SECTION 5: LOOKING AHEAD

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17. Looking ahead: emerging developments

The Careers Registration process gathers a small amount of information about many people: essentially a whole student population. This comprehensive coverage is a strength. However, the relative simplicity required to ensure that the process works within enrolment naturally limits depth and nuance. Combinations with other data sets and the addition of qualitative data have been picked up in several of the case studies in this guide and will undoubtedly feature in future work in this area.

The Careers Registration process relies on student self-report and therefore has the risks and limitations common to this form of data gathering (Branford & Leon 2023; Cobb 2019). Set against this, is the remarkable consistency of student responses across institutions, over time and between countries, as illustrated by Kathy Ryan and Jane Black in the University of Melbourne case study and the enduring strength of the relationship between Career Readiness and Graduate Outcomes in the UK, as described by Andy Blunt. A recent collaborative project across nine universities in the Yorkshire region of England, (Tapley & Gilworth, 2024) showed that the proportion of year one students in the earlier (Decide/Explore) stages of career thinking was identical to that reported through the UK Learning Gain project seven years earlier, with no overlap in participating institutions.

Regardless of the macro-level consistency, it will continue to be important to check the language used with students, as it has been from the beginning and as illustrated in many of the case studies.

Embedding Careers Registration in the annual enrolment cycle provides time series data on a consistent basis, which can be analysed

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at various unit levels within a university and can be usefully combined/compared with other data which is gathered on a similar basis, such as other aspects of student records and Graduate Outcomes. However, as suggested by Kathy Ryan and Jane Black in the University of Melbourne case study (Chapter 4), the once-a-year nature of the enrolment data capture can be seen as a weakness in using the Career Readiness approach "live" with students. In their case study (Chapter 12), Sal Crosland and Gabriella Holt describe an alternative method of engaging with PhD students who are not required to re-enrol every year.

Several of the case studies, reflect on ways of engaging students "in the moment" with the career thinking stage principles of CR1. It seems both desirable and inevitable that these approaches continue to develop. These examples are all complementary to, rather than substitutes for, data collection through the enrolment process. Even if aggregated in some way, (through a Virtual Learning Environment for example) they cannot reproduce the scale and coverage benefits of embedding data capture in enrolment. However, these approaches could possibly provide a proof-of-concept model for colleagues currently facing challenges in getting agreement to embedding in enrolment.

The connections between the data gathered through Careers Registration and student demographic data, which is facilitated by embedding in enrolment, have great potential for improving understanding of and responding to challenges and opportunities in, ensuring inclusion and facilitating social mobility through a university's careers and employability offer. This will surely be a key feature of the developing application of the Careers Registration approach in all the countries represented in the CR+ group.

Whilst several case studies refer to placements, internships and WIL, most of the data work on Careers Registration so far, has been on CR1. This is understandable given the leading indicator link to outcomes and, indeed, the way in which CR1 can be used to evaluate the impact of some of the activities which would be captured in CR2. However, it is likely that the understanding derived from CR2 will be important in supporting equity, inclusion and social mobility. If data derived from CR1 can be seen as providing insight into career development from a "journey" perspective, the data from CR2 could

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be seen as informing understanding of "employability assets/capitals" acquisition. Combining CR2 data with student demographic data could provide some important insights into the distribution of access to, and participation in, employability capital enhancing opportunities. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the snapshot data and the need for more nuanced qualitative work, the scale and timeliness of CR2-based insights could be very valuable. This aspect of the work seems very likely to be developed further and several members of the CR+ group have indicated that more work on CR2 is in the pipeline.

In addition to combining with other data sets, there are numerous examples of ways in which the Careers Registration data set itself is being developed so that it adds more to the overall picture. The fundamental purpose of these developments remains the same as that which initially drove the inception of the approach. The idea is to improve understanding of the career development journeys of current students to meet them where they are and to provide appropriate support.

This concluding section will look at some of the developments in the Careers Registration dataset and their potential going forward.

An interesting development is the inclusion of what we might call "forward-facing" elements to the process; introducing additional questions or statements which ask students to articulate requirements or preferences for careers and employability support. Though not specifically outlined in the case studies, discussion through the CR+ group has indicated that at least two of the universities involved have taken steps in this direction. Manchester Met asks students to identify work experience that they would like to gain alongside asking about experience that they have gained to date in Chapter 15. The University of Huddersfield asks students to indicate areas in which they would like support based on a topic list: "What can I do with my degree?", "Finding work experience/part time work" and so on. In the staff dashboard, these support areas are usefully cross-referenced to the CR1 career thinking stages.

In the Leeds Conceptual Model case study (Chapter 5), Andy Blunt describes the way in which the categorisation of existing CR1 statements was reframed, resulting in three categories which indicate student support needs and therefore a basis for engagement: "Looking for Information",

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"Looking for Experience", "Looking to Apply." This re-framing was also applied to the collective, regional data in the Yorkshire regional project.

Whilst understanding self-reported status "where are you now?" continues to be very useful, especially in strategic reporting and longitudinal analysis, the above examples are indicative of the potential for students to directly indicate careers and employability support needs in addition to reporting their current career thinking and experience gained to date, or for these to be more clearly implied by reframing existing response categories for engagement purposes. As this develops, we should see more examples of this forward-facing orientation directly informing engagement and provision. In relation to equity and inclusion, it is crucial that this information comes from the whole student body, rather than just an already engaged minority.

The additions of occupational and location preferences (CR3 and CR4) were mentioned in the introduction. Again, they are future-orientated- "In which sectors would you like to work? "Where do you expect/would you like to work when you graduate?" Information gathered from the community of practice suggests that Occupational sector preferences have been quite widely adopted, though they are not universal, whilst the inclusion of a Place question is gathering pace from a lower base. For example, of the nine universities involved in the Yorkshire regional project mentioned earlier, four included occupational sectors (CR3) with a fifth about to implement this, whilst three had introduced location preferences (CR4) with a fourth about to implement.

Of the two, the inclusion of occupational sector preferences has the longer history. Direct use of this data to support employer engagement activity at King's College London was included in a University of London Careers Registration Forum in 2017 (The Careers Group, n.d.)

We may see further development of this application. There is a strong case to be made that demonstrable levels of declared interest from current students could be a powerful tool in bringing employers in the relevant sectors into engagement with a university from a graduate talent perspective. In graduate labour markets with substantial levels of "any discipline" recruiting, such as those in the countries represented in the CR+ group, indication of interest through Careers Registration may be a

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stronger predictor of graduate talent supply than data on subject of study at undergraduate level, particularly in subject areas where there are few obvious connections between degree title and occupational sectors.

Students' declared occupational preferences, particularly the ways in which these might change or consolidate over time could prove to be useful indicators of the development of occupational awareness - the O in the DOTS model (Law & Watts 1997, 2003).

For example, the data could indicate instances of a potentially self-limiting focus on careers perceived to be "in" the degree subject area, (where there is a face value link between the degree title and potential occupations and/or sectors) at the expense of broader possibilities which use skills and attributes developed through the degree but could be seen to be "around and beyond" the degree subject itself (Daubney, 2021). Using occupational sector data in this way, could inform interventions relating to broadening of occupational horizons and understanding of graduate labour markets. Rimmer (2024) found the issue of perceived (lack of) face value connection to degree title to be a significant factor in inhibiting student take up of the placement year option.

Whilst delivering valuable Work Integrated Learning (WIL) assets, experience in a sector may result in a shift of career intention away from that sector rather than further into it. Shifts in declared occupational sector preferences may be useful additions to the mix in relation to understanding the non-linear nature of the career development journey for many students, which has been a recurring feature of the narrative in several of the case studies .

So far, an understandably pragmatic approach to incorporating occupational preferences has been to use established, externally generated categories, which may be linked to available information resources (as in the case of the Prospects job sectors in the UK). If, as seems likely, the adoption of occupational sector preferences grows, it may be valuable to carry out research with students to understand the user-friendliness of categories from their perspective. The potential limitations of reliance on self-report will always be a factor in Careers Registration data (Branford & Leon, 2023). This could be particularly true for occupational sectors if the categories involved are not clear to the student audience.

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The introduction of a place-based element (along the lines of "where do you expect to work when you graduate?") has been driven by two factors in seeking to understand students' career development journeys. One is an attempt to gain some understanding of the aspirations of international students to work in their home country, the country of study (perhaps with regional preferences) or a third country. The other is to better understand home students' regional preferences (which may include working abroad).

International students feature strongly in the student populations of the institutions and national systems represented in this guide and the CR+ group generally. This may drive further adoption of this aspect of geographical preferences into the Careers Registration process.

The introduction of regional preferences for home students has been gathering pace in the UK. The desire to better understand this aspect of the career development journey at scale, is naturally connected to informing the ways in which the institution seeks to support students in understanding and connecting with, opportunities in geographical contexts -local, regional, national, international. As with occupational sectors, there is obvious potential in relation to data-informed approaches to employer engagement.

Understanding the importance of place is potentially significant in this context (Alexander, 2024). In the policy and strategic environment of "getting in and getting on" for all students regardless of background, place-based aspirations or constraints must play a part in "getting on" to fulfilling futures. This may apply to opportunities to acquire employability assets (or capitals) through work experience or other activities, during a university course, as well as to opportunities beyond graduation.

Incorporating place into Careers Registration can provide a basic indication of the location aspect of "horizons for action" (Alexander, 2022; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) which impact upon pragmatically rational career decision-making. Whilst consideration of work and place must be tempered to some extent by the rise of remote and hybrid working, location seems likely to be a strong factor in students' evaluation of opportunities. Geographical mobility is an element of social capital or

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career agency, which is not evenly distributed across society. It cannot necessarily be assumed in the context of graduate labour markets.

Charlie Ball (2021) showed that in the UK, "it is a minority of graduates who go to work in labour markets to which they do not already have an existing connection." Using Graduate Outcomes data, Ball showed that the "Incomers" group of graduates, who are domiciled in one region, move to another to study and then move on to a third place (often London) for employment made up just over 22% of the sample, whereas "Loyals" who studied in the region in which they were originally domiciled and then remained in that region to work were the largest single group at just over 42%.

The Office for Students specifically acknowledged the importance of the location of graduate opportunities in enabling successful outcomes in England, in its 2019 Challenge Competition (Careers Research and Advisory Centre, 2023; Office for students, 2019).

The quantitative data gathered on location preferences through Careers Registration has benefits of scale and coverage and has the advantage of being a leading indicator, but it cannot differentiate between a location preference as an aspiration or the same preference which may be a result of a set of constraints. Greater understanding could be derived from additional qualitative research and/or service/classroom interaction as described by Abi Blowers and Cerian Eastwood and Matthew Howard in their respective contributions.

Where they are adopted, occupational sectors and place preferences could provide universities with large scale, leading indicators which could further inform their careers and employability efforts, including employer engagement and the application of labour market information. This aspect of the Careers Registration approach is at an early stage now. It will be interesting to see how this develops in the future.

We have seen some reference in the case studies to the fact that numerous institutions have now cracked the problem of capturing Careers Registration-style data at the point of graduation. It seems likely that future work will tell us more about what has been learned from the development of close equivalents to Careers Registration at this later point.

Having instigated the CR+ project, the University of Huddersfield will continue to facilitate international practice exchange, research

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and innovation relating to Career Readiness. The establishment of the International Centre for Career Development (ICCD), within the School of Business, Education and Law, will build on the CR+ project by establishing and facilitating an ongoing and expanded knowledge exchange community in this space. This publication is a reflection of work across a relatively small group of universities at this point in time. Beyond this, there will be much innovative work going on across the broader community of practice. As the international community develops, we can look forward to further sharing of good practice in support of the shared aim of meeting students where they are and supporting them on their career journeys.

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