

## SECTION 3: PARTNERSHIP: THE CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY ECOSYSTEM



## 9. Embedding Careers Registration data through the careers and employability ecosystem

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In today's rapidly evolving higher education landscape, career services play a pivotal role in guiding students toward successful graduate outcomes (Hewitt, 2020). As institutions strive to meet the diverse needs of students and stakeholders, career professionals are increasingly recognising the importance of leveraging their institutional ecosystems to drive student success and foster meaningful connections within the academic community (AGCAS, n.d.). To more proactively engage with these ecosystems, a new model has been devised at Manchester Metropolitan University by Dr Stephen Boyd and Rachael Collins which has assisted the recent evolution of our approach in managing the relationships needed to maximise traction and interaction with careers registration data.

This institutional ecosystem framework encompasses an interconnected web of stakeholders, resources and relationships, and is designed to incentivise a proactive approach to understanding the nuanced complexities of these partnerships. The framework supports a collaborative community and shared ownership of challenges but also helps us to stay relevant and agile in response to changing needs and strategic priorities. By understanding the dynamics of the ecosystem, and cultivating these relationships, we can drive positive change via our careers data.

The approach has been designed to empower career services to maximise their engagement and impact, offering a more conscious understanding of the contributors within the institutional ecosystems, each playing a distinct role in driving innovation, collaboration and progress. These contributors, ranging from informed consultants to critical friends, play an integral part in shaping the ecosystem's dynamics. They provide specialised knowledge, champion new ideas, facilitate resource access, foster connections and challenge the status quo.

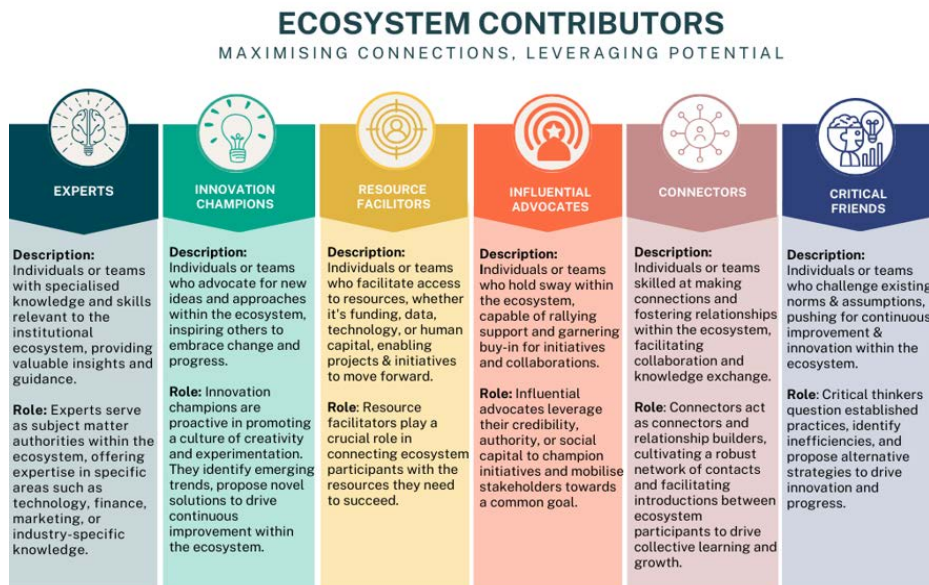


Figure 9.1: The Manchester Met institutional ecosystem framework.

Within the context of Career Registration, we have taken how we utilise the data on a journey, from niche internal careers dataset through to a core part of institutional decision-making and university-wide metrics. This has been achieved by, initially informally and latterly more consciously, leveraging the ecosystem approach.

### *Our Career Readiness Story: Evolution of Careers Registration at Manchester Met*

At Manchester Met we first embedded Career Registration questions at online enrolment in 2016/17 Academic Year. Back then it was very much an internal careers service dataset. As a team, we used it to analyse trends within the categories and to target students based on their responses. For example, if a student indicated they had no prior work experience but would like to gain some, we would then target them with work experience opportunities.

In 2019/20 academic year we had three years of career readiness data to analyse as well as our first responses to the new sector survey to track graduate activity (the Graduate Outcomes Survey). This also felt particularly crucial as this new sector standard Graduate Outcomes Survey had replaced the previous DLHE survey, which included the change of survey period from 6 months to 15 months post-graduation. This meant that this new sector metric was actually a lagging indicator (whereby there is little we can do to alter the outcome as the graduates have already left). As this new survey and the data released from it was going to become the sector standard measurement of graduate activity which would feed into the UK League Tables, it quickly became one of our institutional key education Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

We therefore felt it was an appropriate time to explore the relationship between these two surveys. In particular, we analysed the proportion of students going on to a positive graduate outcome and whether that varied by the career readiness categories they had chosen while studying with us. The results were staggering; **if a student was more career ready at entry to their final year, they were much more likely to go on to a positive graduate outcome.** Please see evidence of this in Figure 15.1 in our second case study. With this finding, as well as our new lagging education KPI, the results to our Career Readiness survey quickly became a lead indicator.

This finding also, crucially, gave us a story to tell far and wide across our institution. It was quickly shared across our service who went on to share it with a number of their stakeholders including senior leaders, academics, course leaders, employers etc.

As a result of our new lead indicator, as well as the story we were now telling, the Director of Careers and Employability requested that this survey be considered in our internal course annual quality review, our Educational Annual Reviews. Once this was agreed, we then had to build the CR responses into an interactive dashboard which could be considered in these review meetings and could also be explored by a number of stakeholders for a variety of reasons.

Over time this dataset and the insights derived from it became a key dataset across our institution. We now write reports on the latest findings, use it to measure the impact of our initiatives and have continued to update our dashboard to meet our many stakeholders and their needs of it.

### *Career Registration User Ecosystem*

Now in 2023/24 academic year, we have come a long way from the initial exploration undertaken in 2019/20. Please see Figure 9.3 below which indicates who our current users are, how they use the data and insights and how they access it.

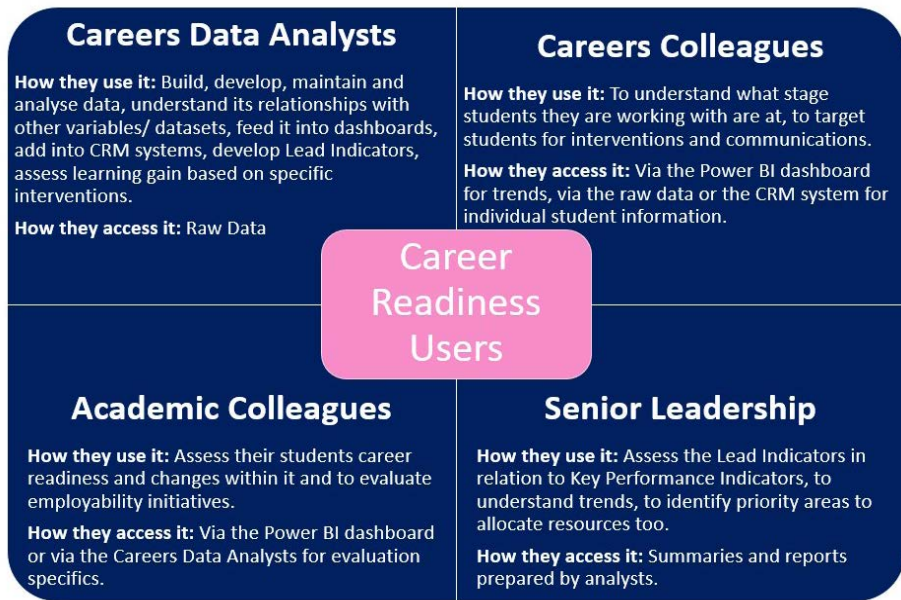


Figure 9.2: Career Registration Users, Manchester Met

### *Our approach to our users*

It is worth noting that the schematic above represents where we feel we are now with our users. This has been a learning curve for all involved and we have constantly adapted our approach to ensure it works best for all stakeholders. The above approach has relied heavily on our data analysts; we have never found that dissemination of Careers Readiness data and the insights derived from it has been a one size fits all approach. We therefore spend a lot of time ensuring the data is available via many different sources to meet those varied needs such as interactive dashboards, raw data, building it into our CRM system, writing up summary reports and visuals indicating changes in lead indicators.

Once data is available there is the next, arguably more crucial, stage which is helping our end users ‘use’ it, understand it, draw insight from it and feel confident in all of the above. This is also time consuming and requires analysts who are also strong communicators with effective people skills. Some useful ways in which we have approach this is by:

- Recording videos of ourselves talking through our dashboard and indicating how users can derive insights from it.
- Providing data drop-in sessions for colleagues to come to the Data and Insights team with queries.
- Going to present dashboards and data in meetings to relevant stakeholders.
- Going and meeting with academics and filtering the data to their areas with them to help them pick out relevant insights.

### *Considerations of our story and our approach*

Based on the story told in this case study there are a number of considerations we feel were crucial to the roll out of this dataset within our institution which should be considered for successful wide-spread awareness, knowledge of and effective use of this dataset and the insights derived from it.

- Senior leadership must value the data and the story it is telling and need confidence in using it to inform decisions.
- Resources are needed to analyse the data in house (data analysts) and strong communicators (data interpreters).
- Creating a dashboard is only part of the process, the data needs more in-depth interaction and analysis to draw out insight – only then can you showcase this more widely.
- Careers colleagues and academics need to have the skillset, ability and confidence to interpret the data and talk through the findings; analysts can develop this if they have availability to do so.
- Close professional relationship between the careers service and the academy is essential.
- The best way to get buy in and to develop partnerships outside of the service is to explore the relationship between Career Readiness and other key institutional datasets such as Progression, Attainment and Graduate Outcomes, without this it is really a Careers-only dataset.



- We would not have the partnerships we have, nor the wider Manchester Met interest, without having this dataset, and the dashboard it feeds, embedded as one of the key datasets within the organisation.

### *References*

AGCAS. (n.d.). *About us: Integrating employability working party*.  
<https://www.agcas.org.uk/Academic-Alignment-Working-Party>

Hewitt, R. (2020). *Getting on: Graduate employment and its influence on UK higher education*. Higher Education Policy Institute, Report 126.

