

# Careers2032

An industry research project co-produced by AGCAS, ISE, Wonkhe and Handshake, looking at the careers sector of 2032 and the role technology could play in facilitating human connections.

Spring 2022



**WONKHE**



**Handshake**



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# Foreword

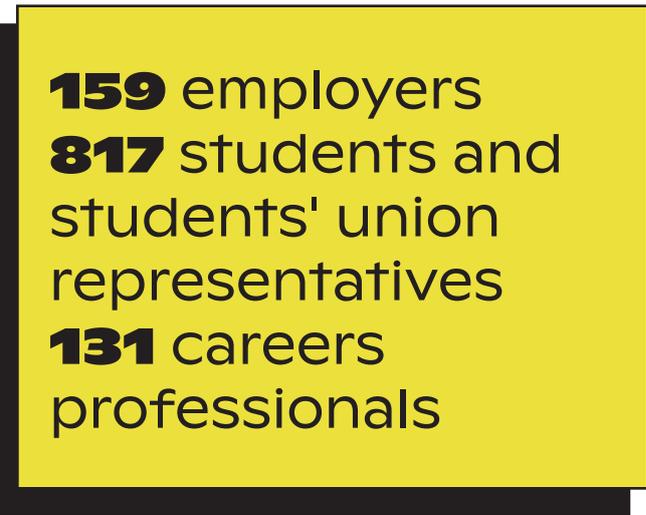
With the fallout from Covid-19 still reverberating through Higher Education (HE), it's easy to see why most market analysis for the sector currently focuses on how to navigate the immediate period ahead. As policies and strategies focus on rebuilding from a particularly challenging period, as well as preparing for the possibility of further periods of enforced lockdown, immediate needs have needed to be prioritised.

However, we now have a real opportunity to look further ahead, not just to focus on the short-term effects of the global pandemic on the sector. Although the continued impact of Covid-19 is of course a very real concern, how HE institutions react to broader trends like global competition and the continuing march of technology will also influence future success. Particularly, we have an opportunity to assess the changing way that students and graduates are interacting with employers, how the next generation of UK PLC is being hired, and importantly, we have an opportunity to shape a better future.

The partnership between Handshake, AGCAS, the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) and Wonkhe, allows us to provide a holistic picture, assessing how students, employers and university Careers Services view the future of student and graduate career development and recruitment.

To build this report, and create a picture of 'Careers2032' we have brought together stakeholders from Careers Services, student and graduate employment and students' unions – exploring opportunities and discussing how we can all work together to meet future challenges and better serve students and graduates.

In order to make this a reality, we hosted 15 roundtable discussions across the UK, visiting Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh and London, aiming to create an open forum for the exchange of ideas at each stop along the way. Supporting this effort, we also issued surveys among each group in order to gather quantitative data – working with our partners at AGCAS and ISE. In total, this report has been put together based on the insight of:



**159** employers  
**817** students and students' union representatives  
**131** careers professionals

The results of these discussions and research projects are detailed in this report. Notably, we can demonstrate that students' priorities are changing, and will continue to shift in the next ten years, that Careers Services will rely on collaboration as a way to boost engagement and improve outcomes and that employers see the need to work more effectively and closely with their colleagues in academia.

Crucially, the collaborative way we have built this report effectively illustrates one key concept underpinning the entire project: the importance of working together to fuel progress towards supporting students' career development and outcomes as well as the local, national and global workforce. Without this diverse range of voices, and the crucial partnership-based approach to producing the report, with AGCAS, Handshake, ISE and Wonkhe at the helm, this report would not have been possible.



# 1

**Introduction  
– how to  
navigate this  
report**

With Government priorities, forthcoming legislation and the surrounding economic and political climate being unknown and unpredictable, it's hard to forecast the future of student and graduate career development and employment. However, by analysing the last decade, and looking at what is happening right now, we have been able to make predictions about the challenges the sector is likely to face over the next decade.

Based on insights from 159 employers, 817 students, 131 Careers professionals, and incorporating expert insight from Handshake, AGCAS, ISE and Wonkhe, this report is designed both to provide a picture of the likely developments in student and graduate career development and recruitment over the next decade, and to help the sector prepare for the future. We know that Careers Services currently plays a vital role in students' career development and will continue to do so. It's crucial that as a sector we support students both today and into the future, providing them with lifelong learning skills to enrich a dynamic and prospering workforce.

The reality of any piece of research focused on trends and changes 10 years into the future is that we will not be able to make concrete conclusions with certainty; there are a myriad of unknown factors and variables that will affect current trends and help shape the early talent careers landscape. That should not render any forward-focused work meaningless, but should instead compel us to focus on understanding which current trends are likely to remain influential or even grow, what goals will remain at the heart of Careers Services in HE, and what resources we are likely to need. We believe the best way to spur reflection and enable us to focus on these important themes is to start from a frame of what questions to ask. Based on extensive research, we want to start by laying out what the sector should be asking itself as we prepare for the challenges and opportunities of the next decade. At the end of each section, you will find key questions from the research partners, which are designed to be revisited to support building critical lessons into your plans for the years ahead.

**2**

**The Student  
Picture**

Our roundtable sessions and the quantitative research carried out amongst 750 undergraduates in December 2021 uncovered an engaged cohort which is passionate about their future career. It's a promising indication of the future, and is mirrored by students' desire to work for ethical companies who 'do good' and – as one roundtable participant put it – 'change the world'. Indeed, the single top priority for students when finding a career today is finding the work interesting (40%) – well ahead of salary concerns in second place (18%).

Just as students' values are shifting, the methods they employ to find work are also evolving, with Careers Services competing with Google, as similar proportions of students would use web searches for information on opportunities available to them (20%) rather than more bespoke information from Careers Services (19%) as a first port of call.

**Table 1: Where would you be most likely to turn as your first port of call if you had questions about.... (Select one)**

	Google	Website	Careers Services	Lectures	Friends	Parents
Information on the opportunities available to me	20%	12%	19%	14%	7%	6%
Advice and guidance on what career might suit me	14%	9%	20%	18%	8%	9%
Advice on what skills, knowledge and experience I need	15%	10%	16%	23%	8%	9%
Opportunities to connect with employers and professionals	14%	13%	18%	17%	9%	6%
Networking opportunities	19%	10%	14%	16%	10%	5%
Career fairs and events	13%	8%	24%	14%	8%	6%
Mentoring	9%	5%	13%	32%	8%	7%
Support finding work experience	16%	9%	18%	19%	8%	9%
Support finding more graduate job opportunities	15%	13%	20%	15%	7%	7%
Advice on CV and applications	16%	8%	19%	18%	7%	11%
Advice on interviews and other recruitment practices (assessment centres, psychometric testing)	15%	9%	21%	18%	8%	8%

Careers professionals recognised this increasing reliance on technology during our discussions, and it underscored the need to capture student attention. As a participant at the Edinburgh Careers Services roundtable commented:

***"When it comes to students looking for resources, Google is only useful if you know what we're looking for. Even when coming to us, there's a wider challenge we're facing with the students, and that is: what can we do for them? What they should be asking themselves before reaching out to Career Services is firstly what they're looking for. The problem is, they're so information overloaded that it's hard to know how we reach them."***



This is undoubtedly a challenge which careers professionals will need to continue to explore in the next decade in order to help students and graduates gain access to expert advice and the broadest range of career choices, and not be negatively impacted by a Google-first approach. As one research partner put it: “Careers Service professionals need to produce accessible, engaging and streamlined content that enables and empowers students and graduates to come to them better prepared - and, similarly, students and graduates need to take ownership of this part of the process, ensuring they too are prepared and informed.

It is important too to address the uncertainty students feel about their futures. While there are always groups of engaged students who are sure about their future direction, there are many others who are unsure. 27% of students questioned

reported that their biggest obstacle to their future careers success is not knowing what field to go into – an issue which has undoubtedly been exacerbated by Covid-19 related employment uncertainty. As one student participant in Birmingham told us:

***“Building confidence and personalising services is important because the fact is, the students who don’t know what they want, what they want to do or where they want to go are too scared to engage with careers advice because they don’t know where to start. Say it’s a careers fair, it can be overwhelming – same goes for a careers advice appointment. The first question is often “what do you want to do?”***

A student at the Bristol roundtable confirmed this, saying:

***“Careers support is great and comprehensive if you know what you want to do with your life, but less helpful if you’re unsure about what your career path might look like. More focus needs to be put on helping those students who are unsure as to what they’ll do after university.”***



A further important issue for students is a lack of confidence about their future career, which students report actually increases as their university course continues. Our quantitative student research shows that 33% of students feel very confident about their career prospects during the first year of their course, dropping to 31% in year two – and falling dramatically again to just 17% in year three.

We also found that confidence diminishes in line with prior family engagement in higher education - and that the same is true when it comes to a male/female divide, with women less confident than men. A significant group of students (19%) said that limited opportunities in the geographical areas in which they are looking for roles also presented a barrier to employment success.

**34%**

I am concerned that I won't get a job in my chosen field as a graduate (Female 37% vs Male 30%)

**32%**

I am worried that I am not good enough or not ready for a good job as a graduate (Female 36% vs Male 19%) (Family university attendance, none = 36% sibling = 31% parents 28%)

**30%**

The economy after the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to make it harder for me to find a job (Female 32%, Male 26%)

Indeed, the issue of diversity was frequently cited in our student roundtable discussions - alongside a recognition that students have variable levels of social and professional capital which influences their sense of what might be possible for them, as well as their confidence to seek advice and engage with services. This sentiment demonstrates the importance of a strong equality, diversity and inclusion - and that universities must be dedicated to proactively reaching all students with tailored support.

In our roundtable discussions, we also found that students are looking for closer alignment between curriculum/subject and preparation for future careers - and for consistency across subjects

in approaches to this, within the framework of disciplinary difference and shared "graduate attribute" goals. Students' union representatives suggested that creating an expectation that most students should be actively seeking careers advice at an early stage of their learning is unrealistic. What may matter for some is having opportunities to explore their future professional selves within the curriculum, turning to Careers Services when they have a clearer sense of who they might want to become. Our quantitative research also showed 21% of students struggle to balance career efforts (work experience, exploration and searching for jobs, part-time work, applications, interview preparation etc) with studies.

# Key Statistics

## **40% of students**

say their top priority when finding a career today is finding the work interesting, well ahead of salary concerns in second place at 18%.

## **27% of students**

say the biggest obstacle to their future careers success is not knowing what field to go into.

## **20% of students**

are most likely to turn to Google first for information on opportunities available to them, with an additional 12% turning firstly to job websites.

## **Career confidence**

diminishes throughout study, with 33% of students saying they feel very confident about their career prospects during the first year of their course, dropping to 31% in year two – and to 17% in year three.

## **19% of students**

say that limited opportunities in the geographical areas in which they are looking for roles presented a barrier to employment success.



## Questions from the Research Partners

- How can careers professionals and universities support students to develop their career readiness by integrating careers education into the wider student experience? (AGCAS)
- How can the wants of students (e.g. interesting work over a higher salary) be better communicated to employers? (ISE)
- How can careers professionals become more visible and accessible in a world where some students default to a 'Google first' approach? (Handshake)
- How are careers professionals preparing to accommodate diverse students' needs for employability and careers support in a changing labour market? (Wonkhe)

**3**

**The Employer  
Picture**

In both our qualitative and quantitative research, we found that while employers foresaw the continuation of a challenging period in the years post-covid, engaging with graduates early in their career and fuelling the workforce with talented recruits for the long-term would continue to be a primary concern.

Currently, top issues among businesses employing students and graduates were primarily based around strategic concerns. Namely, attracting top talent with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion years' initiatives in mind (68%) and more broadly struggling to find the best candidates (54%) were prominent, while having hires renege on agreements to join (56%) and retaining graduate staff (54%) were also key issues.

These leading concerns suggest an opportunity for Careers Services – and universities as a whole – to utilise their expertise and understanding of their student body to work even more strategically with employers. The research shows an appetite for closer collaboration too – the vast majority of employers would like to work more with universities (79%) and Careers Services (77%) in the future.

Considering the particular challenges of recruiting in the wake of the pandemic, delegates from the employer sector in Edinburgh paint a mixed picture. Whilst some of them have had a big influx of applicants for

their vacant positions, others have felt that this year has been challenging when it comes to finding the right people.

More than half (54%) of all businesses say struggling to reach the right candidates is among their top concerns - with even large employers citing this as a concern in our roundtable discussions. However, this rises to 85% among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs - with fewer than 250 employees), indicating that the scale of this problem massively increases for smaller businesses with less name-recognition and fewer resources. Erini Tamousi, from [wearyour smile.org](http://wearyour smile.org), comments: *“As a start-up it’s definitely been a challenge in terms of how do we get to universities, how do we get our name out there, how do you approach universities and what’s the best way to advertise your brand? If you don’t know a company that well, you won’t go for it. Especially right now there’s so many well known companies recruiting. That’s been the main challenge for us.”*

One consideration raised during roundtable discussions in terms of being able to reach the right people was having access to the right platforms. Currently, most employers (82%) use non-university owned platforms to engage with students (for example, LinkedIn, Prospects) compared to 45% who use university-owned systems. However, the majority of employers (78%) felt technology could play a positive role in creating dedicated early talent networks to support graduate to employer connection in the future.

For the decade ahead, both our qualitative and quantitative research emphasised similar priorities and challenges. For example, employers of all sizes were most likely to say that retaining graduate employees will be the biggest challenge of the coming decade, with 71% being concerned by this. This indicates that more could be done to create a ramp rather than a steep step towards embarking on a career, encouraging students to think more holistically about what they want from the world of work from day one in higher education, rather than thinking about it two years into their first job. Making this a reality will require close collaboration between employers and higher education institutions, drawing on expertise among Careers Services staff.

In fact, a number of participants – and 78% of survey respondents – suggested that doing more to engage students and pupils even earlier in their educational journey would be beneficial. This would encourage those in all stages of education to consider their career options in greater depth, making the job of employers and Careers Services professionals easier and reducing the pressure on the final years of higher education. But some roundtable respondents questioned how this would work logistically, considering the

number of schools and sectors vying for time. Laura Anderson from HSBC suggested: *“It would be good to see businesses going into schools at an early age more consistently. But there’s no point 10 companies going into one school saying the same thing, cooperation across a sector is key. Everyone can win if we can take a more coordinated approach and focus on promoting the opportunities within the sector holistically. By different companies going into different schools we can positively impact more children in more schools.”*

Nofi Akerele from UBS UK Investment Banking agrees that this could shape the coming decade, and that technology could be applied to help this early engagement meet EDI needs – a top priority both today (68%) and in the future (66%) according to employers: *“One aspect of provision in 10 years’ time could be normalising early engagement. I can see an increase in employers engaging with students – in secondary and even primary schools. The virtual world has increased the scope in attracting students outside the ‘standard recruiting period’. This is where talent pooling will be particularly useful to employers – and platforms like Handshake can play a vital role here, particularly on the EDI piece.”*

Changes to the nature of recruitment in 10 years' time are likely to also include changes to what employers are looking for in candidates – and how they're looking for these qualities. The vast majority of respondents (86%) agree that recruiters will increasingly be screening for potential rather than experience or current skills. The challenge is, how should employers go about fulfilling this goal? This is a key area where employers believe technology can play a positive role, by offering alternative ways to assess candidates, such as making student-employer interactions continuous (84%).

However, it's crucial not to alienate candidates, and roundtable responses indicate that higher education institutions and employers have work to do in helping students understand exactly what employers mean when they talk about what skills they want graduate employees to have. As one student representative put it:

***“It can feel like an uphill struggle to acquire many defined skills and almost having to squeeze yourself into an approved “employable” box. Instead of a hard to achieve check-list, it’s important for employers to remember what we might bring to the table in terms of talent or potential – and for universities to help us articulate these skills and attributes.”***

Technology was cited as an important enabler for employer/student/graduate connections, providing automated information and advice, connecting students directly with employers and sharing information about careers paths and opportunities – as well as the longer-term goal of helping to enable students to better develop the skills and knowledge they need to a successful career for life. Crucially, 85% of employers feel tech has the potential to boost social mobility and ensure that career prospects are open to more people (86%).

As one of our roundtable participants pointed out:

***“Technology has the potential to deliver opportunities for students to develop social capital, have a broader view of the opportunities available to them and allow employers to play more of a continuous role, rather than the time bound ‘milkround’ of old.”***

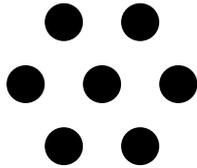
In fact, employers are more likely to disagree that in the future, graduate recruitment will be tied to a point-in-time event like the milkround (disagree years' 48% vs agree 26%). But in turn, changes to the timeline and cycles of graduate recruitment will impact what support, events and content Careers Services provide to students and graduates throughout the academic year. Timelines becoming more fluid or dispersed, combined with the on-demand nature of how students consume content, could mean a significant increase in the needs for on-demand content – and the associated investment in time and money required to do so.

# 81%

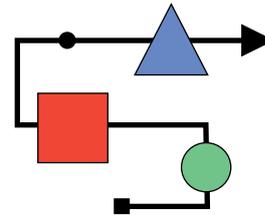
Requiring a similar level of agility, 81% of employers expect that in 10 years' time, they will be recruiting for jobs which don't exist today, due to automation and tech. This rapidly evolving labour market means the institutions supplying the workforce need to be able to react and evolve quickly too. This means Careers Services professionals will have a key role to play as internal labour market experts within their university, potentially drawing more upon their expertise to inform the institution's curriculum.



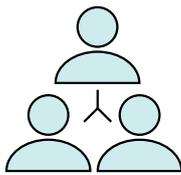
# Employers feel tech can support student and graduate recruitment in the future by:



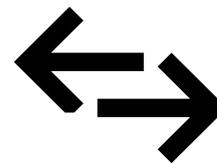
Creating dedicated early talent networks to support graduate to employer connection 78%



Automating information and advice 75%



Connecting students directly to employers 78%



Connecting students to more job and work experience opportunities 72%



Sharing information about career paths and opportunities 72%



Making student/employer interaction ongoing (as opposed to sporadic contact at pre-set times, such as events and careers fairs) 76%

# Key Statistics

## 68% of employers

say attracting top talent with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives in mind is a priority alongside preventing students renegeing on offers (56%)

## SMEs

are far more likely (85% to 54% overall) to say that struggling to reach the right candidates is among their top concerns compared to businesses overall (SMEs - with fewer than 250 employees).

## 78% of employers

feel technology could play a positive role in creating dedicated early talent networks to support graduate to employer connection.

## 78% of employers

suggested that doing more to engage students and pupils even earlier in their educational journey would be beneficial.

## 85% of employers

feel tech has the potential to boost social mobility and ensuring that career prospects are open to more people (86%).

## Employers

are more likely to disagree that in the future, graduate recruitment will be tied to a point-in-time event like the Milkround (disagree 48% vs agree 26%).

## 81% of employers

expect that in 10 years' time, they will be recruiting for jobs which don't exist today, due to automation and tech



## Questions from the Research Partners

- How can employers adapt their outreach, recruitment and onboarding processes to make the most of a diverse talent pool? (Wonkhe)
- How can careers services and employers provide a framework to ensure that EDI targets and career outcomes are being consistently met and opportunities are distributed more fairly? (ISE)
- How can the sector provide new tools, guidance and support to SMEs – who struggle to reach candidates – to reach more candidates without sacrificing quality? (Handshake)
- What information do employers need to really know a student is the 'right' candidate? How can careers professionals enable employers to get the information and connections they need? (Handshake)
- How can careers professionals support employers to understand student and graduates career priorities and access a diverse talent pool? (AGCAS)
- How can educators and employers work together to build skills through experiential learning and make the step between education and a career smoother? (ISE)

# 4

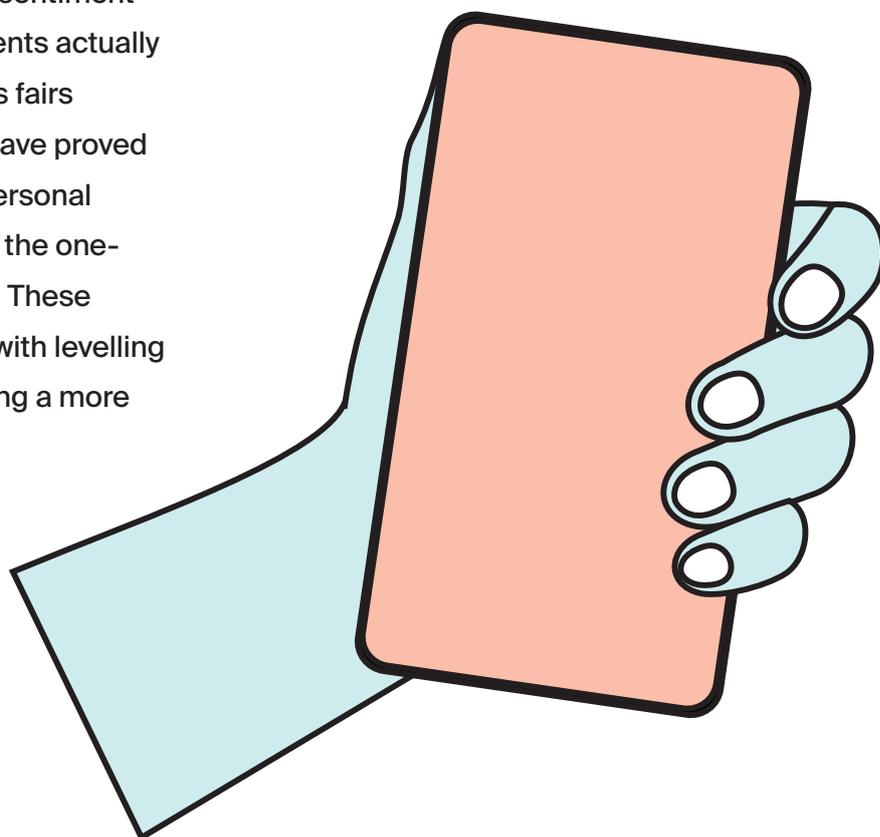
## **The Careers Services Picture**

# Covid-19 Response

Careers professionals in Edinburgh, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and London feel positively about the sectors' response to the pandemic – confirming that while Covid-19 has undoubtedly affected students and the graduate labour market, employers are still investing in student and graduate recruitment and opportunities in all sectors are opening up.

Careers professionals have responded at pace to the pandemic-related lockdowns, embracing virtual recruitment processes and harnessing technology to ensure connections can still be made even when face-to-face interaction hasn't been possible. Indeed, according to sentiment at the roundtable events, many students actually found that the influx of online careers fairs particularly over the last 18 months have proved beneficial, allowing more in-depth personal connections to be made, rather than the one-to-many approach of in-person fairs. These online fairs have also been credited with levelling the playing field for students, powering a more democratic approach to hiring.

Indeed, while budget and time constraints limit the number of institutions an employer (particularly an SME) can visit in person, online alternatives allow organisations to connect with more people than ever. This can open up opportunities for more students from more diverse institutions, whilst also widening talent pools for employers. What's more, some careers professionals indicated that an online mechanism helps less confident students interact with companies and Careers Services in a way that's more comfortable for them.

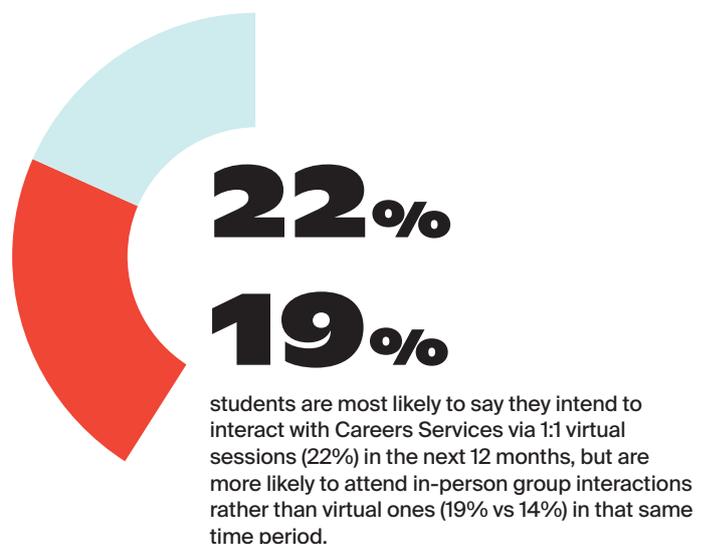


# Hybrid and Embedded Delivery

However, there is a feeling that after nearly two years of primarily virtual communications, universities see evidence of online fatigue. While still appreciating the benefits of a virtual approach, today's student population now want to enjoy a face-to-face experience too. As Lucy Wilson-Whitford, Associate Director of Graduate Talent at Coventry University says: *"Digital fatigue is now coming across. Often students say they want recordings of sessions, but it is debatable how much these are actually being engaged with in practice."*

Indeed, most institutions surveyed for this report are embracing a hybrid model that combines the best of online with face-to-face activities. Of course, getting the balance right between the transition to digital-first services and the appetite for in-person provision is a challenge – something reported by all groups during the roundtable events. Difficulties cited include how to market events and support to students, in order to compensate for the 'serendipity' factor while standing out from the crowd of similar careers events and information sources.

Whatever the medium, all groups agreed that keeping interactions targeted and groups small is important today, and will remain so in the future. As James Hairsine, Head of Careers and Graduate Futures at Heriot-Watt University, commented: *"We've found that smaller insight events (online and in person), with employers talking about what they want from students, have been successful for us."* Notably, students are most likely to say they intend to interact with Careers Services via 1:1 virtual sessions (22%) in the next 12 months, but are more likely to attend in-person group interactions rather than virtual ones (19% vs 14%) in that same time period. All this further indicates the need – and appetite – for a hybrid model, an approach that many institutions are already working towards.



# Personalised, Accessible and Engaging Solutions at Scale

AGCAS and Handshake surveyed 131 heads of Careers Services to assess the current challenges and opportunities careers professionals face. The biggest issues include students not engaging with career development activities and support earlier in their time at university, and students not utilising the university support available – both of which 98% of respondents said were a concern. This engagement challenge can also be seen in the student data (table 1), with students not seeing Careers Services as the first port of call for many of their careers related questions. Indeed, time and again the data indicates that students view Careers Services as one resource that is used equally with others in the ecosystem.

**Table 2:**  
Where do you think your current cohort of students would turn as their first port of call if they had questions about the areas listed below? (Select all that apply)

	A specific website	Friends	Google	Lecturers	Parents	Siblings	Other family member	Social media	Careers Service
Information on the opportunities available to them	61	68	94	66	60	27	34	54	74
Advice and guidance on what career might suit them	30	55	44	83	88	38	38	25	90
Advice on what skills, knowledge and experience they need	53	27	72	83	38	16	21	25	84
Opportunities to connect with employers and professionals, e.g. networking opportunities, career fairs and events, mentoring	41	21	45	58	20	8	19	57	100
Support finding work experience	52	34	52	79	53	17	34	46	102
Support finding more graduate job opportunities	80	35	73	61	35	12	22	44	101
Advice on CVs and applications	50	38	67	57	55	20	23	25	107
Advice on interviews and other recruitment practices, e.g. assessment centres, psychometric testing	62	38	64	46	38	15	16	27	106



As Caroline Tolond, Head of Careers and Employability at Arden University puts it, in looking to the future of provision in these circumstances: *“Being bombarded by information means students need Careers Services to curate content and help them identify trusted sources. AI and chatbots have the potential to automatically deliver this first line careers support when students want to engage – not necessarily during regular office hours – providing a personalised service and while also reducing the burden on staff to respond.”*

Also prevalent in the research amongst both Careers Services and students was the need for more personalised and tailored information. Indeed, the research found that meeting expectations for more individualised careers provision is likely to become significantly more of a challenge in the coming decade (79% vs 59% currently saying this is a concern). This trend in the data also surfaced as a consistent theme in roundtable discussions, where many

participants noted a growing need to provide more differentiated support. However, Careers Service professionals overwhelmingly agreed that tech can play a role here, with 90% saying it is likely to be a key part of facilitating personalisation at scale. The roundtable discussions reflected this sentiment; a common theme among leaders was that technology can be a powerful mechanism to identify unengaged students and extend the reach of Careers Services teams at scale.

Linked to concerns over personalisation and its resourcing, the threat of budget cuts and having to do more with less is predicted to become a more acute issue for Careers Services in the next 10 years – 77% rate it a top concern in the present vs 88% for 2032. The confluence of these two Careers Services perspectives - a demand for greater individualisation of service combined with potential reductions in budget - impels the question of how technology can help Careers Services scale their impact in the coming decade.



## Career and Well-being

It's perhaps no surprise that the importance of good mental health has become increasingly important over the last two years. The pandemic has affected many people emotionally. However, for our Careers Service respondents, a challenge has been to grapple with the fact that wellbeing conversations and careers outcomes are increasingly seen as interdependent and that the importance of job prospects for students' emotional stability is not overlooked.

Antony Adams, a Careers Services lead at the University of Wales, Trinity St David says: *“Employability and well-being are bidirectional. While there is support for mental health and wellbeing in universities, there is less recognition of the close relationship of wellbeing with career outcomes. There is strong evidence supporting this relationship, including in long-term outcomes. Confidence and resilience are huge challenges and are not something students would go to the counselling service for; it should be part of Careers Services role to help students respond. The model for careers needs to include applied psychological interventions.”*

For many institutions, careers provision doesn't end at graduation, as they provide guidance for alumni too. As Denise Morrison, a student ambassador at London Met says: *“At London Met, alumni still get support up to 18 months after leaving our university – something I help with. Disseminating information on employability and careers as a student rep can make a difference because the students reading it know that as a mature student, I've been through London Met as an undergrad. Relaying that to the students helps them understand I relate to them and their needs.”*

In roundtable discussions, these challenges of providing support for wellbeing and expanding the remit of careers professionals to also support alumni surfaced consistently. However, serious questions were raised about whether Careers Services are adequately resourced to address these responsibilities. Many careers professionals are already providing support in these areas today, but further research is needed to understand what additional staffing, training, and technology will be needed in the coming decade to help careers professionals in these areas.

**Table 3: Priorities for Careers Services – today vs 2032**

	Relevant now	Relevant in 2032	Change in importance
Students not engaging with career development activities and support	98%	93%	-5%
Students struggling to articulate and demonstrate their skills and qualifications to employers	95%	92%	-3%
Identifying and prioritising equality, diversity and inclusion needs of students	93%	89%	-4%
The need to demonstrate impact and value within the wider university	89%	95%	6%
Overloading students with information and advice	88%	88%	0%
Ensuring the number and diversity of work experience and employment opportunities visible to students	86%	91%	5%
Students applying for opportunities before they have the information and skills they need to be successful	81%	82%	1%
Students not having all of the skills necessary for employment	80%	82%	2%
Students finding it hard to connect with employers	78%	76%	-2%
The threat of budget cuts and doing more with less	77%	88%	11%
Difficulties engaging with academics in career service provision	73%	72%	-1%

# 5

**How can  
Universities,  
Careers  
Services and  
Students'  
Unions  
respond?**

This report has been designed to provide insights and discussion topics for the sector, raising awareness and supporting universities, Careers Services and students' unions as they move through the next decade – helping today and tomorrow's HE leaders and careers professionals to continue to support students career development and outcomes, as well as, fuelling the local, national and global workforce.

## A Truly Integrated Approach - Inside and Outside the Gates

There is the opportunity to build on work to embed careers provision into all facets of higher education – from engaging academics and in curriculum work, to making more of alumni services and utilising those networks.

A topic that arose time and again as a future focus was academic and Careers Service collaboration. At present, where careers professionals are able to embed their work into teaching and learning, it can be limited in scope. There is a consensus that more internal collaboration with academic colleagues (74%) and professional services (57%) would enable more effective working.

This suggests there is more potential here for university senior leaders to further unlock the potential of Careers Services teams by supporting better collaboration, rather than relying on one or two enthusiastic colleagues, who are often then called into other projects or don't have time to dedicate to long-term collaboration. In the next ten years, 89% of Careers Services professionals agree that a key objective will be to scale these efforts in the coming decade – making Careers Services input into curricula a systemic part of university life rather than a series of individual projects.

Careers professionals reported that their role is increasingly becoming broader than ‘just’ employability, and that there is an imperative in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic to help students shore up their wellbeing. This will continue over the next decade.

There is a need to look at the holistic picture of student life, said delegates at the Bristol and Birmingham roundtables, coaching students to cope with unprecedented changes to the way they study (and will eventually work), and to help them to establish confidence and assuredness in navigating the post-pandemic world. This view echoes our student data too, with 95% of students harbouring some kind of worry about their future career – and with the long-term impact of Covid-19 on the jobs market being among the most common concern, affecting almost a third of students (30%), rising to 37% among first year students.

**89% Careers services will play a more crucial role advising and offering insights that impact curriculum design**

**96% Careers services will increasingly need to tackle gaps in outcomes across their diverse student populations**

**84% Careers services will play a more active role engaging the alumni community in opportunities to connect with students and recent graduates**

**88% Careers services will collaborate more to support the wider student experience, e.g. working with professional services, the Students’ Union**

Student roundtables also discussed the role of students' unions in supporting student employability over the next decade, and there were some good examples of student societies working directly with employers and students' unions providing opportunities for students to gain accreditation for employability skills achieved through volunteering and work experience. However, the general consensus was not that students' unions need unilaterally to do more for student employability but that they could work more directly with Careers Services to represent the diversity of student experience, and develop closer alignment between the various activities and opportunities for students. While Careers Services frequently solicit student feedback on the quality of their services, it is less evident that there is provision for a sustained "critical friendship" between Careers Services and students' unions that could help to amplify key employability messages, manage and cope with expectations, and focus priorities on the areas that matter most to students.

What's more, delegates feel that Careers Services, wider university staff and students' unions, will have an increasingly important role to play in the wider community. Careers Services are internal labour market experts at a university - they have a vital part in boosting economic prosperity by fuelling regional businesses with talented workers - and as one employer put it "to stop graduates from moving away from their hometown

*on graduation, by offering them compelling employment opportunities closer to home."*

As has been the case since their inception, universities' role as a lynchpin in the communities they serve will continue to be important. A big part of continuing to achieve this will be in supporting local businesses with a steady stream of skilled and capable recruits. Engaging with SMEs in a more concerted fashion is a key part of this broadening out of opportunities - but support will be needed for these organisations to market themselves alongside large companies with brand name recognition and resources as well as to navigate the complex world of higher education.

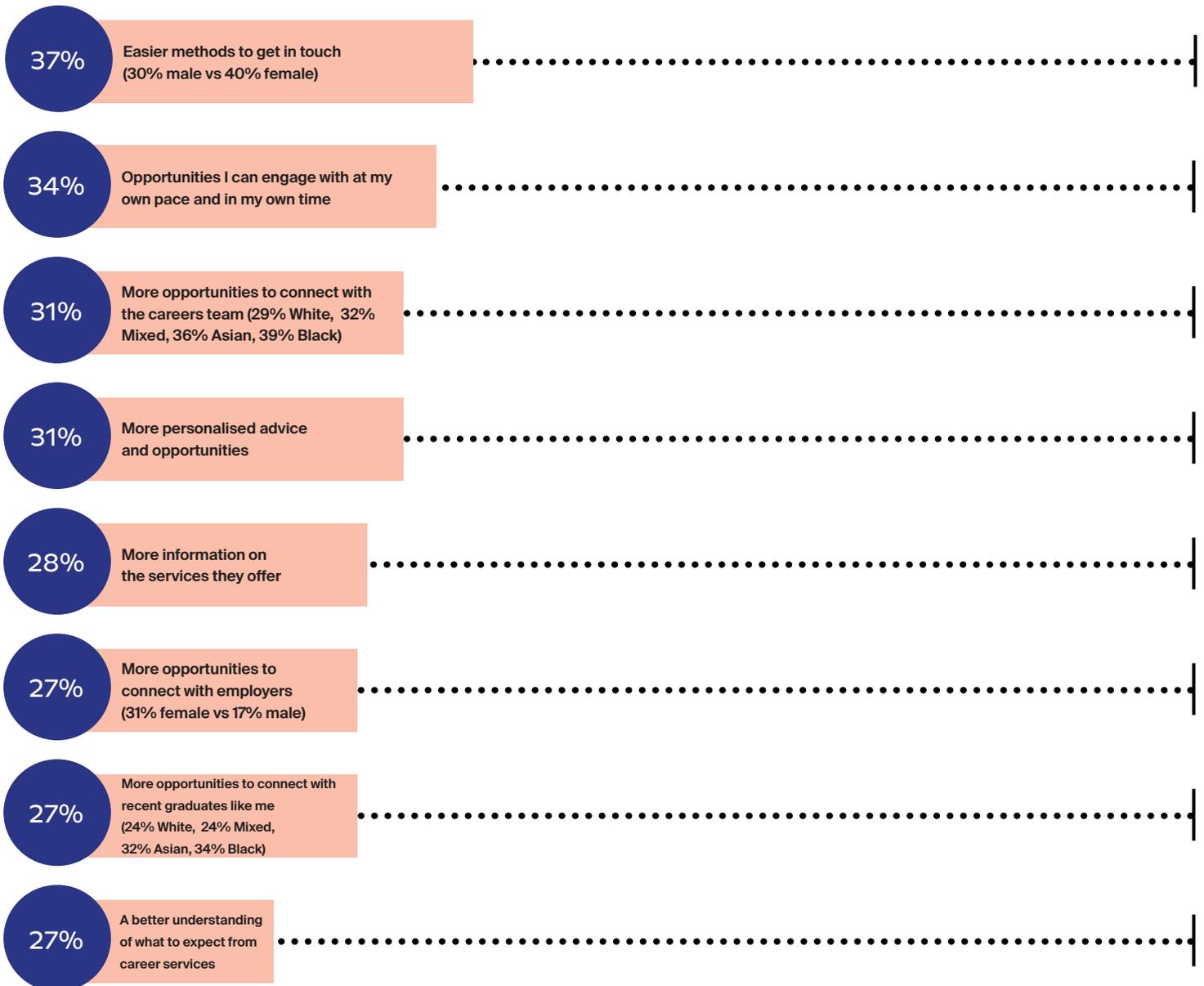
The roundtable discussions also saw careers professionals not just considering what Careers Services will look like in 10 years' time, but reimagining the purpose of university as a whole.

As one participant in the London Careers Services roundtable put it: "*The question in 10 years' time will be what are universities for? Are they there to create a pipeline of excellent workers, or other more holistic concerns? Will that perception start to shift due to changes to how we operate and changes to technology?*" One participant went further, saying "*one of the most important things universities can do in the next 10 years is prepare students to make their contribution not only through work, but find meaning and value in leisure and passion pursuits too.*"

# Collaboration, Connections and Closing Gaps

In the decade ahead, Careers Services must also be supported to explore the disconnects between students, employers and Careers Services and work to close them. Most notably, while many Careers Services participants in our roundtable sessions noted an apathy or lack of interest from students in engaging with opportunities, students reported a willingness to engage, but a lack of awareness of how to do so.

Which of the following would encourage you to engage more with opportunities available at your university to support your future career?  
Base: Students



While Careers Services and employers already do good work together, better collaboration can help all parties succeed. The roundtable discussions uncovered a universal desire for all three groups (employers, students and universities) to work more closely together to boost the employability and employment of graduates in the years ahead and to use technology to fuel these connections. However, tech is not seen as a panacea – with 80% of careers professionals agreeing or strongly agreeing that technology would present a challenge to face-to-face interaction, and 84% saying that in-person events would continue to play an important role.

Research among careers professionals also demonstrated this two-way street is front of mind when it comes to future provision. The data found that 75% see their role changing to link up employers as part of curriculum design in the next decade, while 74% said they could see their departments doing more to advise employers on their recruitment strategies, including EDI initiatives.

Careers professionals groups in Bristol and London both talked about needing to work much more closely with employers to help them understand what to expect when interacting with universities and students. It was felt that there was a mismatch between employers' expectations –

for example the number of applicants they could expect to receive when posting a job ad – and the reality, where it is more difficult to engage students than ever. Harnessing this insight will allow employers to better understand and establish relationships with potential recruits throughout their time at university – and will help them to secure quality applications from engaged students.

This group was also keen to impart knowledge and experience to employers – helping them to understand what this generation of students really wants from the companies they work for. Importantly, says this group of careers professionals, students today are not chasing high salaries or quick promotion paths, but are looking for meaningful work for companies with a purpose.

Employers in our roundtable discussions agreed with the need to establish even closer relationships with Careers Services and students themselves, with one participant noticing *“Ongoing collaboration is a two-way street. Employers get to meet the most talented candidates, universities are able to get to grips with evolving career opportunities, and students can develop the skills needed to successfully enter the workforce.”*



## Impact and Scale Powered by Technology

The biggest challenge identified by careers professionals for their sector over the next decade was the need to demonstrate impact and value within the wider university – 95% of respondents felt this would be a key consideration.

The role of technology – from apps to AI – presents both opportunities and challenges. With participants agreeing that many Careers Services departments are under-resourced, automating some aspects of the role may help direct provision to where it is needed most – sharing expertise and engaging those who are harder to reach.

# 87%

87% of careers professionals see their future role increasingly involving the use of technology to facilitate human to human connections between employers and students, while 62% think that some provision of automated information and advice would help free up the time to make more in-depth support available in the decade ahead.

The power of technology to facilitate top quality services, harness collaboration between students and employers, and create more meaningful connections came up regularly during sessions. But there was also an awareness that the sector needs to run before it can walk and in some instances, the basics aren't being done well currently. Carolina Salinas from Staffordshire University said: *"It is not talked about much in Careers Services, but internal systems are often slow, and don't compare to what students experience elsewhere. By the time they've worked out what to do and navigated the careers systems, they are often ready to give up. We need to make it easier as a sector to do the simple things like get in touch with careers staff quickly and effectively if we are going to compete with Google and social media."*

It will also be vital for universities to tackle the pervasive problem of 'information overload' that was cited in both the roundtable discussions and qualitative research. Respondents from Careers Services agreed that currently they offer too many platforms to manage and too many routes to reach their students, which can dilute the impact of their communications. In the next ten years, university Careers Services would benefit from consolidation, providing a more unified experience.

More broadly, Careers Services expect an increased use of technology, this suggests a need for deeper partnerships with providers and internal IT departments alongside additional resources that specifically support this increase in utilisation. In turn, this may also illustrate a need for tech providers to evolve their offerings to meet future needs.

One Careers Services participant from the Edinburgh roundtable commented on this issue, saying: *"Investment in technology will form a key part of helping us work less in silo. We've been fighting for some kind of technology solution for contact management, which for engaging with employers and the internal community at the university, helps you connect the dots and understand who is talking to whom. There's a cultural challenge in encouraging data sharing but it really is so important because otherwise you just don't know where the gaps are and can't be as strategic."*

Table 4: How will Careers Services teams use technology in 10 years time?

	NET: Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to provide initial basic advice on CVs, applications, interviews and other recruitment practices	97%	76%	21%	2%	1%	0%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to personalise the digital student experience	96%	72%	24%	2%	1%	1%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to integrate their offer into the wider student experience, including virtual learning environments	96%	75%	21%	4%	0%	1%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to automate communications to students	87%	50%	37%	10%	3%	1%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to facilitate human to human connections between employers and students	87%	45%	42%	12%	2%	0%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to provide personalised labour market information and opportunities to students	86%	52%	34%	12%	3%	0%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to automate administratively heavy tasks around reviewing and approving employers and vacancy content	86%	54%	32%	10%	4%	0%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to automate communications to employers	82%	28%	45%	13%	4%	0%
Careers Services will increase their use of technology to facilitate human to human connections between their team and students	81%	51%	30%	13%	4%	1%

# Key Statistics

## Careers professionals

say that over the next decade, the need to demonstrate impact and value within the wider university will be their biggest challenge – 95% of respondents felt this would be a key consideration.

## 96% of careers professionals

believe that they will increasingly need to tackle gaps in outcomes across their diverse student populations.

## Consensus

that more internal collaboration with academic colleagues (74%) and professional services (57%) would enable more effective working.

## 75% of careers professionals

see their role changing to link up employers as part of curriculum design in the next decade, while 74% said they could see their departments doing more to advise employers on their recruitment strategies, including EDI initiatives.

## 97% of careers professionals

will increase their use of technology to provide initial basic advice on CVs, applications, interviews and other recruitment practices.

## 96% of careers professionals

will increase their use of technology to integrate their offer into the wider student experience, including virtual learning environments.

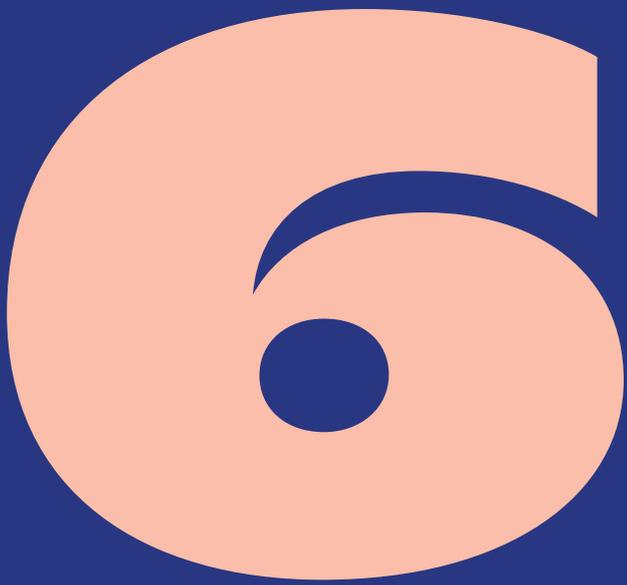
## 96% of careers professionals

will increase their use of technology to personalise the digital student experience.



## Questions from the Research Partners

- How can senior leaders of universities support the strategic alignment and collaboration between departments, professional services and student representatives to help diverse students build their personal career development journey? (Wonkhe)
- How can careers professionals collaborate with employers, academic colleagues and students themselves to develop student career readiness and graduate career management? (AGCAS)
- What evidence do students' unions have about diverse students' experience of employability and how is that insight informing institutional discussions about evolution of pedagogy, curriculum and career support plans? (Wonkhe)
- How can the sector use AI to provide support which is more personalised and nuanced, in a scalable way? (ISE)
- How do we scale careers education to reach the most students and graduates? (AGCAS)
- How do we use technology to increase cost effectiveness and improve support for students and graduates? (AGCAS)
- Is technology supporting careers professionals and universities with actionable data to understand the needs of their students? If this is not the case today, what needs to change? (Handshake)
- How is technology supporting universities to deliver a scalable personalised digital student experience? (Handshake)



# **Conclusions and Next Steps**



The key takeaway across the research we undertook and people we spoke to was that everyone was urging greater collaboration between all the stakeholders involved - and in order to shape the world in 10 years' time, every group needs to take responsibility for fuelling better working practises.

It will be crucial to entwine careers provision and academic endeavour - and to support employers to reach students earlier in order to create a 'ramp' to early career for each individual rather than information overload and a stark step up to employment. Vital too, will be making use of technology and AI to automate less complex processes and information provision, to create stronger links and connections between Careers Services, students, graduates and industry - allowing careers professionals to reach students, strengthen and deepen relationships within their community, share their expertise, and collaboratively tackle those bigger challenges and seize those opportunities.

# A final word from the research partners

“There are undeniable opportunities for employers to connect with students and universities in novel and fresh ways in the coming 10 years. Yet, employers need to be aware of using technology in a way that not only streamlines their recruitment process, but does so in a way that increases candidate engagement, diversity and representation of student and graduate hires. It’s important that with technological developments students don’t start to communicate more and more with AI systems through automated recruitment systems, but the employers, both big and small, work in partnership with universities to connect with diverse student populations and meaningful career opportunities. Success looks like increased collaboration across sectors, with a focus not only on the bottom line for employers, but also on the students they hope to employ, prioritising meaningful work, no matter what that will look like in 10 years’ time.” Nicola Thomas, ISE Head of Research.



"Universities can't predict exactly how the labour market will change in the next decade or what graduate careers will look like, so careers services can't plot a simple unified path to the future. What has always mattered, and what will matter even more as students, courses, and career paths diversify, will be creating the kind of powerful educational experiences that help students make meaning, build their confidence about who they are and what they can contribute in the world, and develop the agency to build their own career journey. Achieving this at the scale required will take fresh thinking, using technology in novel ways, seeking partnerships that go well beyond the transactional, and building services around students' lived experience and aspirations." Debbie McVitty, Editor, Wonkhe.

**WONKHE**

“It is unclear what the future will look like and it is important to embrace this ambiguity. Careers Services professionals need to continue to collaborate with academic colleagues, employers, and support service providers to embed employability into the wider student experience - supporting students and graduates to develop the skills and attributes to manage their careers.” Elaine Boyes, Executive Director, AGCAS



“The innovation we have seen in the last decade will no doubt be mirrored in the decade to come. In the next 10 years, technology partners will need to continually collaborate with careers professionals, universities, employers, graduates and students to invest in solutions to meet their rapidly evolving needs and expectations. Achieving this will require partnerships that go beyond service provision, that utilise expertise on all sides and challenge the status quo to design inclusive solutions that level the playing field for students and employers”

Clare Adams, Head of Education Strategy, Handshake UK.



# Methodology

This research project was carried out between September 2021 and December 2021. It draws on the insights from 159 employers, 817 students and student representatives, and a small group of 131 careers professionals from all over the UK.

Insight was gathered from a mix of face-to-face interviews at roundtable meetings in Bristol, Birmingham, London, Edinburgh and Manchester - and research questions posed by email to a representative sample of each of our groups: employers, student groups and careers professionals.

Institute of  
Student  
Employers **ise.**

 **AGCAS**

**WONKHE**

 **Handshake**

