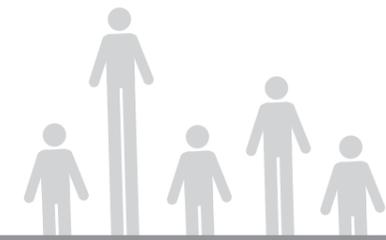


The universities each significantly increased their involvement and collaboration with employers – this was directly influenced by good practice from outside the United Kingdom and prompted by data from the participants that showed how highly the graduates valued employer contact.

It gave me the 'tools' to analyse job applications and to identify how my skills relate to those which employers seek.



Graduates North West

5 Programme requirements

ESF ITM funding comes with a requirement that activities are delivered under three strands – Innovation, Transnational and Mainstreaming. Activities in the North West programme to enhance graduate employability were shaped by these three themes.

Innovation ran through this whole programme – at the level of the individual, the department, the institution and the programme partnership. This innovation was of various types. The innovative activities were all in pursuit of delivering services or provision to improve the employability of recent graduates in the North West of England.

The **transnational** aspect of the programme involved a range of activities with universities and employers outside the UK, some of whom will remain collaborators after the ESF funding ends. Programme partners identified a lot of good practice and significant inward benefit that had been achieved as a result of the programme.

The learning from the innovative and transnational phases can have a longer-term impact where **mainstreaming** is achieved. The challenges of the global economic downturn during the life of the programme, and their effect at local level, should not be underestimated. Nonetheless, there were notable successes in mainstreaming at every partner institution, with provision, staff positions and partnerships continuing beyond the end of the ESF funding.

The programme as a whole has furthered our knowledge of employability – both for graduates and for students – and this advance will have a positive legacy for the participants in the programme, the universities and, potentially, the wider higher education sector.

It was absolutely fantastic, and I mean the course was absolutely perfect ... I'm talking to you this confidently now because of that programme.

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Evaluation of The North West Graduate Employability Support Project Highlights

A partnership of universities in the North West of England matched £2,500,000 of funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to develop the North West Graduate Employability Programme.

In 2009 the universities of Bolton, Central Lancashire, Chester, Cumbria, Lancaster, Liverpool John Moores, Manchester Metropolitan and Salford began delivering the project activities. In 2012 six of them successfully bid for additional ESF funding to continue the partnership. (Lancaster and Liverpool John Moores did not continue in the second phase of the project).

The funding came via the ESF's Innovation, Transnational and Mainstreaming (ITM) strand, which meant that the universities had to deliver particular outcomes in these three areas.



More Employable Graduates in the North West

“As a result of this programme, the universities involved were all able to significantly improve their offering to graduates and students, with the ESF funding facilitating the development of new provision.”

1 Why they did this

The universities had all identified a growing number of graduates who were struggling to attain graduate-level employment after completing their studies. The careers and employability staff believed that many graduates were simply ill-equipped to search for jobs, had difficulties developing an appropriate CV and did not know how to perform at interview.

I was struggling. I was kind of losing confidence in the fact that I was going to be employable.



2 What they did

The universities designed and developed lots of new activities and interventions specifically with graduates in mind. The participants in the activities – unemployed and underemployed graduates – were the subject of research to find out what they wanted and what worked best. This helped the universities to further hone their activities to meet real needs. The activities included:

1. information advice and guidance,
2. placements,
3. taught modules,
4. events,
5. employer engagements,
6. funded students,
7. leadership.



The great range and scope of these activities included filmed mock interviews, speed networking events with employers, work with British Army Officer Corps, webinars, team building, self-awareness development, realistic-thinking cognitive behavioural activities, confidence building, personal branding and mock assessment centres.

3 Research findings

Some key research findings were identified in an evaluation of this programme. Many of the graduates who participated had low levels of self-confidence and felt ill-prepared for engaging with the labour market.

I would definitely recommend this to any graduate who doesn't feel they are fulfilling their potential.



Many graduates needed a combination of practical skills, such as CV development and interview preparation, alongside help and support to increase their confidence and self-reflection skills. This combination of need seemed to be best met with a holistic approach. The participants enjoyed and greatly valued the provision:

- 91% found their activity useful,
- 92% would recommend it to others,
- 97% believed the activity should be offered to all students.

After the course I took my newly found skills and knowledge and applied them to my job-hunting techniques, and within a few weeks I found the position I was looking for.

Comparing data on the status of individuals when they accessed the graduate employability programme with their status at the time of interview shows a significant rise in the number of those employed.

As a result of this programme, the universities involved were all able to significantly improve their offering to graduates and students, with the ESF funding facilitating the development of new provision.

4 Collaborations

Working in partnership resulted in a number of benefits for the universities involved, and for the wider employability agenda. The research demonstrated that the universities, despite their relative proximity suggesting natural rivalry, had functioned as a collaborative and collegiate entity with shared aspirations. Staff benefited too:

From a personal view, my entire approach, the journey and the guidance has been changed by this, and has developed.

University staff member

“Working in partnership resulted in a number of benefits for the universities involved, and for the wider employability agenda.”