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Spence, Sue

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Employability and engagement key to graduate success

Sue Spence, Careers Adviser at University of Huddersfield and The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Director for Professional Development

With almost 50 per cent of young people now going to university, the graduate employment market is becoming a crowded place. For students and graduates the picture is a lot more positive than the data portrays, but the key message is to take advantage of the help on offer at higher education careers services and, for those who are yet to enter higher education, to plan ahead.

The good news is that university offers lots of opportunities for personal development and to become more employable. Getting a degree can open up a wide range of exciting opportunities; the experience equips graduates with the skills and knowledge as well as the confidence to enter the world of work at a level of competence expected by graduate employers.

Jenny Blakesley, AGCAS Vice President and Director of Careers at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), commented:

"Getting a university degree is not a passive process. There's a difference between acquisition of knowledge and learning to learn. What a university education teaches you is how to learn - and that makes you a flexible, desirable employee. Careers guidance and support has changed dramatically in the past ten years - there is more support than ever and more student uptake than ever - and students should make the most of the opportunities presented to them during their time at university."

Higher education careers services are relatively well resourced and have survived the government cuts that have decimated the school sector. Employability features high on university management agendas as it contributes to the positioning of an institution in the league tables that many potential students (and their parents) use to help them decide on a place of study. Higher education careers services remain an extremely active and innovative part of the IAG sector with a flourishing professional organisation, AGCAS, at the heart of training, research and lobbying for the sector. AGCAS is the professional body for careers and employability professionals working with higher education students and graduates and prospective entrants to higher education. AGCAS members participate in a wide range of professional activities, links between member services are strong and there is a clear commitment to the professional organisation as the voice of higher education careers professionals.

Every higher education careers service has a team of qualified and dedicated people who are specialists in helping students and graduates plan and develop their careers.

Qualified careers advisers provide the information, advice and guidance students need to plan their career and make decisions about what to do next. Employer relations teams have excellent links with local and national employers, both large organisations and, increasingly, small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), working with them to develop employability programmes and joint initiatives to improve outcomes for all stakeholders.

Qualified careers advisers provide the information, advice and guidance students need to plan their career and make decisions about what to do next. Information specialists increasingly work in innovative ways with web-based material and social media platforms to ensure students and graduates have the information and labour market resources they need to make well-informed career decisions. Additionally, careers services work closely with enterprise teams to provide support for students looking at business development, freelancing and self-employment.

Student engagement with the university careers service and all that it offers will result in employers being presented with confident, capable graduates with the skills, knowledge and qualities to enable their business to grow and succeed in an increasingly competitive and global market.

There is plenty to do - the trick is getting students engaged. The first year is the new final year - the sooner students engage, the better equipped they will be as employable graduates. Higher education careers services are ready and waiting.

This article was written by Sue Spence, Careers Adviser at the University of Huddersfield and a Director of [AGCAS](#) and published in [When IAG grow up. A collection of opinions on the state of careers information, advice and guidance in the UK](#), published by the National Union of Students, April 2014

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/adviceandguidance/When-IAG-Grow-Up/>