Please cite the Published Version

Jisc - Prospects

The career planning motivations and behaviours of taught postgraduate students from widening participation and non-widening participation backgrounds: A cross institutional study

March 2024

Authors: Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green (Manchester Met), Lucie Whitfield (Nottingham), Amy Longsden (Leeds), Sue Edwards (Huddersfield), Janice Simpson (York), Samuel Braide (Exeter), Mahsa Entezam (Manchester Met)

Affiliates: Annie Bocock (Leeds), Jokotola Ogunyimika (Manchester Met), Jyotiraditya Vaghela (Leeds)

Careers
Service

Jisc Prospects

Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Careers advisors, consultants and academics who are members of National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) postgraduate study working group came together on a cross-institutional study to explore the career planning motivations and behaviours of taught postgraduate students (PGTs).

Higher Education institutions taking part in the study:

- Manchester Metropolitan University (Lead)

- University of Exeter

- University of Huddersfield

- University of Leeds

- University of Nottingham

- University of York

The aim of this report is to provide insights and analysis relating to this study funded by the Luminate grant (Prospects/Jisc) that explores whether there are differences in the career planning motivations and behaviours of WP and non-WP PGTs.

We conducted a mixed methods study. The first stage was an online survey (completed by 1528 PGTs) and four institutional focus group sessions (with 18 WP PGT participants), to provide insights into career planning motivations and behaviours of 716 PGTs. We determine that there are similarities in the career planning motivations of both non-WP and WP students (with some nuanced differences related to work outcomes, related to perceived financial risk). However, the structures of opportunity and associated work-readiness of PGTs across non-WP and WP PGTs is different. In short, this means that career planning behaviours/engagement is very different across the two groups.

Finally, our report ends with some key recommendations for colleagues who support the career preparation of PGTs in our universities.

Key findings

- Non-WP and WP students have similar career planning needs, slightly different motivations, and very different career planning behaviours.
- Intrinsic motivating factors are more dominant than extrinsic motivating factors in making the decision to do a PGT award.
- PGTs opportunity awareness (capability to research job opportunities) is lower than their self-awareness (what career they want to go on to).
- 71% of all PGTs are working alongside their studies (c.18.5% are in full time employment).
- Nearly 7 in 10 of all PGTs currently in work want to go on to secure a professional role.
- 11% of all PGTs want to go on and do a doctorate within five years of finishing their postgraduate award.
- WP PGTs do not wish to seek volunteering opportunities, nor set up their own business.
- WP status of PGTs has a statistically significant relationship with careers provision engagement.
- International PGTs are more likely to attend careers events than home domiciled PGTs.
- There is no statistical difference between WP and non-WP PGT students in careers support engagement provided within programme.

- PGTs who have caring responsibilities and/or are first in family to secure a HE award are most likely to engage with career support provision within programme.

- PGTs who engage with career preparation provision value the service more highly than those who do not engage with career preparation provision.

- Business and Law Faculty and Science and Engineering students engaged with the careers service provision more than PGTs in other faculties.

- The biggest barriers of engagement with careers preparation activities outside of their programme are WP PGTs who are first in family to secure a HE award and those with caring responsibilities.

- All PGTs want a careers service provision that is accessible to them and recognises that they are at different stages of the career trajectory, offering exploratory, life wide skills developments and that centres them in the provision, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach with 'chaotic' messaging.

- Communications strategies & targeted support needs to recognise diverse needs but not adopt deficit positioning of WP students, who are work-ready (based on self-awareness, less so on opportunity awareness), but in some cases experience, 'imposter syndrome' and confidence issues.

The key findings summarised above relate to the empirical results (p.21 – p.46) of our study only and cannot be extrapolated to the general non-WP and WP PGT population.

Introduction

Our framing of PGT students as 'WP' uses the principle of under-representation in SOC 1-3 (highly skilled work), of specific groups of students who have intersecting characteristics. We do not place these students in a position of deficit or suggest that they are under-achievers. Our positioning of these students as 'WP' recognises the need to broaden and target our services to better support these students who face social disadvantage. Our position is that it is important that systems which have demographic-based inequalities and resulting differential outcomes across different student groups make changes to 'level up' and increase equality of opportunity. In this context, our aim is to provide data-informed insights and recommendations for enhanced access to opportunity for under-served PGTs studying within the higher education system.

Widening Participation

There is no universally agreed definition for a 'widening participation' (WP) student.

For the purposes of the project and to enable us to meet our project aims, it is important for us to distinguish between WP and non- WP PGTs. To do so, we determined a WP is a UK domiciled student (so called, 'home domiciled student'). Additionally, the student must possess at least one of the following criteria.

- Is of a low socio-economic background (Household income of <£25,000). Rather than asking about salary, we defined low socio-economic background through their primary household earner's occupation, which had to be either a technical and craft occupation, a routine, semi-routine manual and service occupation, or is long-term unemployed for the student to satisfy these criteria.

- Has caring responsibilities.

- Is care experienced.

- Has a disability.

- Is estranged from their parents.

- Is a refugee, asylum seeker or is stateless as defined by the UK Government.

- Was entitled to Free School Meals in school.

- Doesn't have any parents, stepparents or guardians with HE qualifications.

Although we acknowledge that this set of criteria is not faultless, we believe these characteristics to be a good proxy for widening participation (WP). It is important to note that there are a few characteristics that are commonly used elsewhere, which we actively decided to omit from this list.

- Is a commuter student.

- Is an 'Ethnic minority,' since we felt that this alone wasn't an indicator of WP (e.g., Black people are racially minoritised and categorised as 'BAME' but are more likely to go to university than someone racialised as white). The project team concluded that a more intersectional approach to WP status beyond ethnicity, needed to be taken (although Roma/Gypsy and Irish traveller (gov.uk website, ethnicity facts and figures, 2023), is acknowledged as an under-represented group in higher education – we had no respondents from this ethnic category).

Career preparation

In the Postgraduate taught student experience (PTES) 2022/23 survey, the highest correlation of any single item with overall satisfaction (for non-EU domiciled students), is for career preparation, while the extent to which course prepares for career is the third highest correlated for UK PGTs, after support for learning from teaching staff and smooth running of the course. As such, career preparation is a significant aspect of the student experience and one that has an impact on overall satisfaction.

In the report we use the terms, career preparation, career support, career provision inter-changeably. All terms refer to activities to support career planning activities.

Political landscape – B3 conditions, investment in education, PGT trends in higher education

There are external, higher education policy pressures as well as the significant factor of career preparation impacting on overall satisfaction of PGTs. This highlights the need for universities to review their careers provision for PGTs. With increasing WP student numbers, as well as condition B3 and split metrics, it is vital the sector gains a better understanding of differences in access to improve support services. By applying this research to careers services, respective universities can improve the efficiency and sustainability of their support and potentially improve post-graduate career prospects.

The impact of COVID-19

Another important contextual factor is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted students' abilities to engage with careers services on a face-to-face basis. Students now have expectations of hybrid/remote working which may have an impact on career planning. During national lockdowns, low-income students experienced a significant impact on their financial capital. Remote working can lead to isolation through reduced access to opportunities due to increased digital poverty (Donald, 2020). Although 53.3% of PGT respondents said that their main mode of communication with staff is online, digital poverty can be an additional barrier to engagement with career support opportunities for WP PGTs.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on everyone in different ways. However, a lack of application confidence and lost opportunities to develop human and cultural capital, has prevented social mobility (Holt-White & Montacute, 2020).

Project aim

Whilst there is extensive research into the employability of first-degree graduates, there is comparatively little for post-graduate employability research. This project seeks to provide a contribution to the sector, in comparing career planning motivations and behaviours of PGT students across five UK Higher Education institutions.

The project aims to gain insights and explore the career planning behaviours and motivations of WP and non-WP PGT students, through the analysis of data collected through a mixed-method approach. In doing so, this report aims to determine whether the needs of WP PGT students are different to that of non-WP and whether there are barriers of engagement with career preparation, that are unique to WP students. In doing so, we aim to provide some recommendations on how careers services can better support their WP students. Universities have a responsibility to provide enhanced opportunity for social mobility amongst under-represented students (Milburn, 2012), particularly in a higher education context where social mobility is restricted.

Overall, the report provides foundation for HEIs to consider what equity work is needed to address inequity of opportunity of career support, by better understanding the career planning motivations and behaviours of PGTs.

Background

Artess and Hooley (2017) explain that PGT outcomes data are not part of the HESA dataset so there is no sector-level view of outcomes. This is problematic as institutions cannot benchmark to others in the sector and student expectations cannot be set. Wakeling and Mateos-Gonzalez (2021) note that participation in taught postgraduate study has increased in the last six years following the introduction of student loans, which has also increased the diversity of the student body.

Career preparation support is reported in PTES 2023 as a significant factor of overall satisfaction by PGTs. To enter a career, (post) graduates must be deemed to be work ready.

The extent to which graduates are 'work ready' is seen as "indicative of their potential in terms of job performance and career advancement" (Caballero and Walker, 2010, p.12). As Ugiagbe-Green (2021) explains, the extent to which students engage with different spaces of transformation and extract value from those interactions in terms of work-readiness development is influenced by their opportunity structures (p.126). In short, the agency that is exercised by students to develop their work-readiness is influenced by the opportunity to do so. It is widely recognised that WP students are socially disadvantaged in multiple ways and as such, have less opportunity to engage in spaces of transformation to develop their potential and planning for career advancement.

Skills and knowledge related to professionalism and workplace behaviours rely on prior work experience and social stratification. Graduates are expected to understand "graduateness" (Ugiagbe-Green, 2023). Systemic barriers make it more difficult for WP students from low-income families to develop skills and qualify for opportunities to develop work-readiness such as placements and internships (Dilay et al, 2023)

It is proposed that the motivation for many students to access postgraduate education, is to access graduate and/or highly skilled work. However, limited social capital may hinder WP students, especially those from working-class backgrounds, as they lack extensive professional networks and connections (Cross & Lin, 2008). In contrast, non-WP students with high social capital have an advantage in accessing information about job opportunities through their wider network or even through nepotism. It is an equity of opportunity, that sets the context within which our exploration of career planning motivations and behaviours of WP and non-WP PGTs is set.

Career planning motivations and behaviours

Career planning is traditionally understood as the process of assessing personal strengths, values, and aspirations, establishing goals and objectives; identifying the steps needed to achieve them; and putting this information into a written career plan, which will then be periodically reviewed and updated (CMI, 2023)

Becoming career-ready is about identifying your options for life after university, including the skills and experience that will help you navigate recruitment processes and secure graduate-level work (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023). Career motivation theory (London, 1983) applies motivation theory to understanding career plans, behaviours, and decisions.

Career planning behaviours describes the actions that are taken by the student to support their development in navigating recruitment processes and secure (post) graduate work. Work in this context does not only mean employed work, but it could also be further study, enterprise and entrepreneurial activity & volunteering.

Career planning motivations – Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

The questions in the survey about motivation for career planning were rooted in whether motivation for career planning was intrinsic or extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivations (interests, enjoyment, inherent, curious, goal based and satisfaction)

Extrinsic motivations (external factors; family pressures, work related, self-endorsement of goals, goal congruence with professional body expectations, focus on the approval of others)

Available literature suggests that students undertake master's studies for various reasons including a desire to explore their potential, get promotion and a higher salary, broaden their career opportunities, get stimulated intellectually, acquire research skills, meet the requirements of a specific occupation, change a career, escape from routines and dissatisfying careers or institutional politics (Ayub et al, 2017).

Career planning behaviours – Happenstance theory

The translation of career planning motivations to actual action i.e., engagement with career preparation activities, is influenced by structures of opportunity. We propose that opportunity structures are rooted in happenstance and the extent to which PGTs are 'work ready.'

Happenstance learning theory (Krumboltz, 2009)

Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) explains that people follow different tasks through life and career. HLT is a used as a framework of 'planned serendipity' and a proxy for structures of opportunity in which PGTs engage as part of their career planning behaviours.

The traditional model of career planning is based around a four-part approach; the individual elements are described below.

- **Self-awareness**: knowing what it is you want from a career and what you have to offer an employer

- **Opportunity awareness**: researching different occupations, employers, career paths within an organisation, the job market, and maybe further study or training opportunities.

- **Decision-making**: weighing up advantages and disadvantages of different options in the light of what you know about yourself, assessing how realistic your choices are, and making decisions

- **Taking action:** developing a job search strategy, identifying vacancies or opportunities for progression, making well-targeted job applications, and preparing for interviews and other selection methods.

Work awareness (self and opportunity awareness)

Work awareness is the outcome of HLT in a career preparation context. As there is no existing scale or measurement for work awareness, we developed a construct for work awareness that is predicated on participation in career preparation activity within a programme. This is best understood as a space through which PGTs can pursue their career development, developing the skills to do so as they navigate career preparation activities. Different awards/subject disciplines have different spaces and therefore different opportunities for career development.

Work awareness (decision making and action)

Engagement in career preparation spaces that lead to decision making e.g., to apply for a job, undertake an internship, undertake training and action associated with the decision made. In the study we use engagement as a proxy variable for career planning behaviour (a combination of decision making and action).

Theoretical framework

Below (Fig.1) is a visual representation of how the relevant theories identified in our literature review form the theoretical framework that underpins the research design and methodological approach we adopt to explore the career planning motivations and behaviours of PGTs.

Opportunity

Motivation
- Career motivation theory
- Self determination
- Extrinsic
- Intrinsic

- Happenstance
- Work awareness (self awarness & opportunity awareness)

Behaviour
- Decision making
- Action - engagement
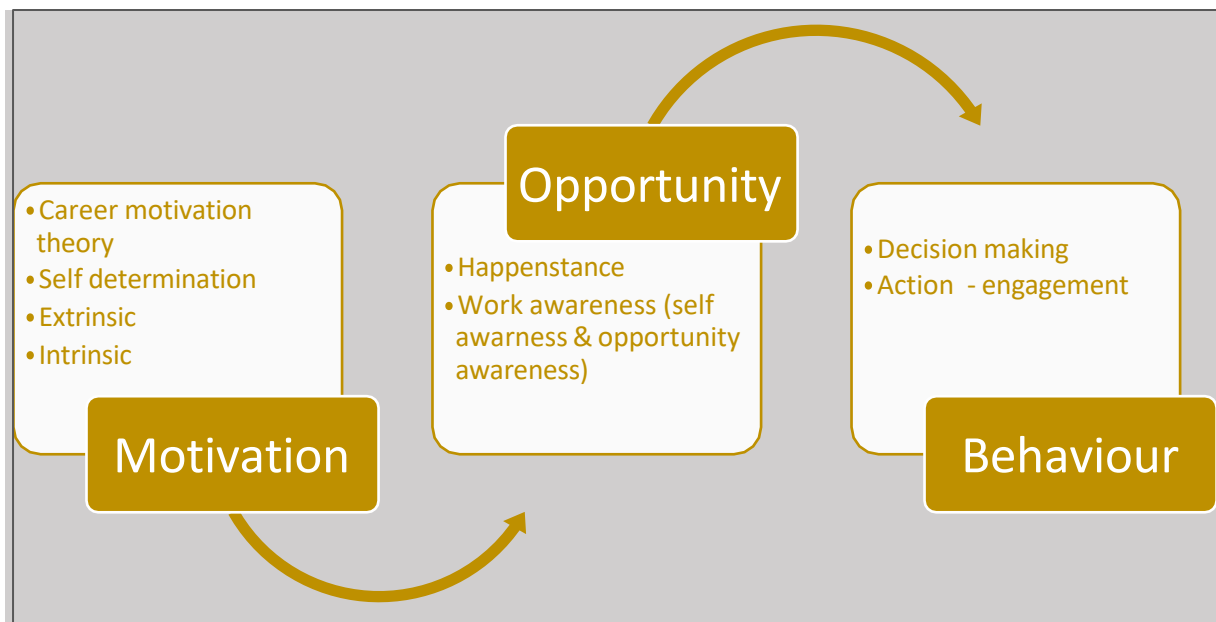
Fig 1. Theoretical framework underpinning the research design to explore PGT career planning motivations and behaviours.

Research question

What are the factors that contribute to any differences in the career planning motivations and behaviours of widening participation (WP) and non- widening participation (non-WP) postgraduate taught students (PGTs)?

Research aim(s)

The research aims to provide insights into the career planning motivations and behaviours of PGT students, with a particular focus on whether there are differences between WP and non-WP students. In doing so, we provide recommendations on how universities can provide career preparation support to these student groups.

To answer our research question, the project has three associated aims.

1. To identify and explore the career planning needs and behaviours of PGTs.

2. To evaluate whether there is a difference in the career planning needs and behaviours between WP and non-WP PGTs.

3. To determine how university staff can most effectively support WP PGTs with their career planning.

Methodology

To address the research questions outlined, the report utilised a mixed method approach including quantitative and qualitative elements. A mixed method approach "seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components" (Greene, 1989, p. 259). We apply the theoretical framework to our methodology to inform our research design.

Mixed methods – Quantitative and qualitative analysis

The online survey design was informed by the theoretical framework. The survey was disseminated via a Qualtrics web link to PGT students at each of the HEIs in the study.

The survey comprises of 30 questions, within which there are two main constructs/outcome variables: career planning motivation, career planning behaviours and four independent variables, WP status, work awareness, work readiness and work usefulness. These independent variables have been chosen as we acknowledge from our literature review that these factors may have a relationship with career planning motivations and behaviours.

Given the differences in comparative group size (non -WP and WP), non-parametric testing in quantitative analysis software package, R, was used. We used Chi-square to test our assertion that WP PGTs face social barriers which means their career planning motivations and behaviours compared with those of non-WP PGTs is different. We adopted Cramer's V to understand the strength of the relationship between the outcome variables and the independent variables.

In the next stage of the study, we used the insights gained from the survey data analysis to inform exploratory questions that we posed in the focus group sessions. These questions gave space to WP PGTs to focus on the barriers that they face in accessing and engaging with career preparation support.

Pilot test

Prior to general dissemination of the online survey, a pilot test of the survey was conducted. The survey was piloted with PGTs studying MA Career Development and Employability students at University of Huddersfield. Additionally, PGTs at University of York and Leeds provided feedback on the survey design. Finally, the survey was also sense checked by a few members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service (AGCAS). Changes were made to the survey because of the feedback received from these critical friends.

Data cleaning

Before accurate analysis of the responses to the final online survey could be undertaken, surveys that were partially completed had to be removed from the sample and a comprehensive overview of the sample data was taken.

Initial analysis of the survey dataset exported from Qualtrics, showed that there were variables that needed to be altered and removed. There were instances where a student had started the survey but not finished it. There were also students who were not a registered postgraduate student (Q5), who started to complete the survey. The next stage of data cleansing was to incorporate some text-based responses on identifying questions, that were not coded. The affected variables included course start date (*Q6*), university they're attending for their PGT course (*Q7*), subject area (*Q8*), aims after graduation from PGT (*Q16*), gender (*Q27*), occupation of primary household earner (*Q29*).

Following a comprehensive data clean, the original number of response surveys dropped from 1528 to 716 (4 students chose not to complete some of the answers to questions we asked to define WP or non-WP).

Aim 1: Career planning motivation of PGT students

This aim relates to our whole PGT population in the study. There is no distinction between WP and non-WP. Here, self - determination theory which suggests intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivations for career planning is used to underpin questions linked to career planning motivations.

Here we start with PGTs motivation to undertake a postgraduate award.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance
1	I want to work in a field/sector/industry different to that studied at undergraduate level	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.45	2.09
2	A postgraduate qualification makes me more employable in my chosen discipline/field	1.00	5.00	4.11	0.99	0.98
3	I want to gain new knowledge about a subject I am interested in	1.00	5.00	4.44	0.77	0.59
4	I want to learn more about my subject field/sector/industry - which was the same as that studied at undergraduate level	1.00	5.00	3.62	1.31	1.70
5	I was not ready to look for a job so chose to do a postgraduate course instead	1.00	5.00	2. 17	1.38	1.90
6	I was not ready to work in a graduate job so chose to do a postgraduate course instead	1.00	5.00	2. 12	1.38	1.90
7	I have been working but feel to get promoted, I need to complete a postgraduate qualification	1.00	5.00	2. 77	1.42	2.01
8	I am looking for a new job that is more suited to my needs and circumstances	1.00	5.00	3.58	1.29	1.66
9	My chosen subject field/sector/industry requires a postgraduate qualification	1.00	5.00	3.31	1.36	1.84

#		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance
10	I wanted to remain in the geographic region where I completed my undergraduate degree	1.00	5.00	2.52	1.39	1.92
11	I wish to stay in the UK and work, after I complete my postgraduate study	1.00	5.00	3.92	1.22	1.48
12	I believe I will earn more money if I have a postgraduate qualification	1.00	5.00	3.87	1.08	1.17
13	I wish to return to my home country with new skills and secure a job there	1.00	5.00	2.61	1.23	1.50
14	I feel pride in doing a postgraduate qualification	1.00	5.00	4.33	0.89	0.78

Interestingly, extrinsic career/job progression related motivating factors, were among the lowest motivating factors associated with the decision to do a postgraduate award. Whilst it was acknowledged that doing a postgraduate award would be a gateway into a potentially higher paid, more well- suited job, PGTs wanted to do a postgraduate award because they wanted to gain new knowledge, felt pride in doing a postgraduate qualification and believed that it would make them more employable, in the sector/industry that they wanted to go into. This demonstrates a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for doing a postgraduate award.

Q19 – Work-aware analysis

PGTs were asked to rate themselves between 1 (low) to 5 (high) in relation to their work-aware skills. That is, their self- awareness and opportunity awareness of potential jobs and pathways into their career. These questions are aligned with happenstance theory, to better contextualise how 'work aware' our respondents are.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance
1	I am confident that I can research and explore career options and job sectors	1.00	5.00	3. 87	0.99	0.98
2	I know what options are open to me after my postgraduate study	1.00	5.00	3.58	1.09	1.20

3	I have a good understanding of my skills, strengths, motivations and values	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.86	0.75
4	I have a good understanding of the kind of opportunities that would suit me	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.98	0.96
5	I know how to connect with professionals/alumni/individuals to get insights about my career options	1.00	5.00	3.23	1.15	1.31
6	I only apply for jobs that meet my chosen criteria	1.00	5.00	3. 64	0.99	0.98
7	I do things without being told	1.00	5.00	4.02	0.89	0.80
8	I have a high degree of professionalism	1.00	5.00	4.28	0.80	0.64
9	I hold myself to a high standard of work	1.00	5.00	4.44	0.74	0.54
10	I learn from my mistakes	1.00	5.00	4.33	0.76	0.58

Our analysis suggests that the PGTs are broadly a group of students who have a high degree of professionalism, hold themselves to a high standard of work and learn from their mistakes. They suggest that they have good self-understanding and do not only restrict themselves to applying for roles in their field (mean is 3.64). It would seem however, that whilst their self-awareness is high, their opportunity awareness (see above in red circled), is comparatively lower. Not only is the knowledge of jobs or opportunities that would suit them lower, but the ability also to network and connect with people to get insight about career options is lower.

Aim 2: Identify if there is a difference between career planning needs and behaviours of non-WP and WP PGT students.

We have reviewed the self -awareness and opportunity awareness of our general PGT sampled participants. This is to better understand what the career planning needs are across both groups and whether they are broadly the same, we sought to better understand what the specific work-related aims of non-WP and WP PGTs are. This acknowledges that work includes enterprise and entrepreneurial activity, volunteering and further study.

The table below shows the different aims as represented by different students across our PGT population.

		Q16: Which of the following actions below best describes your aim after you complete your postgraduate award?							
		Secure a professional job role	Secure a doctoral study place	Secure another PG/ Chartered award	Go back to my existing job role	Continue in existing job job role	Set up my own business	Secure a volunteering role	Other (please state)
Do you commute to attend university?	Yes	69.7%	48.6%	41.7%	52.6%	60.5%	100.0%	100.0%	50.0%
	No	30.3%	51.4%	58.3%	47.4%	39.5%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Do you have caring responsibilities?	Yes	23.0%	37.5%	25.0%	36.8%	28.9%	62.5%	50.0%	45.5%
	No	77.0%	62.5%	75.0%	63.2%	71.1%	37.5%	50.0%	54.5%
Are you care experienced?	Yes	28.0%	30.6%	25.0%	36.8%	26.3%	73.3%	50.0%	31.8%
	No	72.0%	69.4%	75.0%	63.2%	73.7%	26.7%	50.0%	68.2%
Do you work part-time?	Yes	58.5%	50.7%	25.0%	42.1%	21.6%	56.3%	50.0%	45.0%
	No	41.5%	49.3%	75.0%	57.9%	78.4%	43.8%	50.0%	55.0%
Do you work full-time?	Yes	9.9%	25.7%	27.3%	26.3%	81.1%	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%
	No	90.1%	74.3%	72.7%	73.7%	18.9%	100.0%	100.0%	57.1%
Do you receive financial assistance to support your studies?	Yes	35.9%	33.3%	33.3%	31.6%	31.6%	25.0%	0.0%	27.3%
	No	64.1%	66.7%	66.7%	68.4%	68.4%	75.0%	100.0%	72.7%
Do you have a disability?	Yes	10.4%	9.7%	25.0%	10.5%	13.5%	18.8%	0.0%	22.7%
	No	89.6%	90.3%	75.0%	89.5%	86.5%	81.3%	100.0%	77.3%
Do you have recognised asylum seeker, refugee or stateless status granted by UK government?	Yes	1.8%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%	4.5%
	No	98.2%	98.6%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	93.8%	100.0%	95.5%
Do you consider yourself to be estranged from your parents?	Yes	6.6%	6.9%	0.0%	5.3%	7.9%	0.0%	50.0%	4.5%
	No	93.4%	93.1%	100.0%	94.7%	92.1%	100.0%	50.0%	95.5%
Were you entitled to receive free school meals during your secondary education?	Yes	8.6%	12.5%	8.3%	26.3%	21.1%	12.5%	0.0%	22.7%
	No	91.4%	87.5%	91.7%	73.7%	78.9%	87.5%	100.0%	77.3%
Do any of your parents, stepparents or guardians have HE qualifications?	Yes	39.3%	38.6%	25.0%	15.8%	52.6%	18.8%	0.0%	31.8%
	No	60.7%	61.4%	75.0%	84.2%	47.4%	81.3%	100.0%	68.2%

Figure 2: Table showing career aims of non-WP and WP PGT students when they finish their postgraduate award.

Q16 - WP and non-WP PGT career aims.

68.2% of PGT survey respondents suggested that they wish to secure a professional role when they complete their PG studies. Of these, nearly 10% are currently working full-time and 58.5% of these students are currently working part time. This means nearly 7 in 10 of those currently working wish to go on to secure a professional role after completion of their PGT studies.

11.7% of all PGT respondents state they wish to secure a doctoral study place. 7% of all PGTs suggesting that they wish to continue in their existing role. A small number of PGTs (<4%) were retiring or travelling after they completed their PG study.

Interestingly, all non- WP PGTs (in the 'no categories above), expressed an aim that spanned all the post award (work) outcomes that we referred to in the survey. However, this was not the case for WP students. Those PGTs classified as specifically from a low-income background or in full time employment do not wish to secure a volunteering role and/or set up their own business. Those with asylum seeker/refugee status wish to secure a professional job role/doctoral study place. PGTs with a disability do not wish to secure a volunteering role. Those who are estranged from their parents/guardians do not wish to do another PG award nor do they wish to set up their own

business. In short, WP students do not aim to take on opportunities where there is perceived higher financial risk.

As such, our analysis shows that broadly speaking, the careers support provision needs for both WP and non-WP students is the same. There are some nuanced differences across specific opportunities e.g., volunteering or setting up a business or other subsequent Post graduate awards e.g., chartered qualification, as noted above, but these differences are comparatively small when we compare both groups.

In making recommendations about how to best support WP PGT students career preparation support, we need to determine not only whether there are differences in careers support need, but also in how students across the two groups currently engage with careers support provision.

Therefore, the next stage of our study is to design a model in which we can determine whether WP status is statistically significant, in analysing decision making and actions (measured by careers provision engagement), in order that we can determine whether there is a difference in career planning behaviours.

Model design

Outcome variables

Engagement is a categorical variable used as a proxy of career planning behaviour.

interventionuse is created by adding all the *Q14b* variables together to create a scale in which any negative number means that overall, the participant has found career interventions not useful, and any positive number means that overall, the participant found career interventions useful. Any calculations equal to zero mean that they have had equally positive and negative experiences with career interventions *or* that they have not accessed any career interventions. The fact that it also considers respondents who hadn't accessed any career provisions was a challenge for the statistical modelling and construction of the scale for this variable. As such, there are limitations associated with the reliability of this scale.

The variable *onprogrammepart* and was created by adding all the *Q15b* variables together to create a scale in the same way as interventionuse, but that measures engagement with careers preparation interventions within programme.

Independent variables

WP status – identified using the WP criteria we have set with the values determined by aggregating scores for Q29 and Q30.

Work aware – self-awareness, opportunity awareness and skills needed to research and apply for work opportunities with the values determined by aggregating scores for Q18, Q19, Q23

Work readiness - skills needed for future accomplishment in work context with the values determined using Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22

Work usefulness – perceptions of value of careers provision available to PGTs with values determined by aggregating scores for Q18, Q19 and Q23.

Alongside the variables created, code was written in R, to extract the data of individual universities into their own datasets. The names for these are:

- *MMU* – Manchester Metropolitan University

- *Leeds* – University of Leeds

- *York* – University of York

- *Exeter* – University of Exeter

- *Notts* – University of Nottingham

- *Hudds* - University of Huddersfield

Reference has been made to the relevant HEI in our data analysis, where the institutional data is statistically significant.

Data analysis (WP and Non – WP PGTs)

Below are the criteria that we have used to distinguish between WP and non-WP PGTs (although commuting is not included in the criteria). We also used registered status of the student (Q10), as only home domiciled students (44.7%) were included in WP PGT group.

We analysed data from Q.30 which showed that over half (53.3%) of all our survey respondents are working part time and nearly one fifth (18.5%) are working full time. Nearly two fifths (38%) of

respondents are first in family to achieve a HE award, with a similar proportion of students receiving financial assistance to undertake their studies. PGTs within our sample, are students with WP identities right across the scope of our criteria. Over a quarter (c.30%) of PGTs have caring responsibilities, with the same proportion of care experienced PGTs. There are also PGTs who are estranged from parents (6.4%), have a disability (11.5%) or asylum seeker/refugee (1.7%).

The ratio of WP (40%) to non-WP (60%) is roughly is consistent at each university except for the University of Exeter which had more WP respondents than non-WP.

			Total
Q30: Please answer the following questions about your personal circumstances	Do you commute to attend university?	Yes	65.5%
		No	34.5%
	Do you have caring responsibilities?	Yes	27.7%
		No	72.3%
	Are you care experienced?	Yes	29.9%
		No	70.1%
	Do you work part-time?	Yes	53.3%
		No	46.7%
	Do you work full-time?	Yes	18.5%
		No	81.5%
	Do you receive financial assistance to support your studies?	Yes	34.4%
		No	65.6%
	Do you have a disability?	Yes	11.5%
		No	88.5%
	Do you have recognised asylum seeker, refugee or stateless status granted by UK government?	Yes	1.7%
		No	98.3%
	Do you consider yourself to be estranged from your parents?	Yes	6.4%
		No	93.6%
	Were you entitled to receive free school meals during your secondary education?	Yes	11.1%
		No	88.9%
	Do any of your parents, stepparents or guardians have HE qualifications?	Yes	38.0%
		No	62.0%

Figure 4: Table showing the responses of PGTs to distinguish between non-WP and WP PGTs

In our sample, there are **285** students who have been categorised as WP and **427** that are non-WP.
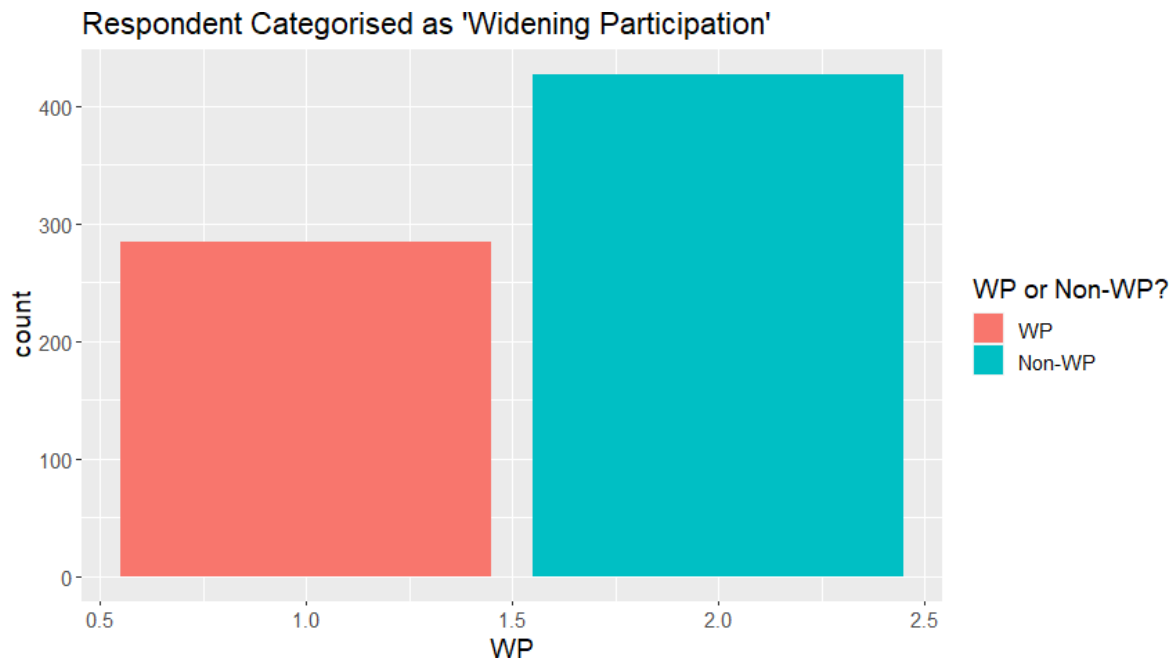
Figure 5: Bar chart showing the split between WP and non-WP PGTs in our sample**.**

There were quite large disparities in the number of respondents across each of our partner universities due to differing populations of PGT students at each university. This was due to varying PGT cohorts across institutions, as well as staff capacity to promote the survey and other factors.
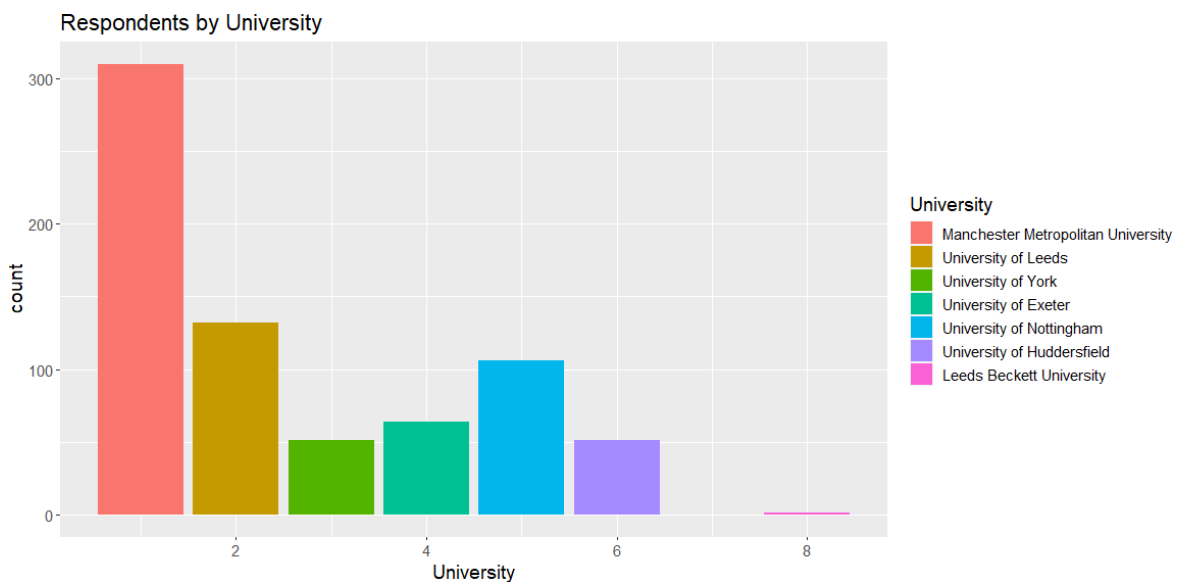
Figure 6: Bar chart showing the spread of responses across the participating universities.

Engagement with careers service via PGT programme

WP status and engagement with careers

Our analysis of engagement with careers service shows that in our sample, WP students tend to use university career services less than non-WP students. We ran a Chi-squared test between the two groups, which showed that $p < 0.05$ (95% confidence level) and a **Cramer's V value of 0.22**. This demonstrates a moderate association between WP status and career activity engagement.

WP student status and engagement with careers via PGT programme

The graph below shows that a larger proportion of non-WP students are using university careers services more often. This trend also follows when you analyse the association between WP and non-WP student groups and the number of activities they access as a direct result of their PGT programme.

The graphic below shows the engagement in general careers provision provided by the university, by both non -WP and WP PGT students at each of the participating universities.
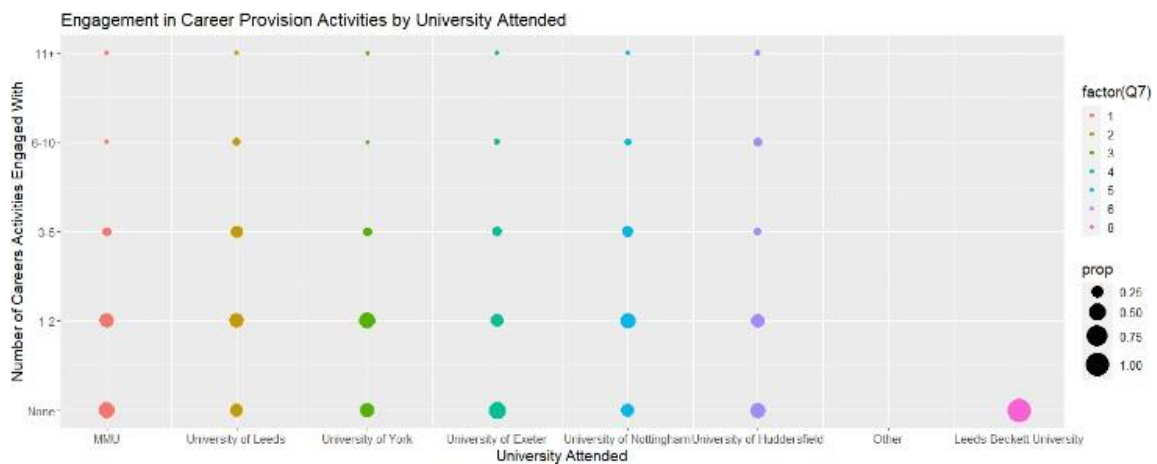
Figure 7: Spot chart showing the spread of engagement across all institutions, with career provision activities.

Engagement in Career Provision Activities via PGT Programme Across WP and Non-WP Groups
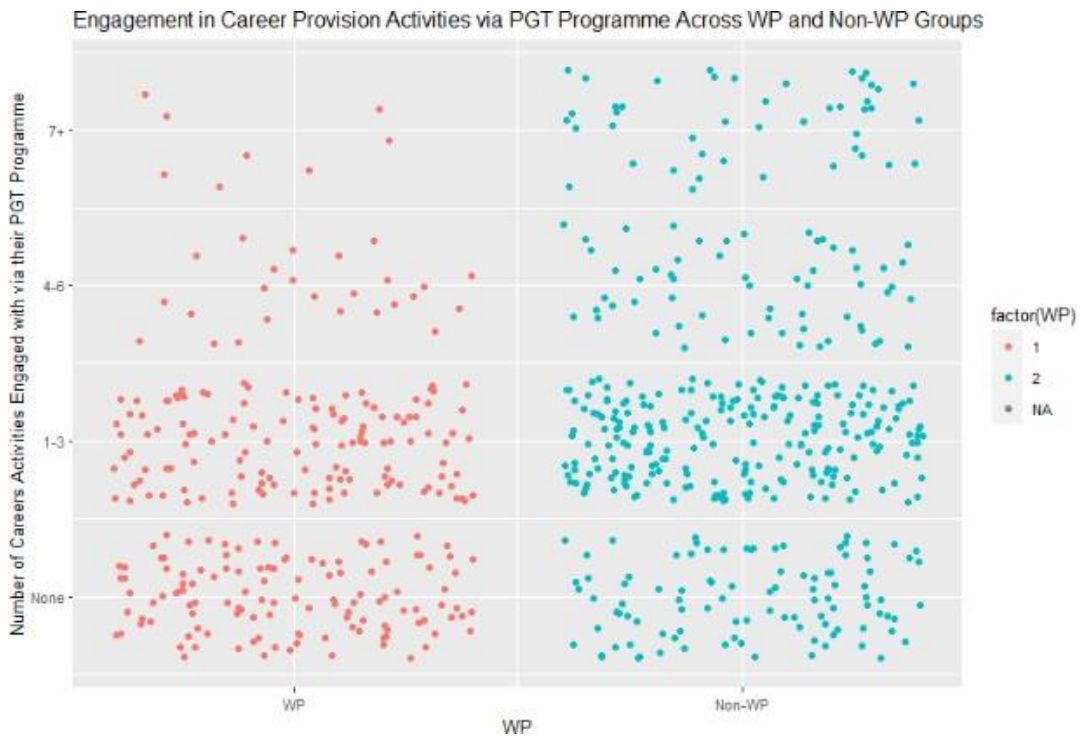
Figure 8: Spot chart showing the spread of engagement with career provision activities within programme across WP and non-WP groups.

We observe that proportionately more non-WP students are engaging with career provision more than WP students. The Cramer's V value of 0.17 does demonstrate a weaker association between these two variables (WP status and career development activities in programme) than with the careers provision of the University. This association is also statistically significant $p < 0.05$ (95% confidence level)
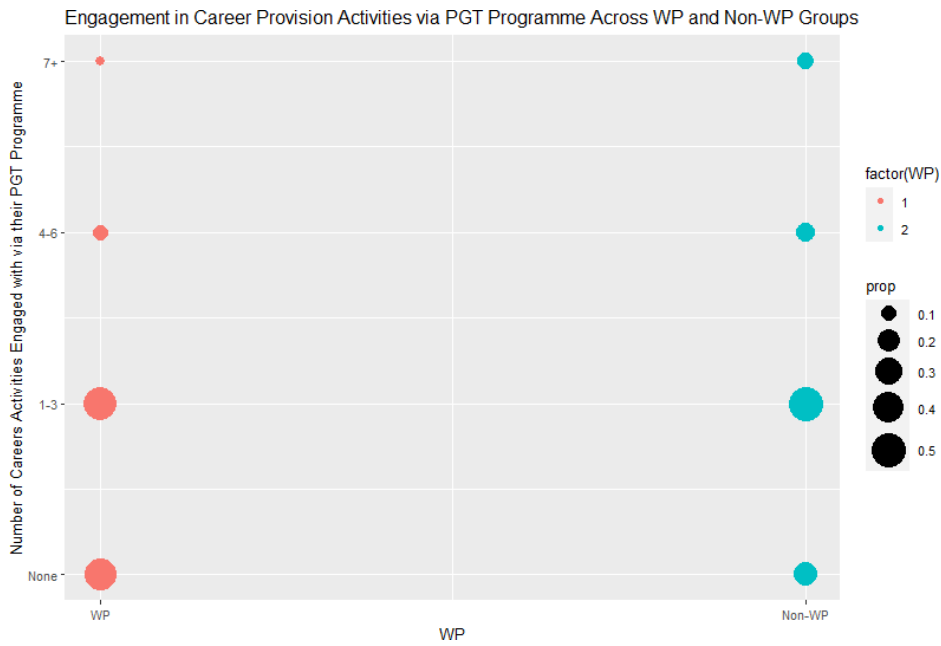
Figure 9: Spot chart showing the spread of engagement with career provision activities within programme for non-WP and WP PGTs.

This chart affirms our observation that proportionately lower levels of WP students engage with careers provisions activities.

We disaggregated WP to determine whether specific WP identifiers were significant factors to consider when exploring careers provision engagement of WP PGTs

Below is a spot graph to show the difference in careers provision engagement between those who are first in family to gain a HE award and those who are not.
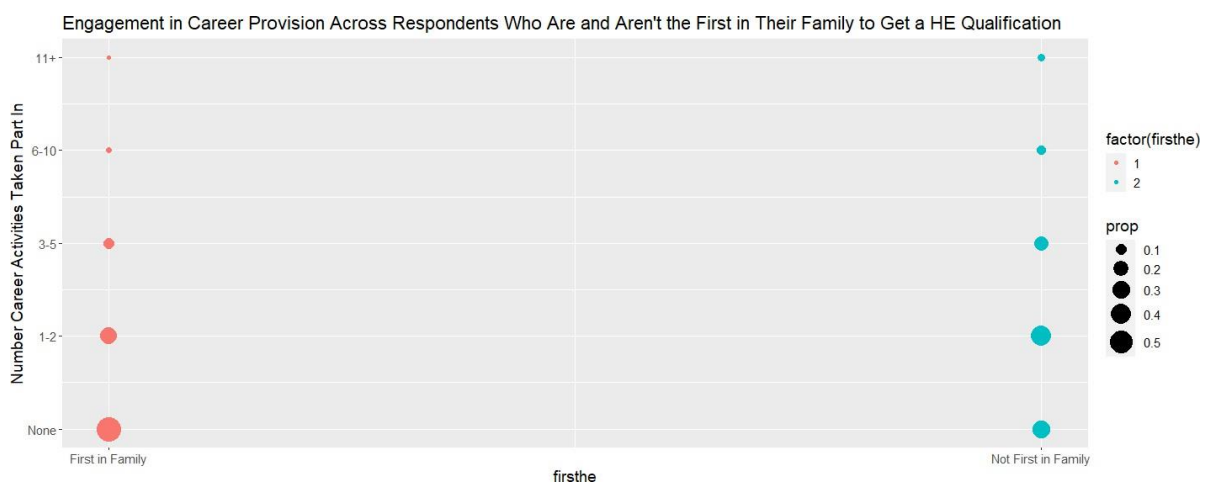
Figure 10: A spot chart showing the differences in careers activities engagement of PGTs between first in family to gain a HE award and those who are not.

The two WP identities that are most significant in exploring career provision engagement are *caringres (*carers)and *firsthe* (First generation – first in family to gain a HE Award). There is a moderately weak association between these two WP identities; first in family with a HE award (Cramer's V 0.19) and caring responsibilities (Cramer's V 0.13) with engagement with careers activities, but these two factors are the most significant of the WP identifiers.

A note of caution is that these results are based on a small sample and cannot be generalised.
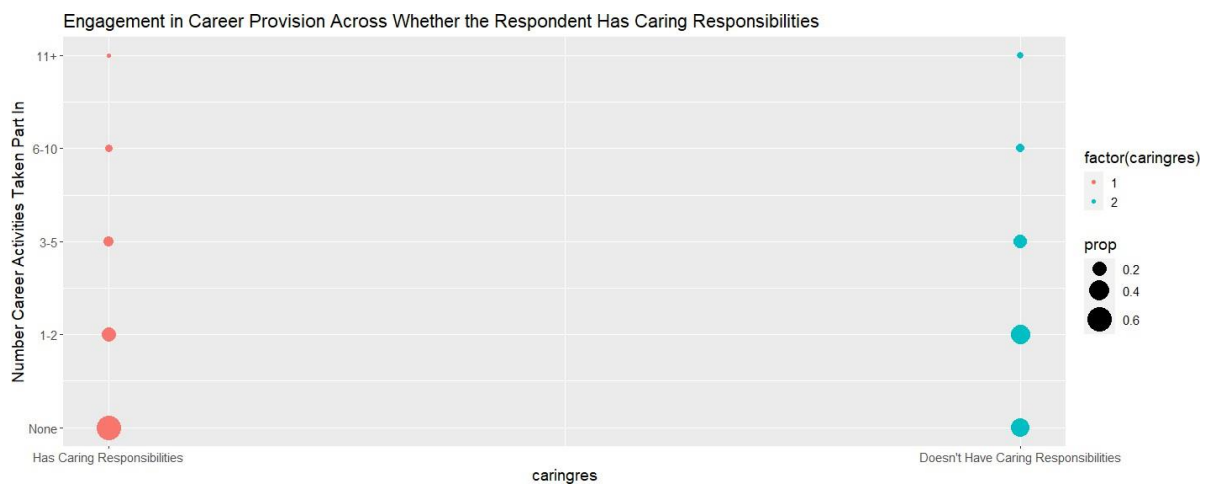
Figure 11: A spot chart showing the differences in careers activities engagement of PGTs between those with caring responsibilities and those who do not have caring responsibilities.

These engagement results are almost consistent with our analysis at an individual university level. Due to limitations with sample size, it is only responses from WP PGT students with these characteristics at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds that are statistically significant.

Engagement with careers provision by PGTs across subject area

Our literature review shows that happenstance i.e., structures of opportunities, is also influenced by subject area. As an example, the opportunity for a social science PGT to engage in career development activities in their PGT programme may differ from a business/management PGT student. As such, we sought to observe whether our data demonstrated differences in career provision engagement across different subject areas.
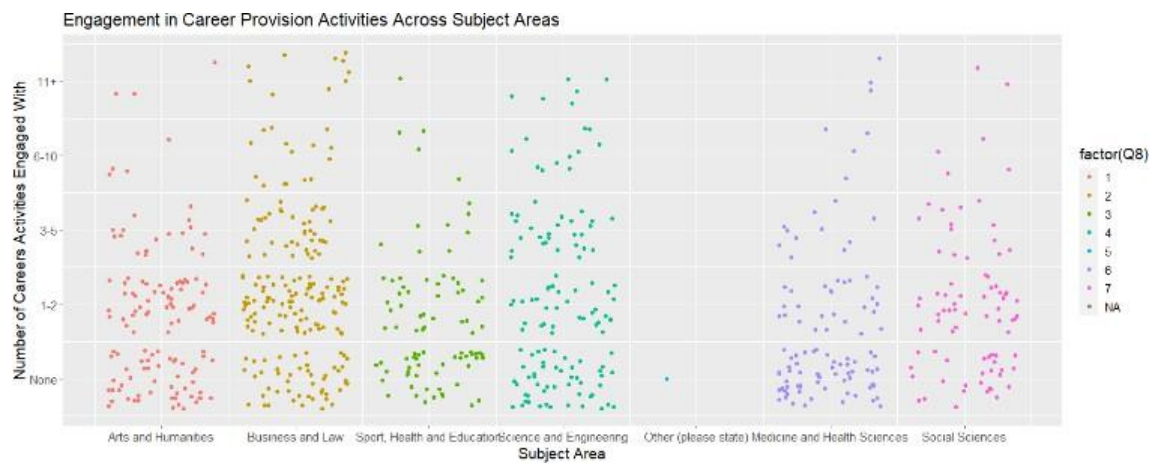
Figure 12: Spot chart showing the engagement of PGTs with career support provision activities across different subject areas.

Our analysis shows that Business and Law students and Science and Engineering PGTs engaged with careers provision of the University more than PGTs in other subject areas.

Perceived usefulness of careers provision by PGTs across subject area
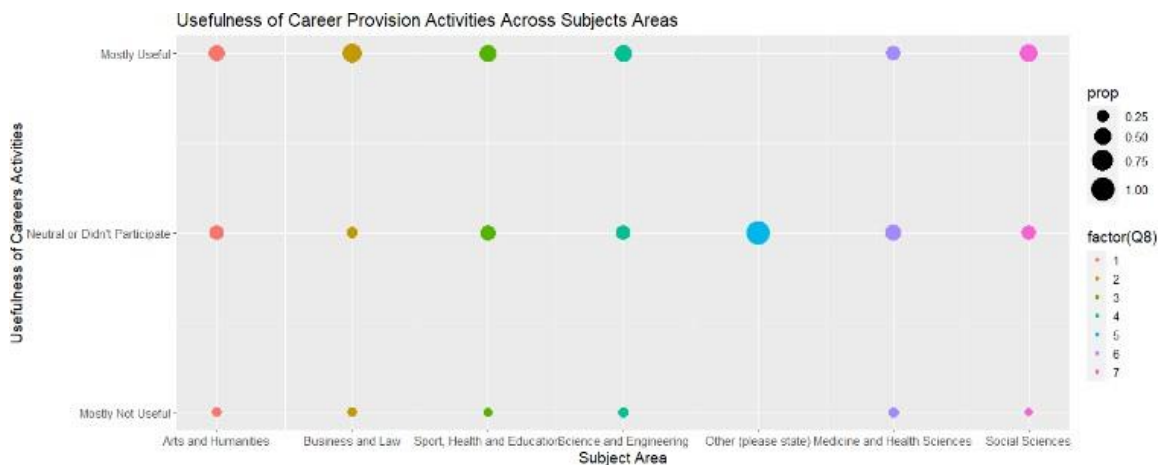
Figure 13: Spot chart showing the perceived usefulness of the career provision by PGTs across subject area.

It is perhaps unsurprising to note, these PGTs determined that the service was more useful than students from other subject areas. PGTs in medicine and Health Sciences reported engaging with careers service provision, with some having elevated levels of engagement, though seemingly ambivalent towards the usefulness of the careers support provision.

Usefulness of careers activities to WP and non-WP students

The perceived usefulness of career activities between WP and non-WP groups is also a statistically significant association (95% confidence level) with a moderate **Cramer's V value of 0.19**.

In our analysis, WP students were shown to have the largest proportion of students who didn't participate in any career support activities. Additionally, this group did not have an overwhelmingly positive or negative experience across the activities they did participate in. Non- WP students, whose engagement in career activities was higher, had a higher perception that the career provision was useful.
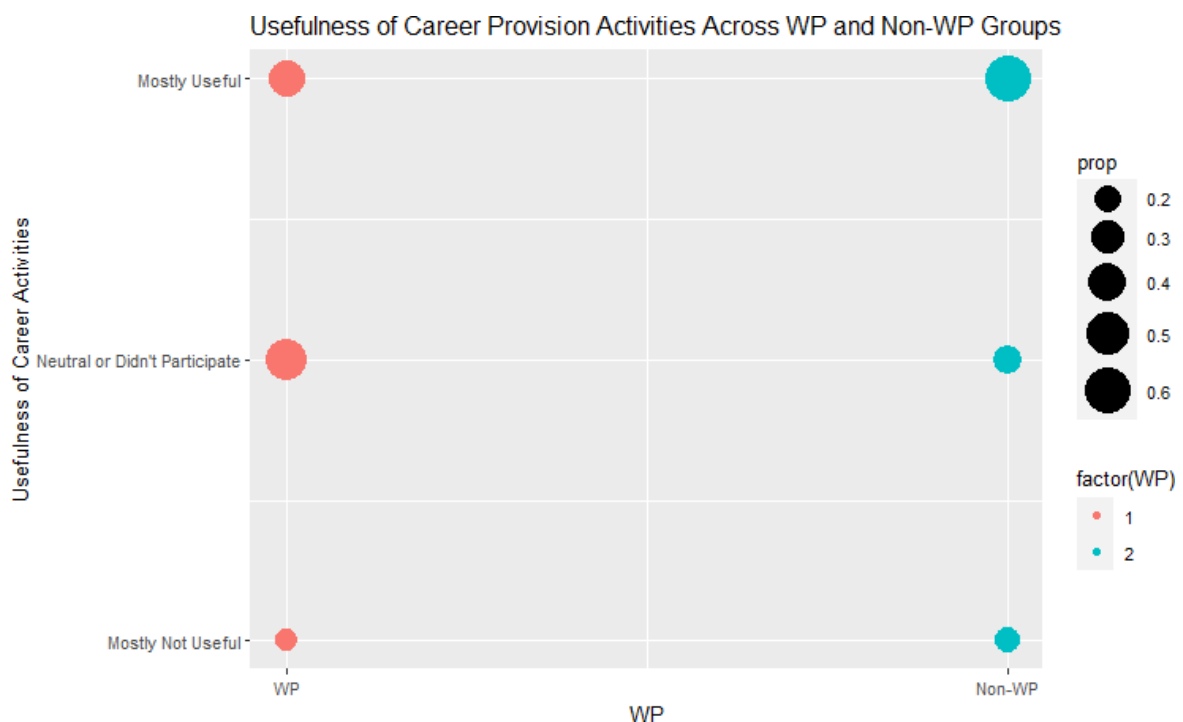
Figure 14: A spot chart showing the differences in perceived usefulness of career provision activities between WP and non-WP PGTs

Again, when we disaggregate WP identity, surprisingly *firsthe* and *caringres* are the variables with the strongest association to the variable in question (*interventionuse*) with **Cromer's V values at 0.14** each. That is, being first in family, to being first in family to have a HE award or having caring responsibilities are variables impacting on the perceived usefulness of the career activities. Statistically, again these WP identity variables have weak association with careers support provision.
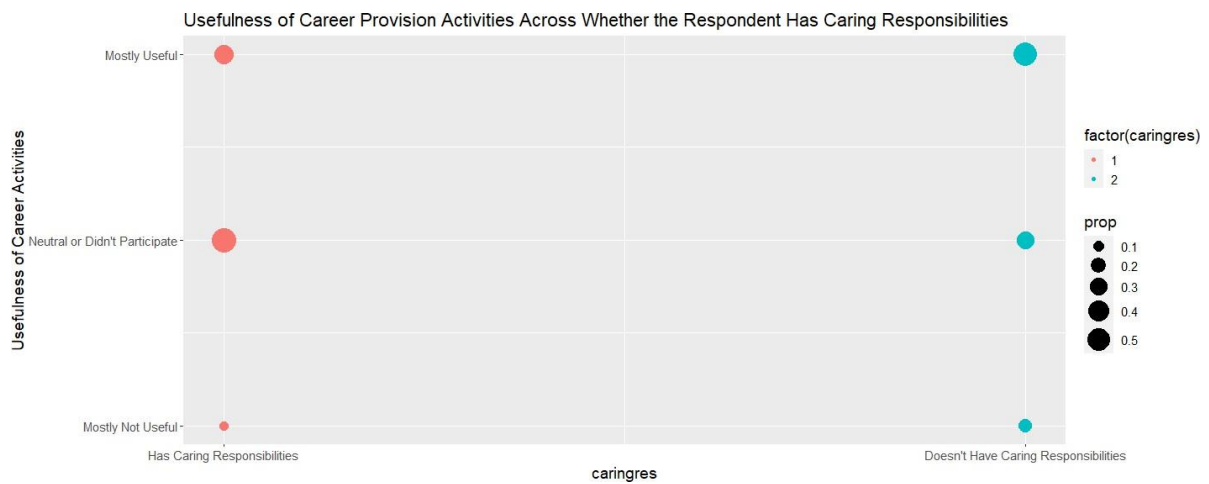
Figure 15: A spot chart showing the perceived usefulness of careers support provision between PGTs who have caring responsibilities and those who do not.

Analysis across the individual universities shows that Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds again show moderate statistically significant associations between the WP and non-WP variables and the usefulness of career interventions. At Nottingham University, WP status is shown to statistically significant, though WP status and useful of career interventions has a moderate association.

Chi Square and Cramer's V Data analysis - Summary Table

Dependent variable	Outcome Variable	Independent variable	Significance	Cramer's V	Interpretation
Careers provision (interventions)	*interventionuse*.	WP status (Q29, Q30)	p<.05	0.22	The WP status of a PGT student has a statistically significant relationship with engagement of

(Q.14)					careers provision made available by the University.
					Statistically significant
					Moderate association
Career provision within programme (Q.15)	*onprogrammepart.*	WP status (Q29, Q30)	p<.05	0.17	The WP status of a PGT student has a statistically significant relationship with the engagement with careers provision made available within a PGT programme.
					Statistically significant
					Weak association
					(Cramers V is 0.19 For First in family to achieve HE award
					Cramers V is 0.13 for caring responsibilities)

Careers provision (interventions) (Q.14)	*Workskills*	Work skills (Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22)	Could not interpret	This is further explored in the focus groups	PGTs self-reported high levels of work skills (3.9 average) * and professionalism (4.28 average) * There are skills that will assist PGTs in their career planning and in work. Respondents again were asked to rank themselves in these skills.
Careers provision (interventions) (Q.14)	*workaware.*	*Work awareness (Q18, Q19, Q23)*	Could not interpret	This is explored further in the focus groups	PGTs self-reported moderately high levels of work awareness (3.4 average) * There are skills that are directly linked to how respondents researched and applied for jobs.
Careers provision usefulness (Q14)	*Work usefulness (Q18, Q19, Q23)*	WP status (Q29, Q30)	P<0.05	0.19	The WP status has a statistically significant relationship with careers provision usefulness. There is a moderate association between WP

					status and the perceived usefulness of careers provision

*(Average scores relate to the Likert scale score between 1 – 5)

Table 1: Statistical relationships between dependent (career planning motivations and behaviours) and independent variables (WP status, work readiness, work awareness, work usefulness)

Statistical inference

This summary table provides the statistical inferences drawn from our quantitative data analysis:

- WP Status has a statistically significant relationship with participation in/uptake of careers preparation engagement within and outside of the PGTs' programme (with non-WP students more likely to access services than non-WP students).

- PGTs are more likely to value the careers support provision if they have used it as such, WP status is also statistically significant in considering how useful the careers service provision is deemed to be by PGTs.

- We could not interpret the relationship between PGTs being 'work aware' or having high levels of work-readiness on their perceptions of usefulness or engagement of the careers study, due to the complexity of the combination of ordinal, nominal data and continuous data. Instead, we have explored these constructs and their relationship to career planning behaviour in the focus groups.

Career planning behaviours (engagement)- Home registered and international domiciled students.

Although a comparison between home domiciled PGTs and international students is not a focus of this study, we did some high- level statistical analysis to determine any differences between the PGT groups. There is a clear difference between the experiences of Home domilced and international students in terms of career activity participation and perceived usefulness towards these activities. There are highly moderate associations between these the registered student status (Cramers V,

0.25) and *Q13* and *interventionuse,* (Cramers V, 0.21). The association between these variables shows that international students are more likely to attend careers events/activities and find them more useful than home domiciled students. This mirrors a conclusion in the recent 2022/23 PTES report that showed, career preparation was the most significant factor (after teaching) on overall satisfaction of student experience for non-EU domiciled PGTs. Although, this is outside the scope of this report, this is an area that we would like to explore more in a subsequent study, given the changes in non-EU domiciled PGT numbers and recent changes in skilled workers' visa requirements and HE policy.

It is also important to note the impact that this effect will have in our analysis of non-WP students, given that this is where non-home registered students are categorised.

Other results

We can see from Table 2 that the most common activities for students to engage with are the careers service websites, careers fairs and CV/job application support. The activities that students found least useful are careers fairs, psychometric test practice and mock assessment centres. The most useful activities were CV/job application support, interview practice and employer-led sessions. The career support activities that students don't think exist at their universities are those surrounding employment assessments such as mock psychometric testing, mock assessment centres and career readiness assessments. Many students also don't believe mentoring schemes are offered. This is particularly frustrating for the universities involved in this study, all of whom offer comprehensive services covering these areas.

Careers support provision variable	Total of Respondents Taken Part	Number of Respondents Found Useful	Number of Respondents Didn't Find Useful	Number of Students Unaware That This was provided
Careers service website (Q14_1)	397	309	88	10
Careers fairs (Q14_2)	284	172	112	13

CV writing/job application support (Q14_3)	235	198	37	20
Interview practice (Q14_4)	91	76	15	39
Career planning resources (Q14_5)	165	123	42	31
Career planning advice (Q14_6)	175	141	34	29
Careers readiness assessment (Q14_7)	76	57	19	78
Psychometric test practice (Q14_8)	65	43	22	117
Support with doctoral applications (Q14_9)	48	37	11	74
Mentoring schemes (Q14_10)	107	79	28	85
Mock assessment centres (Q14_11)	49	35	14	91
Employer led sessions e.g., skills workshops (Q14_12)	176	147	29	62

Table 4: A table showing the perceived usefulness or knowledge of range of careers service provision by PGTS.

In conclusion, the quantitative analysis of the survey data highlights that there are minimal differences in career planning needs between non-WP and WP students. However, there are big differences in the ways in which these groups engage with university careers provision and consequently, the value that is accorded to the service. WP status has a significant statistical relationship with careers provision engagement. However, there is no statistical difference between the engagement of WP and non-WP students with careers interventions in their PGT programme. Reassuringly, those who had participated in careers preparation activities, held a higher perception of the usefulness of the activities that those who had not.

Non-WP students were more likely to have engaged in careers preparations activities than WP students. As such WP students did not accord such high levels of usefulness to the careers provision available. WP PGT students who identified as first in family to achieve an HE award and PGTs with caring responsibilities were more likely to not have engaged in career support activities.

Our quantitative analysis supports our proposition that structures of opportunity impact on the career planning behaviours of different groups of students. However, we wanted to explore his notion of happenstance further and the perceptions of value placed on the careers service and its influence on engagement and career planning behaviours.

In our research design, we proposed to do this via institution level focus groups.

Qualitative methods

All students who completed the online survey were asked at the end of the survey to leave their email address, to give informed consent of taking part in a focus group. Survey respondents were subsequently emailed and given the option to participate in a focus group. Purposive sampling, using the WP status identifiers was used, to target the self-selecting PGTs, using the email addresses that they had provided. A sample of PGTs based on this technique and convenience sampling (given our time constraints), were contacted directly to follow up whether they still wanted to take part in the focus groups as indicated by their survey response.

This resulted in four institutional focus groups held at Manchester Met University and the Universities of Exeter, York, and Leeds, each with a maximum of 5 participants in each focus group).

Methodology – Qualitative data analysis

Focus groups were used to explore themes that had emerged from the quantitative analysis of data. The focus group (online) sessions were facilitated by members of the research team who had no prior/present relationship with any of the PGT participants.

The focus group design (see Appendix 2) enabled the gathering of diverse perspectives from 18 WP PGT students with different backgrounds and studying a range of courses at the four different universities.

	Higher Education institution	No. Focus group participants	Pseudonyms	Gender	WP identities	
1	University of Exeter	4	BA, LU, MA NA	2 Female 2 Male	Carer First generation	
2	The Manchester Metropolitan University	5	AD, JE, LI, RU, MA	1 Male 3 Female 1 non-binary	First generation Low socio-economic background	
3	University of York	5	RO, AI, AM TO, SA	3 Male 2 Female	Low socio-economic background	
4	University of Leeds	4	GI, AN, CE HA	2 Male 2 Female	Carer First generation	

Table 5: A breakdown of WP PGT focus group participants per institution.

We use pseudonyms and list the general WP status identifiers within the sample for each University rather than on an individual PGT basis, to protect the identity of the participants.

Codes & themes

Online focus groups mediated by two members of staff for each one, were recorded via MS Teams. The transcripts were downloaded and analysed.

Analysis of the transcript data was undertaken using qualitative analysis software called Delve Tool. This software was chosen because it was free and intuitive to use. Transcripts were systematically coded, linkages formed across and between codes and subsequently grouped together into themes.

The thematic analysis of the transcript reveals several key themes and insights regarding student career planning motivations and challenges associated with personal circumstances and labour market demand, and perceived limitations in the careers service provision delivered by universities taking part in the study.

FREQUENCY	CODES	THEMES
15	Care responsibility	Personal Circumstances
3	Disability	
7	First Generation graduate	
4	Low economic background	
4	Limited opportunities	Supply and Demand of the job market
	Niche career problems	
4	Progressing to PhD	Career service team limitations
1	Inconsistency of provision across departments in university	
4	Limited relevance and support for niche careers	

Inadequate Tailoring of provision

17	Not meeting the expectations of students	
7	Limited Non-entry level roles support	
9	Poor promotion of service	Accessibility of the careers team
2	Onsite career events for online students	
8	Not knowing where to access help or where the service is located.	
5	Demanding coursework requirements	Time constraints
7	Other responsibilities	
7	Lack of structure/streaming of provision in careers	

Table 6. Frequency of codes and associated dominance of themes emergent from focus group data analysis

Fig. 17. Word cloud showing frequency of (sub)-themes emergent from focus group data.

Discussion

In this next section, we will explore the four over-arching themes that are deemed important when evaluating the career planning motivations and behaviours of WP PGT students as informed by analysis of the focus group data.

- Personal circumstances
- Supply and demand of the job market
- Accessibility of careers support provision
- Time constraints

1. Personal circumstances

First-generation students BA, LU, and MA share insights into time pressures and structural challenges in balancing work, studies, and career support engagement. They felt a lack of guidance in navigating the academic and career landscape, led to feelings of being out of place or lacking in confidence. WP students including first-generation university attendees, students with disability or those balancing multiple caring responsibilities, expressed feeling marginalised or overlooked within the career services framework. They highlight the lack of nuanced support tailored to their unique challenges and life experiences.

Personal circumstances			
Carer responsibility	Disability	First-generation student	Low economic background
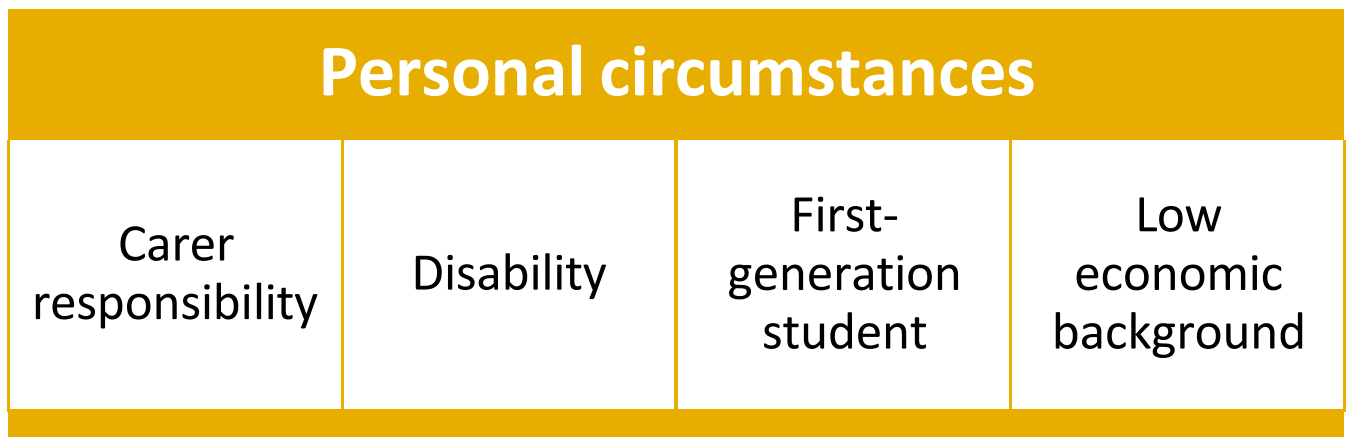
"As a first-generation student, I feel overlooked at times. There's a lack of support tailored to our unique challenges and backgrounds…. I don't think that's set up for kind of maybe people as disabled as I am and like alternative jobs..." (RU)

2. Supply and Demand of the job market

Supply & Demand of the job market
Limited opportunities
Lack of career support for niche careers
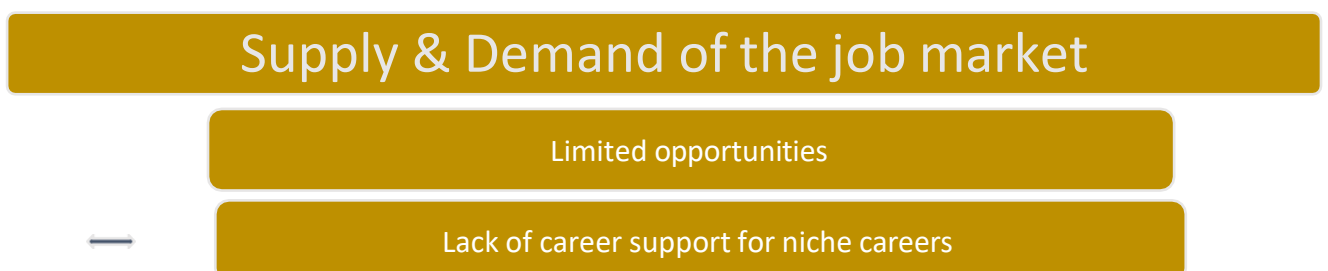
PGTs expressed challenges in finding relevant career resources aligned with their specialised career interests. Students highlighted difficulties in finding tailored support for niche career paths e.g., film theory and note that specific industry niches have limited opportunities.

> "But because I think my career path might be, I guess a bit niche...it's really difficult to find resources that are dedicated towards people on my career path." (MA)

One student observed that a high-demand market could lead to quicker job placements and higher starting salaries, reflecting positively on the effectiveness of career services. In contrast, a low-demand market might require more extensive support from career services in terms of job search strategies and skill-building initiatives. Participants acknowledged that although there may be little the careers team can do to influence the economics of the job market, they can support in building resilience, preparing student for the realities they are about to face and offer them alternatives.

3. Perceived limitations of the career service offering

Figure: 17 – Factors associated with perceived limitations associated with careers support provision

Students express challenges in finding relevant career resources aligned with their specialised career interests. There's a consensus that the current services might not sufficiently meet the needs of students at varying stages of their careers.
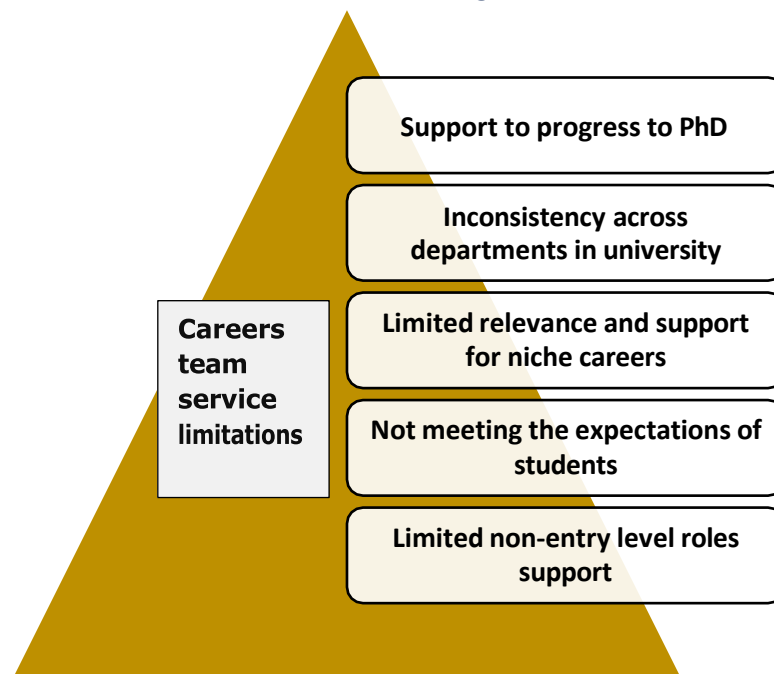
NA mentions the struggle to find resources dedicated to her career path, describing her experiences as "very, very hit or miss." BA shares her reservation on the services of the team regarding being more geared towards undergraduates or entry-level positions. This was a perception shared by many of the PGTs taking part in the focus group. All PGTs expressed a desire for more tailored, individualised support rather than a generalised approach. They seek guidance specific to their career goals, experiences, and stages in life. They call for better communication tailored not only to undergraduates but also to those with diverse career backgrounds and experiences.

Some students expressed differences in the level of support and events across faculties, noting variations in career-related assistance between different departments within the university for instance the support varies, even within the same school e.g., between Biology and Chemistry schools. It was noted by these students that those studying psychology who would naturally expect to progress to a PhD but do not get support they need from the service, instead having to rely on personal relationships with their tutors and contacts in their professional networks for help.

For PGTs further along in their careers, they highlighted the need to be empowered to negotiate their pay and have confidence to request what they are worth in their roles. A common reflection by participants, was the necessity for services that empower and build confidence.

> "We need to learn negotiation skills and build resilience; we need for tools to advocate for our own careers." (RO)

Another student JE is not sure what direction her career should take. For her, career services cater to people who know the direction of their careers and she doesn't fit into that category. Consequently, she avoids the service altogether. While some students are sure about the next stage of their career, she points out that there are some students who do not know what they want to do.

> "I feel like I don't necessarily know which jobs I'm actually qualified to do now…. Again, sort of in an ideal situation, it would be something somebody that completely identifies with me and my situation and the types of jobs that maybe I could or could not apply for." (JE)

The careers provision that JE as a PGT student values is careers advice, not just support into a role. Additionally, MO has a full-time job and is retraining with a master's degree and suggests that the career service does not offer guidance in managing life transitions associated with relocation, starting a new job, or balancing family responsibilities alongside career advancements. Some PGTs highlighted the broader challenges associated with life transitions. "It's not just about job applications; it's about managing life changes that come with new roles," pointed out AN. This highlighted the need for holistic guidance encompassing both professional and personal transitions.

> We're all at different points in our careers. Some are starting, others pivoting. We need services that cater to these diverse needs, not just generic advice. (AN)

Disengagement is a recurring issue that was referred to by participants. Negative experiences, such as securing an internship that lacks quality or feeling disenchanted after attending career fairs can lead to disengagement and decreased faith in the effectiveness of career services.

WP PGTs refer to their different levels of work-readiness and work-awareness. Some PGTs expressed not knowing what their career options are. They also suggest that the absence of tailored support to support the different stages of the career journey, leads to disengagement and disenfranchisement. These PGTs wish to feel a sense of agency and control of their career journey. They express that careers' provision not meeting their expectations, is a contributing factor to them feeling that they do not have agency over the career planning.

4. Accessibility of the careers team

For some PGTs, one of the primary challenges faced by students is a lack of awareness about the career services available to them. Inadequate promotion of career services can significantly hinder students' ability to access valuable resources. Observations expressed by PGTs suggests that careers services need to be more effective in how they reach students via communication channels. It is suggested by participants that this can be achieved through targeted marketing campaigns, collaborations with student organisations, regular emails, social media outreach, and informative website content.

Online students can feel excluded from on-campus career events and networking opportunities. Providing virtual alternatives or ensuring that career events are accessible remotely can bridge this gap. Hosting online career fairs, webinars, virtual networking sessions, and using technology to facilitate interactions with employers can help remote learners access similar opportunities as their on-campus counterparts. Ensuring that these events are well-advertised to those for whom this is a preferred option and easily accessible via online platforms is crucial for engagement and inclusivity.

However, some PGTs acknowledge that their careers service is often accessible but does not always meet their needs. AD states,

> "When those incredibly accessible things turned out to not go so well...I start to sort of lose faith in what I could potentially get out of the career service." "There was one time where there was a careers kind of segment, and it just wasn't appropriate to teaching at all" (AD)

Participants cite a lack of clarity on not only what is offered, but where to find career services or how to access help can deter students from seeking assistance. Participants suggested that universities should ensure clear and accessible information on the location, operating hours, and contact details of career service provision in places where students engage. In essence participants expressed that information should be readily available on the university website, in student handbooks, and through orientation sessions. For example, students from the University of Leeds suggested that the careers service is not centrally situated on campus and not signposted clearly. Students suggested that providing multiple access points such as online chat support, email, phone, and in-person visits can accommodate diverse student needs.

5. Time constraints

Multiple students, including BA, MA, and NA, cite time constraints as a significant barrier to engaging with career services. Balancing full-time studies, jobs, caring responsibilities, or family commitments makes accessing and utilising services challenging. BA is a first-generation student from a low economic background and has caring responsibilities. She explains that time is a commodity she cannot dispense on career events that have not being designed to factor in her personal circumstances. For many students in a similar situation, attending class, doing their assessments,

and going to work is top on their priority list. LU acknowledges there is always a personal trade-off underpinning careers engagement decisions.

"Again, maybe it's a time and a prioritisation thing." (LU)

It seems the balancing of priorities for WP students is more challenging than for non-WP students (that is not to suggest that non-WP students do not have their own real challenges)

Findings – Life wide skills support

Career planning motivations

Although there is little difference in the career planning motivations of non-WP and WP PGTs, the expectations of career preparation support of WP students are broader than that of traditional careers service provision. However, the broader support provision, needs to be more targeted, perhaps made at departmental level, so that there is discipline focused career preparation support (notwithstanding an acknowledgement that there are lots of non-subject related opportunities that are available too).

The scope of career preparation that WP students would like encompasses personal and professional development. For example, transition support, financial management and resilience coaching. The majority of WP students c.80% either want a professional role or to study for a doctoral qualification when they finish their award, but 70% of PGTs are already in work (with less than 10% wanting to continue or go back to their existing role).

As such, their career planning motivations of our PGTs in the study, are linked to accessing doctoral study opportunities (including scholarships and bursaries) and accessing highly skilled work, within a context of variable personal circumstances, differences in perceptions and varied experiences with career preparation activities.

Career planning behaviours

Our study concludes that the impact of intersecting WP characteristics creates barriers to engagement with careers provision. It is the combination of having little money, time constraints

due to caring responsibilities, work commitments related to their course and/or employment and having a disability that leads to issues of engagement with careers support provision. Although these barriers are significant for WP students, there is also a range of perceptions and mixed experiences that suggests PGTs do not comprehend the value that careers service provision can bring to their work and career readiness.

'Mature students', who express being at different stages of their career assume that careers service is not targeted to their needs but better suited to UGs or graduate entry level into professions. One Issue that mature/career changers identified is that website and communications seems geared towards younger, early career students. They suggest there is no obvious representation of mature students or career changers, which is off-putting and can turn students away from accessing careers services. PGTs studying on vocational, or discipline focused programmes find the support too generic and suggest that they would appreciate mentors, alumni, or employer input to programmes. It is important to note that this was an observation associated with degree apprenticeships as well. In some instances, PGTs are often seeking informal career advice from academic staff. PGTs suggest that careers services are ill equipped to offer career advice on accessing doctoral study opportunities and the career options that are open to them on a doctoral study pathway. First generation PGTs raised the need for careers services to provide more 'life wide' skills support. Disabled students express that they want easy, straightforward information about when to disclose and what to consider in their job seeking.

PGTs expectations of their careers service extends beyond job planning support activities, to service provision that supports work-readiness and career readiness. That is, PGTs expect that careers provision will help the development of social (e.g., mentors, networks) identity (e.g., resilience & confidence) and employment (work experience) capital. They expect that the careers service will support the development of their life wide skills, supporting them in their current work as well as future work contexts. This approach to service provision acknowledges that PGTs, no matter what their age or circumstances, simultaneously inhabit several different spaces e.g., work or education, being a member of a family, being involved in clubs or societies, caring responsibilities, commuting to university, studying online etc as well as looking after their own physical and mental well-being.

It is clear from our research that WP status has a statistically significant relationship/association with careers service engagement. It is important that careers provision support is not only targeted but also recognises intersecting characteristics of social disadvantage.

Despite the protestations of generic services for students, WP PGT students did express reservations in being 'singled out' and that this would reaffirm feelings of 'imposter syndrome,' that they

expressed they already felt. Some PGTs also suggested that they did not come to seek out the careers service because they did not know what they wanted to do next; the perception being the careers service is only for students who know what their next careers steps are.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed by the observations, insights, and suggestions of PGTs who took part in the study as well as interpretations by the research team (including our undergraduate and postgraduate student interns), of how to address the issues raised by the findings of the study.

To be clear, our recommendations seek to provide suggestions on ways in which the career planning/preparation needs of WP PGT and non-PGT can be better met.

1. Targeted, inclusive communication strategy

PGTs suggest that targeted circulation lists and communications, is a much better strategy than general communications. This proposal was supported by online drop-ins, live chat support, or ensuring consistent availability of services throughout the year, especially during summer months.

2. Tailored support and guidance

In a statement echoed by many, one student said "The career services are good, but they're often too generalised. I wish there was more personalised guidance for our specific career paths." Students express a strong desire for specialised guidance that aligns with their career goals. This includes mentorship, industry-specific advice, and resources for applying to specific roles, recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach isn't effective for their needs. Students note that career services should adapt to cater to different stages of work/career readiness, including those uncertain about their career paths, those with clearer plans, and mature students seeking additional qualifications. This might cover topics such as CV writing, interview skills, leadership development, or industry-specific training (Cranmer 2006; Pegg et al. 2012) that is tailored to or aligned with a specific subject discipline/industry.

3. Segmented careers support provision

Students express challenges with the structure and frequency of career service communications. PGTs highlight the 'chaotic' nature of current services, suggesting the need for a more structured approach that prompts students to engage more regularly, possibly through scheduled updates or mandatory check-ins. PGTS suggest a structured and targeted process from the beginning of the academic year to schedule relevant events that align with the specific needs of the PGT groups being targeted. To affect this, segmenting events via themes for easier access to relevant provision is required.

4. Work integrated learning (in programme)

Careers preparation/support provision should be signposted as investigation, advisory, support, and transition to spotlight the different stages of the careers cycle. Provision should not only focus on employment, but work-readiness, employability, and career readiness.

The emphasis of a work integrated learning approach is one that focuses on investigation and advisory, as well as decision making and action. The emphasis is on learning (rather than working) and in this context, is linked with intrinsic motivation for career planning. These work ready activities would be suited for those who have low self-awareness and opportunity awareness i.e., are not quite sure what their career options are or how to achieve them.

Careers provision relating to support and transition, is more focused on accessing a specific role opportunity i.e., decision making and action and is linked with extrinsic motivation. These work ready activities would be suited for those who have high self- awareness, but comparatively lower opportunity awareness. These are PGTs who have a strong sense of their skills and their career options but not necessarily knowledge of the pathway into a specific role/job.

We recommend that careers preparation provision focuses on the following areas of career support:

Careers investigation (department level)– exploratory, awareness raising, interest driven, networking, mentoring, simulations.

Careers advisory (specific disciplines/industries) – career advice, career options, career pathways (including doctoral study), role models.

Careers support (specific sector/industry roles) – CV writing, application, psychometric testing, interviews, assessment centres

Careers transition (all) – Resilience training, confidence, strengths profiling, transferable skills articulation, financial management, work readiness.

Given the challenges facing WP PGTs and those with caring responsibilities and first in family to achieve a HE Award, it is really important that the careers provision is delivered in an inclusive way.

5. Embedded employability

Embedded employability refers to the integration of employability skills directly into the core curriculum and learning practices of a course or program. It is different to work integrated learning (which focuses on learning). Embedded employability involves the deliberate inclusion of employability-related elements within the teaching and learning processes. In this approach, the development of skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and professional ethics is seamlessly woven into the fabric of the academic curriculum. The goal is to ensure that students not only gain subject-specific knowledge but also acquire relevant skills that are highly valued by employers in their field of study (Higher Education Academy, 2015).

6. Work readiness module/unit

Bolt on approaches to employability involve the provision of separate modules or add-on courses that focus on work-readiness. These modules could be offered outside of the regular academic curriculum and may be optional or supplementary to the main course of study. Students can choose to enrol in these modules, which could be designed to develop work-readiness capitals (Ugiagbe-Green & Southall, 2021). This means developing PGTs' social, economic, identity, employment, human and cultural capital. Example of work readiness development activities would involve raising awareness of financial opportunities or how to negotiate for a higher pay award. It would also include pastoral support, developing professional networks, goal setting & strengths profiling to build confidence and resilience.

7. Networking and mentoring

The importance of networking and mentoring was emphasised repeatedly. "Connections with alumni or industry professionals would provide invaluable insights," shared one PGT, emphasising the need for networking opportunities. A consistent observation raised by WP PGTs is the need for services that empower students, build confidence, and equip them with the tools necessary to advocate for their careers. Participants cited negotiation skills, resilience training, and strategies for addressing imposter syndrome as work-readiness development areas. We propose connecting centralised mentoring teams with PG programmes and alumni teams, to create new mentoring opportunities, specifically for PGT students.

8. Joined up working between academic departments, doctoral college, and careers.

Participants highlighted the reliance on finding a supportive academic who could offer support that the careers service, is seemingly not able to. This highlights that there is a real opportunity for doctoral colleges/Graduate Schools to work in partnership with academic colleagues and those working in careers support, to provide much valued careers advice and support for those for example, considering a doctorate and the range of opportunities on a doctoral pathway. Of course, there will be other members of the doctoral community e.g., Doctoral students within the doctoral college who can also contribute to this area of provision.

9. Students as partners

A student as partners approach, is recommended to enhance the likelihood of careers preparation activities meeting the needs of the diverse PGT student population and work collaboratively on a communications and engagement strategy. Our 'work ready' data from the survey, shows that PGTs are skilled professionals with high levels of self-awareness (average >4.0). Work ready gaps were in relation to opportunity awareness, which is where the skills and expertise of careers support staff can be leveraged. Developing careers support provision in this way means that different contributor groups being different skills and expertise to its development.

10. Department/School level career preparation support

Some PGTs suggest that subject area/discipline is an important factor in considering career planning motivations. For example, some PGTs reflected that if you are studying psychology, you are more likely to go on and do a doctorate than if you were studying biology or chemistry, even though both may be studied in a Faculty of Health. Therefore, dept level careers provision, will also provide some needed important sector/industry context for careers preparation support.

Conclusion

We are sure that some you who are reading the report, will feel a sense of frustration because many of us hold the view that we provide many of the services called for by PGTs. A big lesson for the sector is that the current careers support framework in our universities is not working in the way we need it to for many of our students. Consequently, WP students are less likely to engage with careers preparation provision and do not accord the same value to the service as non-WP students.

Universities need an intentionally inclusive, targeted communication strategy to provide careers provision information to targeted groups. Careers teams need to work in a more integrated/joined up way with the doctoral training college and academic departments to develop career preparation support that meets a diverse range of needs but also significantly incorporates the development of life wide skills and activities that are investigative/exploratory as well as focused on specific sector/industry roles.

PGTs who are WP are motivated to seek out opportunities that have lower perceived financial risk (compared with e.g., volunteering/setting up their own business), but they are work ready and as likely to engage in careers preparation activities within their programmes as non-WP students. Issues in career planning behaviours surface because of barriers to engagement (particularly for first generation and those with caring responsibilities), but there are also issues associated with the relevance of provision for those who have lower levels of confidence and 'imposter syndrome' as well as low levels of opportunity awareness.

Intersecting sites of social disadvantage impacts on the engagement behaviours of WP students. PGTs are busy people, with busy lives but pursue postgraduate education with the hope of making their lives better. Universities need to work with their students to deliver provision that is life wide but also inclusive to reach those who need the support the most.

Whilst the careers advisors, consultants, developers, and academics are continuously and admirably working hard to support the career preparation of PGTS, if universities are serious about

undertaking equity work to open access to opportunity, some changes in the way we currently deliver and promote career preparation provision is much needed.

References

Allas, T., 2023. *Competition for talent will remain fierce in the UK despite economic uncertainty.,* s.l.: McKinsey & Company.

Andrews, J., Higson, H., Green, P. & Jones, C., 2012. *How do you encourage student engagement in placement learning?,* s.l.: Society for Research into Higher Education.

Artess J, Hooley T and Mellors-Bourne R (2017) Employability: A Review of the Literature 2012-2016. York: Higher Education Academy

Barber, L., Barber, N. & Jones, H., 2017. PhD students: living wage key to diversity. *Nature,* 550(333).

Boat, A., Syvertsen, A. & Scales, P., 2021. The role of social capital in promoting work readiness among opportunity youth. *Children and Youth Services Review,* Volume 131, p. 106270.

Bolton, P. & Lewis, J., 2023. *Equality of access and outcomes in Higher Education in England,* London: House of Commons Library.

Bravo, A. et al., 2012. Perceived Racial/Ethnic Discrimination among Young Adult College Students: Prevalence Rates and Associations with Mental Health. *J Am Coll Health,* pp. 1-12.

Brooks, R., 2012. *Evaluating the impact of placements on employability.* Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Caballero, C. & Walker, A., 2010. Work readiness in graduate recruitment and selection: A review of current assessment methods. *The Journal of Teaching and Learning,* 1(1), pp. 13-25.

Carrasco, J., 2016. *Stereotype Threat in the interview: The Effects of Structure and Prim.* s.l.:Montclair State University.

Christie, F., 2014. Careers guidance and social mobility in UK higher education: practioner perspectives. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* 44(1), pp. 72-85.

Cross, J. & Lin, N., 2008. Access to Social Capital and Status Attainment in the United States: Racial/Ethnic and Gender Differences. In: N. Lin & B. Erickson, eds. *Social Capital: An International Research Program.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Department of Education, 2022. *Destinations and earnings of graduates after higher education.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/after-education/destinations-and-earnings-of-graduates-after-higher-education/latest#download-the-data
[Accessed 27 September 2023].

Donald, W., 2020. *Social mobility and graduate employment outcomes: Risks and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic..* London: Career Guidance for Social Justice.

Drakeley, Y., 2022. *What Happens Next? 2022: A report on the outcomes of 2019 disabled graduates,* Sheffield: AGCAS.

Fogliati, V. & Bussey, K., 2013. Stereotype Threat Reduces Motivation to Improve: Effects of Stereotype Threat and Feedback on Women's Intentions to Improve Mathematical Ability. *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 37(3), pp. 310-324.

Francis, H., Jenkins, M. & Evans, D., 2019. *Why don't students want work experience?,* Cardiff: ASET.

Greene, J. C. V. a. G. W., 1989. Toward a Conceptual Framework for Mixed-method Evaluation Designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 11(3), pp. 255-74.

Holt-White, E. & Montacute, R., 2020. *COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact#5: Graduate Recruitment and Access to the Workplace,* s.l.: The Sutton Trust.

Hubble, S. & Connell-Smith, A., 2018. *Widening participation strategy in higher education in England,* London: House of Commons Library.

Joseph, J., 2016. What Companies Use Blind/Anonymous Resumes and What Benefits Have They Reported?. *ILR Collection,* Volume Spring 2016.

LSE, 2021. *Journeys into Higher Education and Employment: The Impact of COVID-19 on Young People,* The London School of Economics and Political Science: London.

Merrill, B. & Revers, S., 2023. Working-Class Adult Students: Negotiating Inequalities in the Graduate Labour Market. *Rethinking Graduate Employability in Context,* pp. 225-247.

Milburn, A., 2012. *University Challenge: How Higher Education can Advance Social Mobility,* London: National Archives.

Montacute, R. & Holt-White, E., 2020. COVID-19 and Social Mobiliyt Impact Brief #2: University Access & Student Finance. *The Sutton Trust ,* pp. 1-11.

Montacute, R. & Holt-White, E., 2021. *COVID-19 and the University Experience,* s.l.: The Sutton Trust.

Moore-Berg, S. & Karpinski, A., 2018. An intersectional approach to understanding how race and social class affect intergroup processes. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass,* 13(1).

Office for Students, 2018. *Difference in student outcomes.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/differences-in-student-outcomes/
[Accessed 27 September 2023].

Owuamalam, C. & Zagefka, H., 2014. On the Psychological Barriers to the Workplace: When and Why Metastereotyping Undermines Employability Beliefs of Women and Ethnic Minorities. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology,* 20(4), pp. 521-528.

Pasero, H., 2016. *Talkin' 'Bout First Generation,* Southampton: HECSU.

Peters, K. & Halcomb, E., 2015. Interviews in Qualitative Research. *Nurse Researcher,* Volume 22, pp. 6-7.

Robards, F. et al., 2020. Intersectionality: Social Marginalisation and Self-Reported Health Status in Young People. *Int J Environ Res Public Health,* 17(21), p. 8104.

Roemer, J., 2008. Equality of Opportunity. In: *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Scott-Allen, E., Turner, M. & Udell, J., 2016. *What determines student success and failure when searching and applying for placements?,* Portsmouth: ASET.

Smith, M., 2022. *Employment levels among graduates with disabilities,* s.l.: Prospects.

Student Futures Commission, UPP Foundation, 2021. *A Student Futures Manifesto.* [Online] Available at: https://upp-foundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/A-Student-Futures-Manifesto-Final-Report-of-the-Student-Futures-Commission.pdf
[Accessed 3 May 2022].

Sullivan, T. & Adler, S., 1999. Work, Stress, and Disability. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry,* 22(5-6), pp. 417-424.

TASO, 2023. *Addressing gaps in the participation of sandwich courses,* s.l.: TASO.

Tomlinson, M., 2017. Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability. *Education + Training,* 59(4).

Ugiagbe-Green, I., 2023. Identity Regulation Through the Whiteness of "Right Fit": Mitigating Racism in Graduate Recruitment. In: W. Donald, ed. *Handbook of Research on Sustainable Career Ecosystems for University Students and Graduates.* Hershey: IGI Global, pp. 1-122.

Ugiagbe-Green, I. & Southall, W., 2020. Whose job is it anyway? Inclusive approaches to developing students' work readiness. *Advance HE Employability symposium,* Volume 17th September 2020.

Voice, A., Hirst, A., Krauss, T. & Turkenburg-van Diepen, M., 2020. *Work-based learning and students' career readiness,* s.l.: Prospects.

Wilson, T., 2012. *A Review of Business-University Collaboration,* London: National Archives.

Winborg, J. & Hagg, G., 2022. The role of work-integrated learning in preparing students for a corporate entrepreneurial career. *Education + Training,* 17 January.

Zwysen, W., Di Stasio, V. & Heath, A., 2021. Ethnic penalties and hiring discrimination: comparing results from observational studies with field experiments in the UK. *Sociology,* Volume 55, pp. 263-82.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Qualtrics Questionnaire

PGT career planning motivations and behaviours

So, what's your plan? Exploring the career planning needs and behaviours of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students.

Invitation to research

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

This project has been reviewed by the MMU Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee**.**

The project is funded by the Luminate Careers and Employability Research Grant Application, coordinated collaboratively between Prospects Luminate and Jisc.

Staff at the following institutions are coordinating in the study:

- Manchester Metropolitan University (Lead)

- University of Exeter

- University of Huddersfield

- University of Leeds

- University of Lincoln

- University of Nottingham

- University of York

Why have I been invited?

You have been chosen as you are a current Postgraduate Taught student at one of the participating institutions and you have responded to a call for volunteers to complete this survey.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part – you are under no obligation to do so. Your decision will have no bearing on any assessment results or any part of your student experience at your institution.

All responses are anonymized. We will not be able to identify you by your responses.

If you start the survey, you can decide to stop completing it at any time.

However, please note that your responses are much appreciated and will help us to support future postgraduate taught students, but you are under no obligation to complete this survey.

Data Protection Law

Data protection legislation requires that we state the 'legal basis' for processing information about you. In the case of research, this is 'a task in the public interest.' If we use more sensitive information about you, such as information about your health, religion, or ethnicity (called 'special category' information), our basis lies in research in the public interest. Manchester Metropolitan is the Controller for this information and is responsible for looking after your data and using it in line with the requirements of the data protection legislation applicable in the UK.

You have the right to make choices about your information under the data protection legislation, such as the right of access and the right to object, although in some circumstances these rights are not absolute. If you have any questions, or would like to exercise these rights, please contact the researcher or the University Data Protection Officer using the details below.

You can stop being a part of the study at any time, without giving a reason. You can ask us to delete your data at any time, but it might not always be possible. If you ask us to delete information within two weeks of the focus group taking place, we will make sure this is done. If you ask us to delete data after this point, we might not be able to. If your data is anonymised, we will not be able to withdraw it, because we will not know which data is yours.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

It is expected that the results of this research will be disseminated between December 2023 and December 2025, to Prospects/Jisc as the funders and via institutional reporting.

The team will also seek to share the results with sector partners/institutions at conferences or via publications. All data reported on will be anonymized and not traceable to any individual.

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

So, what's your plan? Exploring the career planning needs and behaviours of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students.

Q1 Did you complete your undergraduate study in the UK?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)

- I have not undertaken undergraduate study (3)

Display This Question:

If Did you complete your undergraduate study in the UK? = Yes

Q2 From which higher education institution did you receive your undergraduate degree award?

_____

Q3 Your undergraduate study history

	Less than 1 year ago (1)	Less than 5 years ago (2)	Less than 10 years ago (3)	More than 10 years ago (4)	More than 20 years ago (5)	I did not complete an undergraduate degree/graduate job (6)	I am still working in my graduate job (7)
When did you complete your undergraduate degree? (1)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Q4 Which of these did you do between completing your undergraduate study and starting your postgraduate award? (Please choose all applicable answers)

- Full time employment (1)

- Part time employment (2)

- Fractional contract/short term contract (3)

- Zero hours contract/gig work (4)

- Interim role (1 year or more) (5)

- Volunteering (6)

- Self-employed (7)

- Travelling (8)

- Other (9) _____

*

Q5 Are you currently registered as a postgraduate student studying in the UK?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)

*

Q6 Did you enrol in September or January?

- September (1)

- January (2)

- Other (please state) (3) _____

Q7 Please select/state the University in the UK where you are currently studying for your postgraduate award

- Manchester Metropolitan University (1)

- University of Leeds (2)

- University of York (3)

- University of Exeter (4)

- University of Nottingham (5)

- University of Huddersfield (6)

- University of Lincoln (7)

- Royal Holloway University (9)

- Leeds Beckett University (10)

- Other (please state) (8) _____

Q8 Which subject area/discipline does your postgraduate award belong to?

- Arts and Humanities (1)

- Business and Law (2)

- Sport, Health and Education (3)

- Science and Engineering (4)

- Medicine and Health Sciences (6)

- Social Sciences (7)

- Other (please state) (5) _____

Q9 Is your postgraduate award funded by your employer?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)

- Not applicable (I do not have an employer) (4)

Q10 What is your student registered status?

- Home (1)

- International (2)

Q11 What is your mode of study?

- Full-time (1)

- Part-time (2)

Q12 What is the main/most common method of communication that you use to contact university staff?

- Face to face (1)

- Online (2)

Q13 How often have you used your university careers service during your postgraduate study?

- Never (1)

- Occasionally (up to 2 times) (2)

- Sometimes (up to 5 times) (3)

- Regularly (up to 10 times) (4)

- Frequently (more than 10 times) (5)

Q14 Which careers services have you used during your postgraduate study?

	Yes accessed, was useful (4)	Yes accessed, was not useful (5)	No, did not access (7)	I do not think this service is provided for at my University (9)

Careers Service website (12)	•	•	•	•
Careers Fairs (13)	•	•	•	•
CV Writing/job application support (1)	•	•	•	•
Interview practice (2)	•	•	•	•
Career planning resources (3)	•	•	•	•
Career planning advice (4)	•	•	•	•
Careers readiness assessment (5)	•	•	•	•
Psychometric test practice (6)	•	•	•	•
Support with doctoral applications (7)	•	•	•	•
Mentoring schemes (8)	•	•	•	•
Mock assessment centres (9)	•	•	•	•
Employer led sessions e.g. skills workshops (10)	•	•	•	•

Q15 Did you access any of these career planning support services directly from your postgraduate programme ?

	Yes (4)	No (5)	This service was not available from my postgraduate degree programme (7)
CV Writing/job application support (1)	•	•	•
Interview practice (2)	•	•	•
Career planning resources (3)	•	•	•

Career planning advice appointment (4)	•	•	•
Careers readiness assessment (5)	•	•	•
Psychometric test practice (6)	•	•	•
Support with doctoral applications (7)	•	•	•
Mentoring schemes (8)	•	•	•
Mock assessment centres (9)	•	•	•
Employer led sessions e.g. skills workshops (10)	•	•	•
Personal tutoring (11)	•	•	•

Q16 Which of the following actions below best describes your aim after you complete your postgraduate award?

- Secure a professional job role (1)

- Secure a doctoral study place (2)

- Secure another postgraduate/professional award e.g. PGCert (Academic practice), Chartered award (3)

- Go back to my existing job role (4)

- Continue in existing job role (8)

- Set up my own business (5)

- Secure a volunteering role (7)

- Other (please state) (6) _____

Q17 Please state any support that was not available to you that you believe would have been beneficial to you, for your career planning

_____

Q18 To what extent do you agree or disagree that you

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
Always apply maximum of effort to work/university tasks (2)	•	•	•	•	•
Always meet work/university deadlines (3)	•	•	•	•	•
Always try to be my best self (4)	•	•	•	•	•
Are adaptable (5)	•	•	•	•	•
Are curious (6)	•	•	•	•	•
Have an awareness of how I interact with others and my environment (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Have a role model who I look up to for inspiration and support (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Know what my priorities and motivations are (10)	•	•	•	•	•
Can spot and take advantage of opportunities that others pass by (11)	•	•	•	•	•
Learn from my mistakes (16)	•	•	•	•	•

Q19 To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements about yourself?

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
I am confident that I can research and explore career options and job sectors (1)	•	•	•	•	•
I know what options are open to me after my postgraduate study (2)	•	•	•	•	•
I have a good understanding of my skills, strengths, motivations and values (3)	•	•	•	•	•
I have a good understanding of the kind of opportunities that would suit me (4)	•	•	•	•	•
I know how to connect with professionals/alumni/individuals to get insights about my career options (5)	•	•	•	•	•
I only apply for jobs that meet my chosen criteria (6)	•	•	•	•	•
I do things without being told (13)	•	•	•	•	•
I have a high degree of professionalism (14)	•	•	•	•	•
I hold myself to a high standard of work (15)	•	•	•	•	•
I learn from my mistakes (16)	•	•	•	•	•

Q20 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your motivation to undertake postgraduate study?

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
I want to work in a field/sector/industry different to	•	•	•	•	•

that studied at undergraduate level (1)					
A postgraduate qualification makes me more employable in my chosen discipline/field (2)	•	•	•	•	•
I want to gain new knowledge about a subject I am interested in (14)	•	•	•	•	•
I want to learn more about my subject field/sector/industry - which was the same as that studied at undergraduate level (3)	•	•	•	•	•
I was not ready to look for a job so chose to do a postgraduate course instead (4)	•	•	•	•	•
I was not ready to work in a graduate job so chose to do a postgraduate course instead (5)	•	•	•	•	•
I have been working but feel to get promoted, I need to complete a postgraduate qualification (6)	•	•	•	•	•
I am looking for a new job that is more suited to my needs and circumstances (7)	•	•	•	•	•
My chosen subject field/sector/industry requires a postgraduate qualification (8)	•	•	•	•	•
I wanted to remain in the geographic region where I completed my undergraduate degree (9)	•	•	•	•	•
I wish to stay in the UK and work, after I complete my postgraduate study (11)	•	•	•	•	•
I believe I will earn more money if I have a postgraduate qualification (10)	•	•	•	•	•

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
I wish to return to my home country with new skills and secure a job there (12)	•	•	•	•	•
I feel pride in doing a postgraduate qualification (13)	•	•	•	•	•

Q21 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your awareness of careers opportunities?

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
I am aware of the careers-related services available to me at my University (1)	•	•	•	•	•
I know how to approach/where to go for help if I am uncertain about my options (2)	•	•	•	•	•
I know how to navigate job sites and which ones to use (3)	•	•	•	•	•
I know where to find jobs in my chosen sector/career interest area (4)	•	•	•	•	•
I know when to start applying for jobs and how to do this (5)	•	•	•	•	•
I have a good understanding of when recruitment periods take place (6)	•	•	•	•	•
I know where to find jobs or doctoral opportunities in my chosen area (7)	•	•	•	•	•
I know how to build my work experience (8)	•	•	•	•	•

Page Break

Q22 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your aspirations?

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
I know which opportunities are best suited for me and my skillset (1)	•	•	•	•	•
I know what my goals for the future are i.e. doctoral study/graduate employment (2)	•	•	•	•	•
I am aware that I can apply for roles even if I don't meet all of the essential criteria (3)	•	•	•	•	•
I am confident that I am ready to undertake professional work (4)	•	•	•	•	•

Q23 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your transition skills?

	Definitely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Mostly agree (4)	Definitely agree (5)
I know how to prepare for recruitment processes such as applications (1)	•	•	•	•	•
I feel confident with writing CVs and application for relevant job roles (2)	•	•	•	•	•
I know how to market myself towards specific chosen employers (3)	•	•	•	•	•
I know how to manage my time to apply for the roles I	•	•	•	•	•

want, whilst managing other
responsibilities (4)

Q24 During your postgraduate studies have you experienced any of the following?

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Being mocked for your accent (1)	•	•
Someone trying to change your name (2)	•	•
Experienced disadvantage because of financial hardship (3)	•	•
Feelings that you don't belong on your course (4)	•	•
Asked where you are really from? (5)	•	•
Mental health issues/difficulties (6)	•	•
Access or participation issues due to a disability (7)	•	•

Q25 How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic background?

- Arab (1)

- Asian – Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British (2)

- Asian – Chinese or Chinese British (3)

- Asian – Indian or Indian British (4)

- Asian – Pakistani or Pakistani British (5)

- Any other Asian background (6)

- Black – African or African British (7)

- Black –Caribbean or Caribbean British (8)

- Any other Black background (9)

- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Asian or Asian British (10)

- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Black African or Black African British (11)

- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean British (12)

- Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background (13)

- White – English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British (14)

- White - Irish (15)

- White - Roma (16)

- Any other White background (17)

- Any other ethnic background (18)

- Not known (19)

- Prefer not to say (20)

Q26 What is your sex?

- Man (1)

- Woman (2)

- Prefer not to say (3)

Q27 How would you describe your gender?

- Male (1)

- Female (2)

- Non-binary / third gender (3)

- In any other way (please specify if you wish) (4)

  _____

- Prefer not to say (5)

Q28 Please select your relevant age group

- 18 years old - 24 years old (1)

- 25 years old - 34 years old (2)

- 35 years old - 44 years old (3)

- 45 years old - 60 years old (4)

- Over 60 years old (5)

Q29 Please choose the occupation of your primary household earner if your parent(s) or guardian(s) work(ed)

- Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farmer, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff. (1)

- Technical and craft occupations such as: motor mechanic, plumber, electrician, gardener, train driver. (2)

- Clerical and intermediate occupations such as: secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker. (3)

- Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators such as: chief executive, large business owner, or manager of restaurant, retail, office, bank, etc. (4)

- Modern professional & traditional professional occupations such as: teacher, nurse, doctor, social worker, musician, police officer, accountant, solicitor, scientist, engineer. (5)

- Small business owners who employed less than 25 people such as: corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner. (6)

- Long-term unemployed (claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year). (7)

- Other such as: retired, N/A (8) _____

- Don't know (9)

Q30 Please answer the following questions about your personal circumstances

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Do you commute from home (rather than via student accommodation) to attend university? (1)	•	•
Do you have caring responsibilities? (2)	•	•

Are you care experienced? (3)	•	•
Do you work part-time? (4)	•	•
Do you work full-time? (5)	•	•
Do you receive financial assistance to support your studies? (6)	•	•
Do you have a disability? (7)	•	•
Do you have recognised asylum seeker, refugee or stateless status granted by UK government? (8)	•	•
Do you consider yourself to be estranged from your parents? (9)	•	•
Were you entitled to receive free school meals during your secondary education? (10)	•	•
Do any of your parents, stepparents or guardians have HE qualifications? (11)	•	•

Q31 If you would like to take part in a focus group, in which we will explore some of the issues raised by the survey please insert your email address below and we will contact you.

"By clicking 'Submit' I give permission for the data I entered on this questionnaire to be used in research for the purposes outlined above in the Participant Information Section"

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix 2: Focus group questions

PGT Careers Focus Group questions

Note to facilitators: Remember our main goal is to discover the career planning needs and behaviours of PGT students generally, and whether those from backgrounds under-represented in HE (WP) have differing needs.

All our participants have selected that they meet one or more "WP characteristics", but they are all individuals and these characteristics do not define them.

Check if anyone has not returned their consent form- ask them to complete this and email it to Jyotir immediately.

PRESS RECORD!

Introduction (up to 10 mins):

Facilitators and note-taker introduce themselves briefly.

You are here today as you've consented to take part in a focus group discussing the career planning needs and behaviours of you as postgraduate taught students.

In our sign-up form you were asked if you feel you identified with particular characteristics- we know that students with these characteristics are under-represented in Masters level study, and we would like to explore whether or not these characteristics affect what you need from a careers service.

For example, some of you will be in the first generation of your family to go into higher education, have a disability, have caring responsibilities or be care-experienced. We don't know which of these characteristics you selected, and it's up to you how much you would like to speak about this.

Using information from the survey we have already run, and these focus groups, we aim to find out more about what "PGT" (postgraduate taught) students need, what your career thinking is, and how we can deliver the most effective support. This is a new area of research and we are very grateful for your time and input.

You are all students at the same university, but the facilitators are from different universities, so we can be more of a neutral observer of the discussions. However, if you need support from your own university following this session we can let you know how to access that.

You have already received a participant information sheet and returned a consent form, but to remind you that you can withdraw from this study for up to two weeks afterwards, without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

Everything we discuss today will remain confidential between the members of the discussion.

Following the session, the video recording will be turned into just audio, and the video deleted. The audio will be transcribed and your names will be anonymised, with a pseudonym given. If you want to suggest an alternative name for yourself, put it in the chat and hopefully we can use it!

It would be great if you can keep your camera on as it helps discussions flow more easily when we have those visual cues, but we understand if you're not somewhere you can do that or don't have the right equipment.

The chat is open to type any responses if you don't want to say them. We would like to maintain a supportive atmosphere where there is space for everyone to contribute.

Depending on group size and feel- If you raise your hand you will be asked to speak next, but feel free to let the conversation flow naturally.

We have all your email addresses to get your £30 vouchers to you within the next few weeks.

Please could I now ask the participants to introduce yourselves, including your name and the course you are studying?

Questions:

Section 2 - What do you do? (What do you engage with, how) **15 mins**

- Have you had the opportunity to use your university careers service since starting your PG course?

- Has any part of that been particularly useful for you as a PGT student

- Our survey showed that under-represented students don't engage with careers services as much as other students. Why might this be the case?

- What factors influence your participation in career service activities? (Anything within the curriculum?)

Section 3 - What do you need? Usefulness etc. **15 mins**

1. If you could design a Careers Service to meet the needs of PGT students, traditionally underrepresented at master level study, what would it look like, why? **Did anyone draw something to represent this?**

2. What are your thoughts about targeted support for different groups of students that are under represented? What type of targeted support?

3. What would this service need to include to help PGT students at different stages of their carer thinking- e.g. Some people are in the decide phase, still making decisions about what they might do next, Some are in the planning phase, - they have an idea of what they want to do and are making plans and some are in the application phases, they have a clear idea of what they want to do and are applying for roles/ places on course etc. (do current services meet needs of PGT students form underrepresented backgrounds at all these stages?)

4. What would you say are the main differences between your ideal service and the career service provided by your university? (Maybe ask – maybe not)

74

Section 4 – practicalities in informing about service offer

- Considering the factors you've mentioned, how can the careers service at your university help students from underrepresented backgrounds to participate in more activities or access their support?

- How do you find out about careers support, events from your personal tutor or academic staff?

- What are the best ways for your careers service to give you information about what help is on offer or what events are happening?

Thank you again for participating today.

As mentioned, if you wish to withdraw from the study without needing to give a reason, you can do so for up to two weeks from today.