

Original title: Redefining value in higher education: Beyond metrics to alumni and employer perspectives

### **Shorter title: Redefining value in higher education**

NB Every URL needs a unique Meta Title, ideally less than 60 characters long.

#### **Authors:**

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#### **Website Strap line (140 Characters max )**

Looking beyond GOS results to insights from alumni and employers to enrich the narrative presented to prospective students and employers (135)

#### **SEO / Meta description for website page (160 Characters)**

Looking beyond Graduate Outcome Survey results to insights from alumni and employers to enrich the narrative presented to prospective students and employers (135)

#### **Introduction for website**

When measuring the value of our degrees, **Dr Track Dinning** and **Professor Peter Wolstencroft** suggest that Higher Education institutions look beyond Graduate Outcome Survey (GOS) results to insights from alumni and employers to enrich the narrative presented to prospective students and employers.

#### **Main blog text**

Accessing Higher Education (HE) has emerged as a primary pathway for individuals transitioning from schools and colleges in the UK over the past three decades. Whilst in the 1960s, only 6% of 19–20-year-olds pursued university education in England and Wales this figure increased to over 40% by 2004-2005 (Brooks & Everett, 2009) after which it has remained relatively stable, kept high by a political consensus that stresses the primacy of a high-skilled economy. There is a potentially seismic change on the horizon however. Forecasts from Wonkhe (2019) suggested a significant upsurge in university applications by the mid-2020s due to a projected population increase in the UK, foreseeing an additional million 18-year-olds between 2020-2030.

This growth in numbers coincided with changes in the funding structure for UK universities. Beginning in 1998 with a £1,000 upfront fee, the system shifted to a deferred loan of £3,000 in 2006 and escalated to £9,000 in 2012 following the Browne Review (Bolton & Hubble,

2018), with the current figure of £9250 being introduced in 2017 and staying stable despite the current high levels of inflation. The increase in enrolments and shifts in funding mechanisms have sparked debates about the value of universities and the advantages graduates gain upon entering the job market.

### Traditional methods for assessing the value of Higher Education

Previously, the value of HE has been linked to the idea of the growth of the individual, gaining a graduate position and more lately this has been extended to focusing on employed graduates adding value to the economy through bringing innovation and cutting-edge ideas into the workplace. This economic based view of HE is reinforced by the metrics that universities are being assessed by with the Graduate Outcome Survey (GOS), an assessment that takes place 15 months post-graduation to better understand a graduate career path and experiences after leaving HE being a key measurement of how successful a programme is. Whilst the GOS serves as a benchmark for university league table rankings, it falls short of presenting the complete picture. The perspective of students holds significance in this discourse and the GOS does not encompass the entirety of the graduate's voice including the value of personal growth and lifelong friendships and the value that the graduate brings to the economy.

### Looking beyond the Graduate Outcome Survey

We suggest that in addition to the metrics in particular the GOS, we need to look at ways to measure the value of our degrees. In our view, it is a broader viewpoint from various stakeholders. Primarily a deeper insight from graduates, beyond their job positions and secondly input from the employer, to understand their perspective on the value graduates make in the professional sphere. There is a plethora of existing research in the field. However, due to the rapidly changing workplace landscape, there is a continual demand for fresh research to keep pace with these changes.

### Alumni perspectives

One approach is through alumni connections. Alumni are part of a university's eco-system and having them on hand to speak about their experience post-graduation is so value. In a study conducted by Dinning, Nixon, Williams & Brown (the paper is pending review) over 30 alumni were interviewed to explore their reminiscences of university experiences and value post-graduation. Whilst we can't report the specifics until the article is published, the alumni highlighted several crucial aspects: the experiential learning being pivotal in securing their first job, the development of transferable skills that remain relevant and a mindset fostering continuous learning.

### Employer perspectives

A similar approach can be adopted in engaging with employers, using university's employer advisory boards and networks. Whilst there is research that addresses what employers seek in graduates, the pivotal question remains: what contributions do our graduates bring to the workplace post-employment? Do they align with employers' expectations? Merely having a 'graduate level job' does not necessarily mean that they are contributing meaningfully to the economy; by investigating employers' views, we are moving beyond mere titles to actual

impact. The Office for Students (2022) advocates that universities must offer courses that hold significance to employers. Therefore, in essence universities should regularly ask employers about the value graduates bring and where there is a shortfall in the expectation universities need to be proactive and respond. It is not about waiting for a five-year periodic review; its about having courses that can be adapted between reviews and be responsive to the evolving need of the workplace.

## Conclusions

What this all means, is we need to incorporate more broader research to the results of the GOS, to grasp the true value of a degree course, acknowledging that the GOS provides only a part of the overall picture. Whilst the GOS might shape league tables, which we acknowledge is crucial, additional insights from alumni and employers can enrich the narrative presented to prospective students and employers. Alumni insights suggest experiential learning, the development of transferable skills and a mindset fostering continuous learning, being the three points of value of a degree to a graduate above and beyond their job.