staff supporting the provision of volunteering opportunities through ‘LUSU Involve’, including schools’ outreach projects, local community, environmental, overseas and on-campus volunteering. Opportunities for improved links between the Careers Service and the Students’ Union around the Lancaster Award and voluntary work were noted to ensure an effective use of resource and to provide the best service to students.

3.6 The strengths, creativity and efforts of the staff involved in delivering the employability agenda, and the many and diverse work opportunities offered, were widely recognised and commended by the Panel. However, a single shared vision, improved channels of communications and closer collaboration across all areas of provision were identified to encourage a more efficient use of in-house resources, a sharing of best practices, and a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to employability provision. The Panel therefore recognised the need for a framework to ensure that employability activities are strengthened and co-ordinated and noted that the framework should link to the University’s Strategy for Education to ensure that activities are aligned and are able to leverage developments in the quality of education.

3.7 The Panel also recognised the importance of articulating the concept of Lancaster, through its strategy, as an academic, research-intensive University producing high calibre graduates with analytical, intellectual and enterprising skills and experiences crucial for employability and entrepreneurship. This would further legitimise employability as part of the University’s vision, and would resonate with and attract employers.
The Panel suggested that the University’s overall strategic approach with respect to employability should be overseen by a single institutional lead. It was noted that discussions would need to take place at a senior management level to consider the role of the strategic owner, recognising that aspects of both the curricular and co-curricular currently reside within the senior management team and leadership on delivery of different aspects of employability may continue to be taken forward by different individuals.

The Panel also felt that currently there are missed opportunities due to the lack of a cohesive operational forum for staff providing employability support to coordinate, develop, support and promote existing and new activity designed to enhance student employability and to share best practices.

The Panel suggested that the proposed forum should be chaired by a member of senior professional staff to demonstrate full University commitment and to ensure appropriate and coordinated actions are taken by those represented on the forum. An Employability Implementation Plan could also be established to clarify actions necessary across the University to support institutional priorities in this area. However, the Panel recognised the wealth of innovative and enterprising activities offered across the University and stressed that any structure should recognise, support, and not constrain current activities.

The Panel’s recommendations include:

**Recommendation 1:** The Panel recommends that a strategic framework to support the University’s employability agenda (aligned with the University’s Strategy for Education) should be developed to ensure that employability activities are strengthened, co-ordinated and aligned with the University’s vision, and are given the appropriate focus and emphasis.

**Recommendation 2:** The Panel recommends that the University establishes a single institutional lead for employability at an executive level responsible for the oversight of the overall strategic approach, recognising that aspects of both the curricular and co-curricular currently reside within the senior management team. The institutional lead should work with senior academics, key members of Professional Services and College Principals to enable clear and accountable implementation through a set of pre-defined measurable objectives and to ensure that strategy and targets are owned both centrally and locally.

**Recommendation 3:** The University’s governance structure for education should ensure oversight and on-going evaluation of the effectiveness and outcomes of the delivery of the strategic framework for employability, promoting shared responsibility and effective co-ordination within and among the Faculties, Professional Services and Colleges, where appropriate. It was recommended that the governance structure includes a set of measurable objectives to ensure that the success of the employability strategy can be effectively assessed.

**Recommendation 4:** The Panel recommends the establishment of an operating forum chaired by a member of senior professional staff to plan and co-ordinate activities, and disseminate and leverage best practices with professional staff involved in providing employability support.
4 Uncoordinated approach to employer and alumni engagement

4.1 The University’s engagement with SMEs was identified as a strength, particularly in the Management School, the Faculty of Science and Technology, and Research and Enterprise Services which have a wide network of business engagement activity with SMEs across Lancashire and the rest of the country. However, some stakeholders suggested that University discourse has too great a focus on SMEs. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, in particular, is seen as having a wider and more divergent focus with respect to employer engagement, including with NGOs, the Third Sector and arts organisations, and that a wider approach to employer engagement needs to be adopted which is relevant for all areas of the University. Engagement with larger employers was also identified as a weakness, hindered by the lack of institutional-level stewardship of key stakeholders.

4.2 Employer and alumni engagement is seen as a collective responsibility but there is a lack of management around the many relationship and networks which currently exist which was identified as an issue. The Panel felt that there was a lack of clarity about the level of employer and alumni engagement at the University-level as distinct from the faculty and departmental level. The Careers Service is engaging many of the top 100 employers who employ our graduates, and Research and Enterprise Services has a project underway to develop a framework to increase the visibility of existing enterprise networks across the University as a whole, to encourage a more joined-up approach to enterprise activity and collaboration. The Management School is also highly active in seeking the attention of employers, both locally and nationally. The Panel also heard examples where other institutions deliberately targeted and stewarded relationships with the senior staff responsible for graduate employment. However, the Panel recognised that such contact was often at a more junior level at Lancaster and was fragmented, resulting in a risk of duplication and a lack of leverage of opportunities across the University.

4.3 Access to the Alumni Office’s database (Raiser’s Edge) is deemed to be too limited. However, the Colleges have access to alumni and business contacts through their own networks, as do academic departments and faculties and, with the increasing need to source placements, concerns have been raised particularly from the Alumni Office that there is a risk of damaging existing alumni and employer relationships - especially where fundraising links have already been established - if they are not managed carefully. The risk to the University is that key external contacts perceive the University as uncoordinated. The Panel therefore felt that there was an opportunity to develop one co-ordinated, shared IT system between Professional Services, faculties, departments and Colleges to manage the University’s networks of business and alumni contacts.

4.4 The Panel also noted that the Management School is the only faculty which has an embedded Alumni Office staff member and recognised the risks of “locking in” a company to one discipline, thereby restricting other potential networking opportunities. The links between the Alumni Office and other areas of the University, including other faculties, Research and Enterprise Services and the Careers Service, were identified as a weakness. The Panel therefore felt that a more collaborative, managed and targeted approach was needed to strengthen the University’s links with top employers. Stakeholders also suggested that there is a ‘trust’ issue resulting from staff feeling protective about their business and alumni contacts, and a reluctance to open up their networks to other areas of the University. These networks are seen as an untapped resource which could provide a wealth of opportunities with respect to placements and other work experience, mentoring and participation in careers events. The Panel therefore proposes a more collaborative approach involving the Alumni Office, Research and Enterprise Services, and other members of staff involved in employer and alumni engagement activities, with oversight by a senior member of Professional Services.
4.5 The Panel’s recommendations include:

Recommendation 5: The Panel recommends a simple, co-ordinated and integrated information management solution to managing the University’s networks with external organisations and alumni, to mitigate the University’s potential exposure to reputational risk resulting from the lack of a robust mechanism to support external and alumni relationships and interactions.

Recommendation 6: The Panel recommends a more structured and targeted approach to employer engagement to ensure that the University’s links with top graduate employers are strengthened, planned and stewarded at a more senior institutional level.

5 Insufficient visibility of and access to placements and other work experience

5.1 The Panel commended the diverse placement, internship and other work experience opportunities provided across the University. The benefits of the opportunities with respect to student employability and as a student retention and recruitment tool were clearly articulated. The Panel heard that for academic year 2013-14 over 1,000 placement and other work experience activities, ranging from two week group projects to one year placements, were offered by faculties, departments and Professional Services. In addition, 1,900 volunteering opportunities were provided by the Students’ Union, including schools’ outreach projects, local community and environmental organisations, and for on-campus events. Whilst there is awareness at a faculty level, there is insufficient visibility of the bigger picture, and the majority of staff, senior management and students were unaware of the quantity and range of opportunities provided across the University and thus this is not able to be captured, presented and communicated within or external to the University’s stakeholders.

5.2 The Panel considered the view that all students should complete some degree of work experience prior to graduation but recognised the differences in the work opportunities offer across faculties and other areas of the University. The Panel noted the variation in how placements are currently delivered; some departments adopt an approach of students paying a proportion of their tuition fees whilst on placement, with others using the intercalation model so that students are not paying fees during that time. Consideration needs to be given to identifying a consistency in approach, as this would make it clearer for students and avoid confusion and complaints of differential treatment. Another consideration is whether placements should form part of academic assessment. A one year industrial placement, whilst providing a highly valuable opportunity for students to enhance their employability and compete more successfully in the job market, needn’t necessarily have to be academically accredited to add real value in terms of the student experience. The Panel suggested that an analysis of the costs and benefits of the different models with respect to the impact and outcomes for students in employment terms should be undertaken to identify where to concentrate effort, direct investment, and to inform future strategy. The Panel also agreed that a clear typology should be developed to define the different work experience activities provided by the University, both within and outside of the curriculum. The Panel noted that this approach would help students – and staff - to understand the breadth of the offer and to engage with it.

5.3 An insufficient number of placements to meet demand and for the University to be competitive was also highlighted as an issue. Geographical location was cited as a key weakness affecting the supply of placements, which can result in students having to travel or temporarily relocate thus increasing costs. The Panel noted Lancaster’s strong links with SMEs in the region but identified opportunities for greater engagement with top graduate employers and other sectors including NGOs, large businesses, and Third Sector employers to ensure that employer engagement is relevant for all areas of the University. Leveraging the work of Research and Enterprise Services’ employability mapping project to ensure that the extended range of enterprise opportunities are visible, supported and co-ordinated, was also viewed as important.
The Panel recognised the lack of internal resource to support growth in employer engagement and to provide appropriate placement support (pre, during and post placement) for both students and employers. There is a resource impact not only in setting up a placement but also in delivering support to the students before and after a placement. For a student to be able to articulate the skills that they have developed if the full value of a placement for the student is to be realised, support before and after placement is critical. However, the availability of resources to support this activity is a serious capacity constraint. The Panel also recognised the need to ensure a continuing employer relationship to deliver future placements and the need for effective ‘risk management’ of placement delivery to protect the University’s reputation.

It was reported that some placements are resourced from University funds where the placement is an integral part of the course but a number of placements rely on external funding, for example European funding through ERDF or from other sources such as the Santander SME Internships scheme. This exposes a weakness in the resourcing of placements if too much reliance is placed on the availability of external funding to deliver placements, and also raises the issue of eligibility of students for some funding sources. Inefficiencies also occur when students are passed around the University system to find a relevant placement opportunity if they are deemed ineligible for a particular funding source, or if their faculty is unable to support their placement needs appropriately.

**Recommendation 7:** The Panel recommends a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of placements and other work experience in the context of a new employability strategy and structure to increase student engagement and to raise the visibility of the University’s offer. This should include the development of a clear typology to define the different activities provided within and outside of the curriculum; higher visibility for enterprise opportunities; and evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of different activities for students and the University.

**6 Reliance on external funding sources**

Stakeholders voiced concerns about the lack of resource to build on current employability activities and the threat to the continuation of business engagement activities where they are mainly externally funded. A reliance on externally funded posts for core employability activities has been identified in Research and Enterprise Services, the Faculty of Science and Technology, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development and the Students’ Union. The Panel highlighted the University’s potential exposure to a loss of core knowledge and skills resulting from staff attrition in the context of job insecurity and fragility of funding. The Panel was also concerned about the internal signal sent about the importance of employability if these core roles were known to be insecure. The Panel therefore recognised the need to strategically plan for the delivery of employability activities, taking into consideration the resources required to achieve the plan’s objectives. The Panel noted that funding source has often driven the design of the University’s offer, resulting in support based on small scale or specific funding opportunities rather than developed as part of a more strategic approach to employability for which funding is then obtained.

There were concerns about the sustainability of the current funding model and the Panel recognised the inherent risks of relying on externally funded posts for core provision. Whilst HEIF funding has been secured for a further year, the Panel recognised a possible need to re-evaluate the University’s core employability activities in the context of uncertainty over future external funding streams. The ongoing uncertainty makes change and a more strategic approach very difficult to plan for, even over the lifecycle of a cohort of students.
6.3 **Recommendation 8**: In light of the strategic framework arising from Recommendation 1, a plan for delivery of employability activities should be developed, within a specific timeframe to be determined by senior management, which identifies the scale and scope of support required. The underpinning resource level to deliver this plan should be considered and agreed by UPRG, noting that external funding sources should then be allocated to support and enhance these resources, rather than to determine them.

7 **Lack of clarity on the role of academic staff in contributing to the employability agenda**

7.1 As described previously, each academic department has a dedicated Careers Tutor but there is a variation in role as there is no standard job description and workload models differ. The Panel noted the need to consider the potential for a University-wide job or role description to ensure parity of provision across all faculties, with FASS in the process of developing formalised job descriptions for its Careers Tutors for academic year 2015-16. The way in which Careers Tutors and other academic staff navigate the professional support is seen as key.

7.2 It was also reported that many academics feel that they have not had sufficient training to offer effective careers support and advice to students, particularly with respect to undergraduates seeking more general advice and skills. The Panel recognised the role of the CAP in-service programme to support the academic development of new staff who teach and support students to ensure that careers activity is embedded into the curriculum from the outset but noted that there may be opportunities to do more with current established academic staff in this respect.

7.3 The changing context of Higher Education and the dynamic job market has resulted in students being much more aware of value for money, quality of service and value added, the need to get a “good” degree and the importance of developing co-curricular skills. Some students expect to receive employability provision embedded within the curriculum as well as more individualised advice from the Careers Service and are less happy with more generic advice. The importance of complementary careers provision, between departments, faculties and central services, linked to the specificity of the individual discipline was therefore recognised by the Panel. All students should have opportunities to engage in ‘intellectually credible’ provision which is specific and relevant to their needs.

7.4 Whilst the Panel suggested a shared responsibility between academics and students with respect to the development and delivery of careers provision, the importance of the concept of student ownership, reflective learning and independent action was also noted. Students must also accept that it is their own responsibility to pro-actively engage with the opportunities, resources and support available.

7.5 **Recommendation 9**: The Panel recommends that the key role of all academic departments and academic staff with teaching responsibilities in contributing to the employability agenda be more explicitly defined and mapped alongside the complementary provision in faculties and centrally to promote shared responsibility and to help staff and students navigate support.

8 **Differences in the level of student engagement**

8.1 Student engagement was recognised as a key issue for the University. Whilst employability provision for the engaged student emerged as a strength, the primary challenge the University faces is not with the heavy users of the service, but with the sub-section of students who do not engage or who are unsure of their career direction – those who will ultimately face the greatest challenge achieving positive employment outcomes on graduation.
The Panel heard, from staff, students and graduates, that there is evidence of a behavioural aspect to this - recognising the importance of ‘career’ does not always translate into action and ‘career’ may be something that is simply deferred until later - and so the issue is how we mobilise them to achieve positive outcomes. The Panel noted suggestions that employability provision should be structurally unavoidable to tackle the issue of student non-engagement and to ensure consistency of provision. The Panel therefore recognised the need to raise the visibility of the depth of the University’s employability offer through the development of a clear narrative to inform University discourse with students, and through the integration of employability into the entire student journey, from recruitment, the student experience and curriculum development, to graduation and alumni engagement.

8.2 Embedded and accredited provision in the curriculum gives space for reflection through an assessed piece of work. The distinctive nature of the Management School allows for employability activities to be embedded easily into the curriculum but the Panel recognised that, for different disciplines and different courses of studies, the employability opportunities may vary widely and will need to be co-ordinated carefully with those developing academic programmes. The University’s commitment to academic excellence and personal development for its students should be reflected through the careful and sympathetic integration of academic study and employability opportunities. Good curriculum design helps students to construct understandings of the subject matter, develop skilful practices, and show care for the development of positive beliefs, metacognition and other complex achievements that employers value.

8.3 The language of employability also emerged as an issue. The Panel heard that students often find it challenging to demonstrate and articulate to employers – or even themselves – that the skills that they have gained throughout their studies are transferable and relevant. It is therefore important to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their skills and experience, and to explicitly teach them to articulate this properly. Students need to understand their learning intentions, to know ways of judging what they have achieved, and to see how to improve.

8.4 Effective communication of relevant information that addresses the needs of students at the appropriate time and which can be understood by being placed in context is also seen as key to success. The Panel noted the opportunity to provide more targeted and well-timed careers support, particularly with respect to careers fairs and events. Careers fairs are perceived to be more focused on the business, science and technology sector, and less so on arts and humanities. This view was also reflected in the discussions with current students. Careers advice is sometimes deemed to be too generic and insufficiently differentiated across years of study to address students’ changing needs. The intellectual content of credit bearing employability modules needs to be addressed in order for students to engage, and regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure a continuing relevancy. Insufficient, differentiated support for postgraduate research, postgraduate taught and international students was also a common theme throughout focus group discussions. The careers services provided are not always considered relevant to these students, particularly for the significant proportion of PGR students who do not follow an academic route.

8.5 Opportunities to capitalise on students’ engagement with the Colleges were identified, by using the Colleges as a ‘gateway’ for the hosting of more bespoke events and student-led initiatives in collaboration with professional Careers Service staff. The sharing of best practices across Colleges were also encouraged, including inviting parents and alumni to hold talks about their career routes and to provide mentoring services through the Colleges’ strong links with recent alumni and students.
8.6 The Panel recognised the importance of a student’s capacity to understand and articulate the relevancy of their transferable skills and experience gained throughout the student journey through the use of effective teaching and learning approaches and appropriate terminology. The Panel noted that the Lancaster Award and Lancaster’s volunteering scheme are good examples of existing opportunities which can provide this kind of support, to help students to demonstrate and articulate the skills that employers are looking for.

8.7 **Recommendation 10**: The Panel recommends the integration of employability into the entire student journey to tackle the issue of student engagement with the agenda. The importance of employability and the relevancy and opportunities throughout the student journey should be clearly articulated and planned into student support and personal development processes, communications and, where appropriate, the curriculum. This needs articulation and alignment with the strategic framework identified in Recommendation 1. The Panel supports a co-ordinated approach between Colleges, Professional Services, faculties and departments to effectively respond to this recommendation.

9 **Limited analysis of data to inform the employability agenda**

9.1 As previously described in section 8, ensuring that there is appropriate careers provision embedded within each course is seen as essential and without a compulsory engagement with employability of some kind that is relevant to the needs of students, the University will not easily engage those students who we most need to reach. Identification of this section of the student population is vital in order to be able to respond more quickly to students’ needs and to inform our provision.

9.2 The Panel recognised the potential to leverage off existing processes and systems to track student engagement (the ‘Careers Student Pre-Registration Questionnaire’ and Target Connect) and employer engagement (Target Connect and Raiser’s Edge) through the profitable, effective and legal use of data. The Panel noted that the Careers Service introduced key questions into the pre-registration process for academic year 2014-15 to determine the progress in students’ career planning and work experience activities. Captured within the University’s student records system (LUSI), this data should also inform discussions with academic colleagues to identify appropriate tailored careers provision to meet the needs of students. The Panel also noted the opportunity to personalise student support by tracking employability activities such as careers advice, workshops and engagement with the Lancaster Award on an individual student basis through the University’s Target Connect software.

9.3 **Recommendation 11**: The Panel recommends a systematic review of the University’s data with respect to student engagement with careers and other co-curricular activities to ensure that opportunities are maximised to provide the most effective employability support for all students.

10 **Outside the scope of the review**

10.1 The Panel considered the following to be outside the initial scope of the review. The University may wish to explore them in another forum:

10.2 **Recommendation 12**: The Panel noted that the potential for the Lancaster Award was not being fully met and that there were issues of continuing engagement with the Award and scalability. The Panel recommends this issue is referred to the Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and the Library for further consideration.
11 **Summary of recommendations**

11.1 In summary, the Panel made the following recommendations:

1. The Panel recommends that a strategic framework to support the University’s employability agenda (aligned with the University’s Strategy for Education) should be developed to ensure that employability activities are strengthened, co-ordinated and aligned with the University’s vision, and are given the appropriate focus and emphasis.

2. The Panel recommends that the University establishes a single institutional lead for employability at an executive level responsible for the oversight of the overall strategic approach, recognising that aspects of both the curricular and co-curricular currently reside within the senior management team. The institutional lead should work with senior academics, key members of Professional Services and College Principals to enable clear and accountable implementation through a set of pre-defined measureable objectives and to ensure that strategy and targets are owned both centrally and locally.

3. The University’s governance structure for education should ensure oversight and on-going evaluation of the effectiveness and outcomes of the delivery of the strategic framework for employability, promoting shared responsibility and effective co-ordination within and among the Faculties, Professional Services and Colleges, where appropriate. It was recommended that the governance structure includes a set of measurable objectives to ensure that the success of the employability strategy can be effectively assessed.

4. The Panel recommends the establishment of an operating forum chaired by a member of senior professional staff to plan and co-ordinate activities, and disseminate and leverage best practices with professional staff who provide employability support.

5. The Panel recommends a simple, co-ordinated and integrated information management solution to managing the University’s networks with external organisations and alumni, to mitigate the University’s potential exposure to reputational risk resulting from the lack of a robust mechanism to support external and alumni relationships.

6. The Panel recommends a more structured and targeted approach to employer engagement to ensure that the University’s links with top graduate employers are strengthened, planned and stewarded at a more senior institutional level.

7. The Panel recommends a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of placements and other work experience in the context of a new employability strategy and structure to increase student engagement and to raise the visibility of the University’s offer. This should include the development of a clear typology to define the different activities provided within and outside of the curriculum; higher visibility of enterprise opportunities; and evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of different activities for students and the University.

8. In light of the strategic framework arising from Recommendation 1, a plan for delivery of employability activities should be developed, within a specified timeframe to be determined by senior management, which identifies the scale and scope of support required. The underpinning resource level to deliver this plan should be considered and agreed by UPRG, noting that external funding sources should then be allocated to support and enhance these resources, rather than to determine them.
9. The Panel recommends that the key role of all academic departments and academic staff with teaching responsibilities in contributing to the employability agenda be more explicitly defined and mapped alongside the complementary provision in faculties and centrally to promote shared responsibility and to help staff and students navigate support.

10. The Panel recommends the integration of employability into the entire student journey to tackle the issue of student engagement with the agenda. The importance of employability and the relevancy and opportunities throughout the student journey should be well articulated and planned into student support and personal development processes, communications and, where appropriate, the curriculum. This needs articulation and alignment with the strategic framework identified in recommendation one.

11. The Panel recommends a systematic review of the University’s data with respect to student engagement with careers and other co-curricular activities to ensure that the non-engaged section of the student population is identified so that the University can respond appropriately and to ensure that opportunities are maximised to provide the most effective employability support for all students.

12. The Panel noted that the potential for the Lancaster Award was not being fully met and that there were issues of continuing engagement with the Award and scalability. The Panel recommends this issue is referred to the Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and the Library for further consideration.

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