UK perspective on the postgraduate student experience: Access, funding and employability

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The UK (England) perspective

PG students registered at English HEIs

Higher education in England 2015: Key facts
Home/EU and International – full-time

Higher education in England 2015: Key facts
UCL – established in 1826

- 6,000 academic and research staff across 11 faculties
- 36,000 students (52% postgraduate)
- £1.2 billion turnover
- 29 Nobel Prizes, 3 Fields Medallists
PG students at UCL – full/part-time
PG students at UCL by fee status
Access and affordability

- Is PG education the next frontier in widening participation?
- Will home/EU graduates have appetite for PG education?
- What financial support needed?
HEFCE Postgraduate Support Scheme (PSS)

• Largest intervention in UK PG education
  – £25 million, 20 projects across 40 HEIs
  – 2,000 students
UCL PSS scheme – the context

• 40% privately of grammar school-educated
• 18% attended widening participation activities prior to undergraduate study
• 62% had a part-time job whilst studying
• 9% had caring responsibilities

(UCL PGT survey n=434)
UCL PSS scheme - £2.3 million

- 93 bursaries
- Summer schools and taster courses
- Mentoring
Bursary scheme criteria:
full fee waiver + £10,000

- Income
- Care leaver status
- Polar grouping
- Parental status/socio-economic class
- School status
- Personal statement
Summer schools

- Helped overcome anxiety and low confidence

- But
  - 75% from top 3 social classes
    - 23% from top vs 6% from bottom
  - 63% had at least one parent who was a graduate
Mentoring – lessons learned

- PhD students do a great job
- Can be largely virtual
  - 80% of interactions by email.
- Improved confidence and cohesion of cohort
- Should be non-academic and available early
Barriers to entering PG study

• Financial
• Knowledge/information
• Confidence
Financial support models: recommendations

- Funding aimed at improving participation should be allocated on direct assessment of financial needs/means
- Standardised national scheme of targeted financial support
- Funding for fees and living costs has been critical
Employability in the curriculum

• Help students find employment
  – Students rate enhancing employability as a principal objective of PGT study

• Better understand requirements of employers
  – Employers say graduates are not work ready
  – Employer input into the curriculum
PG study: the employers’ view

• Influencing the curriculum
• Placements can be a conduit for knowledge transfer
• But
  – Reluctant to train PGT
  – Prefer to recruit at graduate level and train their own
  – Prefer 4-year integrated Masters
Value of work placement

- Placement related to programme
- Placement option across a broad range of programmes
- Extra-curricular internship
And the point is.........?

• Specialist or generalist
PGT employment at UCL: careers support issues

- 14,713 PGT students (highest in UK)
- Courses largely one year in length
- Many niche courses (c.45 new taught courses p/a)
- Early deadlines for many UK roles
- Destination results disappointing
Solution 1: SPOC

- Small Private Online Course (SPOC)
  - efficient way for PGTs to career plan prior to course and promote support available through UCL Careers
- Sent to 8819 pre-entry PGTs
  - 1500 engaged, from 49 countries
- Flexible – students didn’t have to do all modules
- 6 ‘modules’ with resources, videos and links to relevant career-related information
  - Why do you need to think about your career right now?
  - What are your career options?
  - How do you write effective job applications?
  - How do you succeed in interviews and presentations?
  - How do you make useful contacts?
  - How will UCL Careers support you?
SPOC Feedback (100% satisfaction)

• “Very helpful, lots of information, very well put together- easy to understand. Keeps you interested with the variety of videos, pdfs, slides and documents.”

• “This introductory course .... a fantastic and interactive way to improve my social network contacts or improve my interview skills when dealing with a job offer for instance..”
Solution 2: Intensive Support for Graduates

• All students can use UCL Careers for 2 years after graduation
• Additional service - intensive support for most ‘at risk’ departments
• Undergraduate pilots: 2013 and 2014; PGT pilot: 2015
• All UK PGT students telephoned in summer 2015 to establish employment status (2500 PGTs called; 41% unemployed)
• 6-8 ‘at risk’ departments chosen for intensive support
Intensive Support for Graduates (Cont.)

• Intensive support model:
  – Dedicated careers coach
  – Proactive and regular contact with graduate
  – 1-to-1 careers coaching
  – Graduate workshops (eg: ‘Building Resilience’)
  – Individual progress tracking

• Undergraduate results:
  – Unemployment fell from 17.9% to 8.4% in ‘at risk’ departments
Solution 3: On Campus Activities

- Survey of all departments to establish level of PGT careers provision: in-curricular or extra-curricular
- Aim to ensure coverage across all courses and share best practice
- Central Careers workshops run across the year:
  - Career Planning
  - Applications
  - Interviews
  - Finding & Funding a PHD
- Well attended (e.g., October 2015: 8 workshops; 957 attendees)