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THE CASE FOR FOSTERING GREATER COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITY CAREER ADVISERS AND GRADUATE RECRUITERS



**WILL DONALD
ARGUES FOR
GREATER SYNERGY
BETWEEN
HIGHER EDUCATION
CAREER
PROFESSIONALS
AND EMPLOYERS**



Nearly three-quarters of university students and recent graduates have experienced lower levels of subjective well-being since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Donald and Jackson, 2022). The same study also found a surge in students seeking career guidance to navigate the uncertainties of transitioning from university into a fiercely competitive and global labour market.

Consequently, it has been suggested that career development professionals can act as architects in fostering a sustainable career ecosystem (Donald, Van der Heijden, and Baruch, 2024). A sustainable career ecosystem refers to ‘a variety of *interconnected* and *interdependent* actors across higher education institutions [educational] and workplace contexts, whereby the lives and careers of individuals evolve and

play out over time with an emphasis on sustainable outcomes for the individual, organizations, and broader society’ (Donald, 2023, p. xxvii, emphasis added).

Challenges for collaboration

University career advisers often struggle with limited resources, making it challenging to give personalised career advice to students and engage with a diverse array of employers. This lack of accessible career support can make it difficult for students to develop and signal different forms of employability capital to potential employers (Donald, Baruch, and Ashleigh, 2024). Additionally, universities often resist suggestions by university career services to work in partnership with other universities because of the direct competition for league table rankings.

Similarly, graduate recruiters encounter resource constraints, which limits the number of universities they can engage with. Even when engagement occurs, graduate recruiters often have to prioritise meeting evolving business demands over aligning with the objectives of university career services.

I have seen these challenges first-hand as a graduate recruiter, as well as over the last decade in academia when researching this topic from the perspectives of various individuals operating within the career ecosystem. Despite the challenges, improved cooperation is vital to overcome the lack of resources and to achieve optimal outcomes, necessary for the sustainability of the career ecosystem.

The need for greater collaboration

Open communication between universities and organisations is crucial for understanding each other's needs and resources. It involves establishing a shared vision, clear governance structures, and unwavering commitment from all individuals to maintain an ongoing dialogue between university career advisers and graduate recruiters. This collaborative approach enhances support for students during their university studies and helps to create better work opportunities for graduates.

By focusing on common objectives such as providing personalised support, timely interventions throughout degree programs, promoting social mobility and assisting international students, both parties can improve their strategies for nurturing the flow of diverse talent between academia and industry. Additionally, these partnerships facilitate opportunities for work-integrated learning, mentorship and the integration of innovative approaches into university curricula, ultimately better preparing students for the university-to-work transition.

These collaborative endeavours yield numerous benefits, including fostering career development and well-being, improving organisational performance and productivity, strengthening competitive advantage, and nurturing sustainable economic growth at the local, regional, and national levels. This approach also helps mitigate the risks posed by high turnover rates among university career advisers and graduate recruiters, which could otherwise undermine such long-term and strategic relationships between universities and employers.

Pragmatic opportunities for enhanced collaboration

To begin to address these challenges and realise the benefits of collaboration, Buckholtz and Donald (2022) applied the 'State Progress Checklist' to foster cooperation between university career advisers and graduate recruiters. They devised a comprehensive set of 50 questions, initially designed for separate consideration by both parties before joint deliberation.

These 50 questions, which are detailed in Appendix 1 of our research paper, 'Direct outcomes and win-win relationships between university career advisers and graduate recruiters', are grouped into nine themes: (1) resources, (2) motivations, (3) interactions, (4) assumptions, (5) scenarios, (6) plans, (7) actions, (8) outcomes, and (9) reuses. Themes 1-3 focus on *potential*,

themes 4-6 on *agendas*, and themes 7-9 on *effects* per 'Direct Outcomes Theory' (Buckholtz, 2011).

Additional opportunities for enhanced collaboration include the involvement of other individuals operating within a career ecosystem, such as alums, faculty members, and well-being support services (Donald, 2024).

Concluding thoughts

University career advisers and graduate recruiters often work extremely hard in challenging environments. Yet, hard work and passion can only get one so far. Consequently, I call for systemic change, requiring buy-in from actors across the career ecosystem. Let's focus on collaboration to fuel innovation and offer the best service possible to students and graduates.

William Donald's book *Strategic Opportunities for Bridging the University-Employer Divide* (2024) is available at (igi-global.com/book/strategic-opportunities-bridging-university-employer/320472). A limited number of hardback copies are available from the author at a discount via w.e.donald@gmail.com.

References

*The references marked with an * are open-access, enabling you to read them for free.*

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