The

WORK ISSUE PART ONE

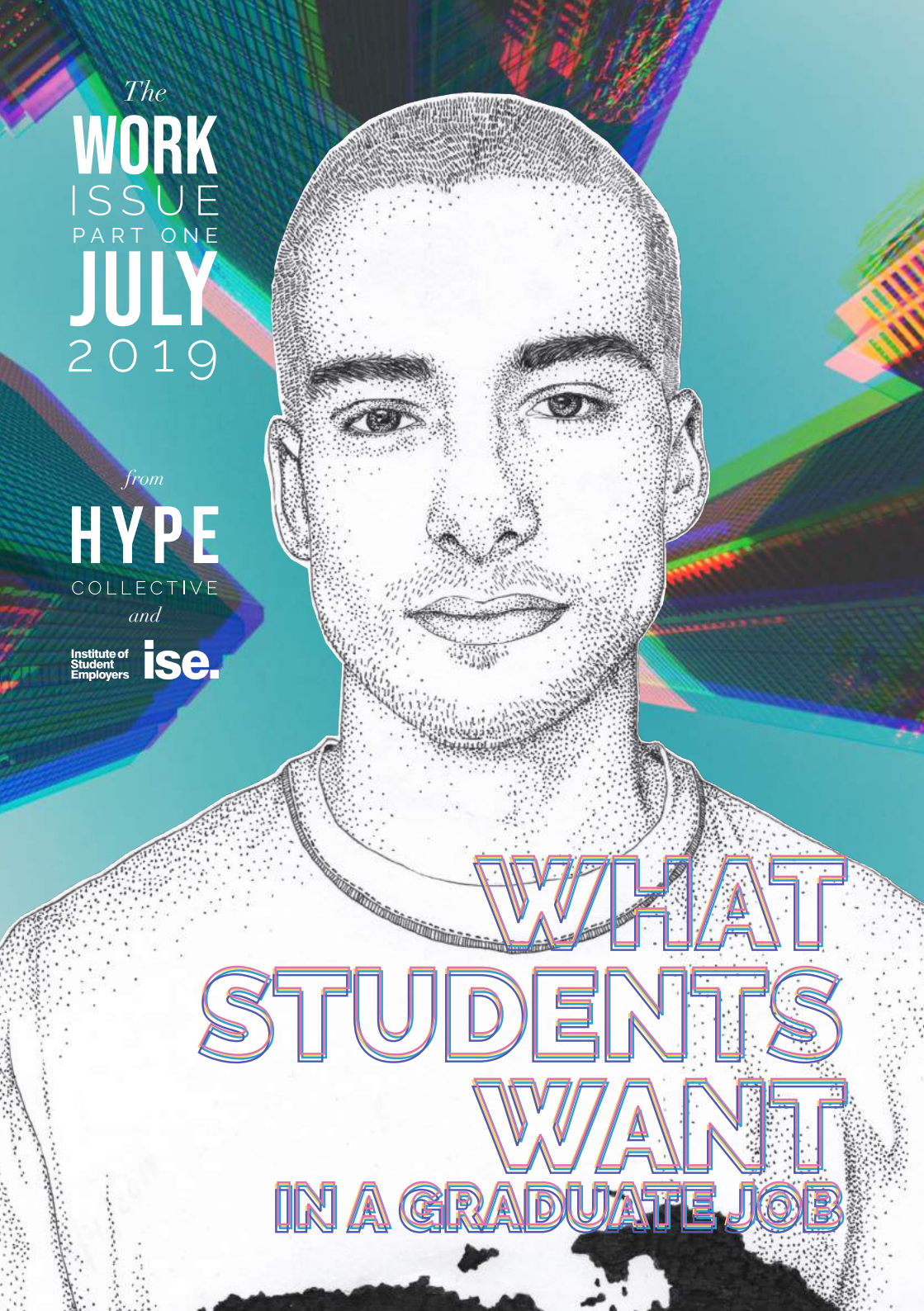
JULY 2019

from

HYPE COLLECTIVE

and

Institute of Student Employers **ise.**



WHAT STUDENTS WANT

IN A GRADUATE JOB

Cover illustration: *Dominika Chmurzynska*

Hype Collective is a student marketing agency. But it's run by two people whose student days are, sadly, long behind them.

So, every couple of months, we conduct research into what students actually want, to prevent the agency from working on the assumptions of the past.

This time, we looked at work.

We partnered with the Institute of Student Employers (ISE), who provided invaluable advice and guidance on the areas where we should focus. Together, we conducted seven focus groups of students across the UK.

With these students, we discussed everything from what they care about most in a job (spoiler: it's getting paid) to how they think their first graduate job will affect their mental health. This is what they had to say.

This research was conducted between March and May 2019.

Listening to the student voice

We have been very excited to work with Hype Collective on The Work Issue. At the Institute of Student Employers we normally look at the student recruitment market from the perspective of employers, so it is great to flip the tables and ask what students think about this.

The paper is packed with insights for employers. Perhaps most importantly, it highlights the role that mental health and wellbeing plays in the modern workplace. Students are nervous about talking about their mental health and they expect employers to be clearer about where they stand.

We also hear that employers should avoid trying to appear 'politically correct' in order to attract potential employees. Instead, they should focus on convincing students that they can offer good opportunities from day one, as well as opportunities for development and progression.

Finally, and somewhat sadly, we hear that many students are not convinced of the value of their degrees. Many wish that they had known more about apprenticeships before they started their degrees. There is clearly more that can be done in education, government and by employers to increase the profile of apprenticeships.

I hope you enjoy reading The Work Issue. Listening carefully to the student voice is critical for everyone involved in supporting the transition from education to employment.

Stephen Isherwood
Chief Executive
ISE

CHAPTER ONE: CHOICE

Why students go to university

Value, motivations and alternatives

The perceived value of the degree

On average, a graduate earns £371,000 more than a non-graduate over the course of their working lifetimes.*

Even so, there is a perception among students that their degrees aren't worth the money they're paying for them. Not a single student surveyed said that they thought their degree provided 'good value for money'.

This is what our focus group participants had to say on the subject of value for money:

The information I learn and get examined on will not be useful in my day-to-day work life, the skills the degree provides me with will be more useful but they're not explicitly taught – Tabitha, 20 / As a history student, I have very few contact hours so the degree seems massively expensive. As I haven't really enjoyed my degree and therefore don't feel optimistic about graduate work it has set me up for, it is hard to feel that it will be worth the money in the future – Ann-Marie, 22 / I really enjoyed it but it's not worth the amount of money - Phoebe, 21 / University costs too much – Patrick, 20 / Personally I think it is [good value for money], because I wouldn't be able to go into my field without it, but I think the value for money is wrong. The masters funding situation is even worse – Aaron, 21 / I'm on a science degree so probably better value than other degrees, also unlikely to pay it off and it will increase my earnings – Bethan, 21 / It's not worth the money, but it's the only way to get where I want to – Harriet, 21 / I don't have as many lectures as I expected for the price paid – Millie, 19 / It may not be the most financially sound decision in terms of being burdened with loans etc, however the experience of both the social and educational sides of uni life make it worth it to me – Daniel, 21

*Source: luminate.prospects.ac.uk/graduate-salaries-in-the-uk

Apprenticeships: a perception problem

In 2015, George Osborne announced the apprenticeship levy. It was a bold plan, which asked larger employers to spend a further 0.5% of their annual payroll on apprenticeship training – or the Government would claim it as tax.

The goal? To turn apprenticeships into a genuine alternative to university.

But there's a bit of a problem.

Students simply don't see it as a viable alternative. The vast majority of students we interviewed didn't consider apprenticeships as a legitimate alternative to university.

This came despite not a single student – outside of Scotland – saying they felt that their degree offered good value for money.

With this in mind, the concept of being paid to learn should be an appealing prospect. But an overwhelming majority – around 95% – of students in our focus groups told us they didn't consider apprenticeships when they were doing their A Levels.

Apprenticeships offer young people good opportunities. Some of them offer fantastic opportunities. What's more, apprenticeships also come without the student debt, which

- according to ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk – averages £44,000 by the time graduation arrives.

However, students don't see the first two benefits. Very few interviewees thought they'd be able to get as good a job from an apprenticeship as they would after going to university.

Many students also felt that apprenticeships are tied to specific career paths and that it would be harder to job-hop off the back of them.

This may have been true ten years ago; however, the range of apprenticeships has continued to grow, and it now includes a wide variety of jobs.

And this is the core of the problem: an apprenticeship is still seen as something that offers opportunities in a limited number of professions. In the eyes of students, you're tied to a specific career forever, whereas most degrees allow entry into a range of different job roles and then job-hopping off the back of it.

This also means apprenticeships lack the prestige of a university degree. This is particularly important, as we delve into why students go to university to begin with.

Around a third of the students we interviewed cited family pressure as an important factor in deciding if they went to university.

But pressure comes from elsewhere, too. Almost all students in the focus groups said they felt that their school defined their value based on whether or not they went to university. "There are three tiers," said one student. "Those who might get into Oxbridge; those who are going to university; and those who aren't. That's just how you're ranked."

Apprenticeships are an increasingly important tool in student recruitment. However, we need to face up to the fact that, if we want to move towards an apprenticeship model, there is a communications challenge regarding what they can offer.

If industries don't start dealing with that issue now, then this vital tool in addressing a lack of diversity in many industries is not going to fulfil its potential.

Why did you choose to go to university?

Quotes from focus groups

I chose to go to university just because it was the natural progression

Ann-Marie, 19

It was just the done thing, I guess.

Sam, 22

Going through school, it was kind of a given. It was expected of us.

Alvi, 23

I chose to come to uni for the pursuit of knowledge... and as a buffer period to figure out what I want to do with my life.

Sally, 21

My parents went to university, my friends went to university. I felt like my school encouraged me a lot to go.

Beth, 21

I felt like I needed to go to university. My school were really pushing me since I started my GCSEs in Year 10.

Amit, 21

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:

If we want to move towards an apprenticeship model, there is a comms challenge. This can't be fixed overnight, but we need to face up to it. We need to convince people that it can offer a well-paid career and transferable skills as much as the 'normal' graduate route.

Tristram Hooley
Chief Research Officer
ISE

CHAPTER TWO: MORALS

(Im)moral values

You could fill a library with the articles written about Gen Z being extremely ethical.

When it comes to hiring, most of these say that if you want to hire a graduate in 2019, you need to align yourselves with their moral compass – or at least appear to.

The problem with this 'trend', as with so much written about Gen Z, is that it is massively overstated.

On a range of areas in the focus groups, from Brexit to the ethics of the company where they're applying to work, students emerged as being far more pragmatic than expected.

The vast majority of students cited money or how they would be treated as the number one reason why they would choose to work for a particular company. Most students didn't rank morals in the top five reasons; in fact, many didn't even put morals in the top ten.

We asked them about a range of moral issues, and how their opinions on such issues would affect their job hunt. Naturally, we had to start with the dreaded 'B' word: Brexit.

We know that students are more likely to be left-leaning remainers than those who are part of older generations, so we expected a strong reaction.

In fact, it was met with a bit of a shrug. Occasionally this was due to political apathy, but around a third of students said it was simply because they were used to it – Brexit is just the latest in a long line of unstable political events to hit their world.

To a lot of these students, chaos is the new normal.

We then discussed companies whose leaders held political views with which they disagreed.

Students expect industry leaders – and, by extension, their >>

companies – to take stances on political issues. If, however, the students disagree with those views, so be it. They would rather work for people they agree with, of course, but it's not a deal-breaker. Business leaders are human, and sometimes humans disagree.

We quizzed attendees on whether there are any industries they'd never work in. 'Big pharma' constantly came out as the most morally questionable in this regard. Most students who gave this answer simply didn't believe that it's possible to make a profit in the medical industry without mistreating a large number of people.

Second spot went to the media. Largely due to its role in the rise of right-wing populist politics, the media was seen as more immoral than working in a field such as oil or gas.

When asked, "Would you like to work with a company whose morals align with yours?", most said yes, but very few ranked it highly. And when it came to prioritising these factors, most were very pragmatic. Students simply want a job that treats them well, makes them happy and pays the bills.

Not so different from the rest of us, then.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:

Don't try and be 'woke', because you're probably not. Be clear, transparent. You're not dealing with a generation of snowflakes, and students aren't from another planet. They're grown-up humans with grown-up human priorities.

Simon Lucey
Managing Director
Hype Collective

It's time to talk?

Let's start with the good news.

The vast, vast majority of focus group attendees – over 90% – said they would be comfortable talking about their own mental health with a friend. Approximately two-thirds said they would be comfortable talking about it with certain family members, too.

In the past decade, the message from mental health charities and advocates has really taken hold: we should talk about our mental health. Ten years ago, this felt like a daunting or even overwhelming task. Although there is a huge amount of work still to do, it's clear that progress has been made.

Discussing mental health with potential employers, however, is a different story.

Across our focus groups, 75% of students said they wouldn't feel comfortable talking about their mental health with a potential employer.

"I believe that many employers might be put off if they heard that an interviewee had a mental illness," said Millie from Birmingham.

This was a consistent theme in the focus groups. Most of the students who said they wouldn't feel comfortable discussing their mental health also said that they feared it would negatively affect their chances of being given a job.

But there was a moral element, too.

Every focus group came to a general consensus that a job interview setting simply isn't the place to be asking – nor asked – about mental health.

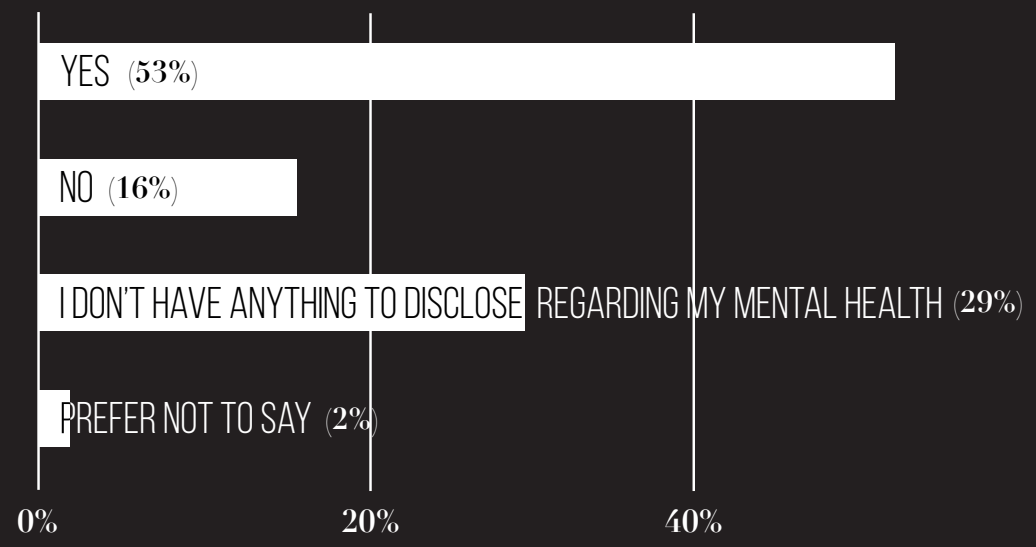
"I wouldn't know what to say," said one student from the University of Glasgow. "I feel like in an interview there's a right answer and a wrong answer. There isn't that for mental health."

Would you feel comfortable talking about your mental health with a potential employer?

"Too personal information for a stranger. Especially if I would be judged on it." Daniel, Aston University / "I feel that it might negatively impact my employment." Faissa, Queen Mary University / "They might discriminate against me if I talked about it." Sumayyah, Queen Mary University / "I feel like I would be judged negatively." Harriet, Cardiff University / "I would feel judged by the potential employer and feel it could negatively impact my chances of getting the job." Emily, Cardiff University / "I wouldn't want anything asked as part of the interview process but if it came up I potentially wouldn't mind discussing it." Patrick, University of Glasgow / "Not in an interview as I feel that it could impede on my room for progression. It depends how severe the case of mental health. If it is something that can put others in danger I would willingly bring it up." Mohit, University of Glasgow / "Personally [I'm] fortunate enough not be hindered by it, but the principle stands that it shouldn't impact someone's application, unless for safety reasons – i.e. jobs with acute high stress." Aaron, University of Manchester / "I would feel comfortable talking about it after I had the job and I knew that their motive was to support me." Bethan, University of Manchester / "I think if necessary it is important – the only issue would be if I thought it would lower the chances of me getting the job." Tom, University of Glasgow

Do you fear that being honest about your mental health in a job interview will damage your prospects of getting the job?

YouthSight poll of 1,000 students who live in the UK

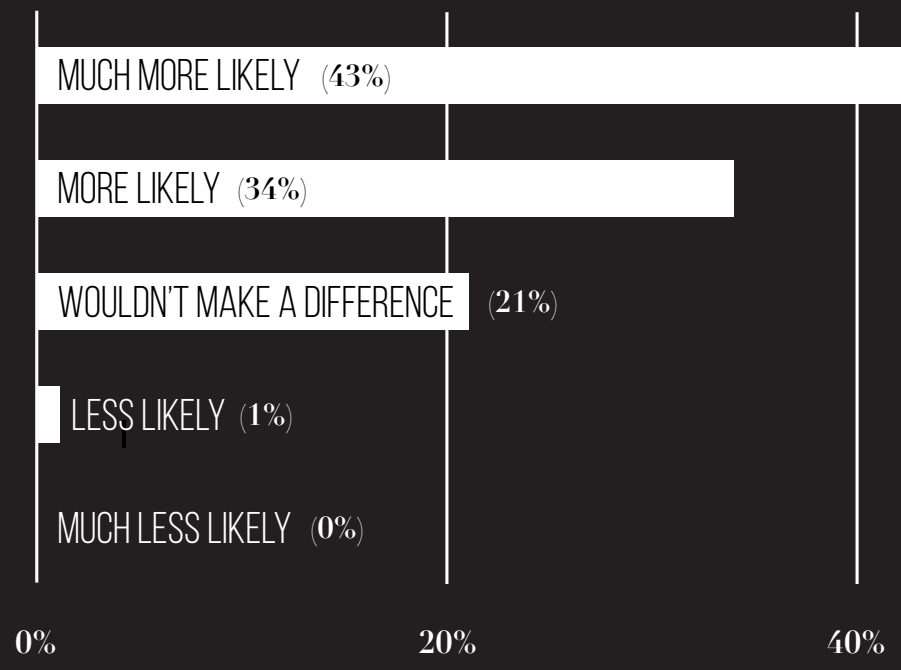


Two-thirds

of our focus group agreed with the phrase, "I would be more likely to want to work for a company with a public and transparent approach to mental health"

Some companies have a public and transparent approach to mental health for example, they post their mental health policy on their website, which states how they treat mental health sick days, mental health support etc. How likely would you be to apply to a company if they had this approach to mental health, compared with one that didn't?

YouthSight poll of 1,000 students who live in the UK



Note: results add up to 99% due to rounding of individual answers

What's your policy on mental health?

Many businesses are starting to see that focusing on the mental health of their employees is critical. 85% of employers surveyed by the ISE said that mental wellbeing was a priority, with 34% viewing it as a high priority.

This is an important step that has been taken by employers, as our focus groups found that students place a huge amount of emphasis on mental health policies when they're looking for a graduate job.

Around two-thirds of the focus group attendees said that they would be 'significantly more likely' to want to work for a company that had a 'public and transparent' mental health policy.

This was true not only of those who had personally suffered from poor mental health, but also those who hadn't. It was seen as both something that students would feel would personally benefit them, and as an indicator of whether a company actually cares about its employees.

Just as students are not always sure about what to say about their mental health, employers often find it a difficult balancing act. That is why we asked for advice from mental health charity Mind on how employers' mental health policies should look.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:

"There are lots of small, inexpensive measures employers can implement."

Forward-thinking employers are increasingly recognising the importance of creating mentally healthy workplaces for their staff.

Most graduates want to work for businesses that promote wellbeing, minimise the work-related causes of stress and poor mental health, and support them if and when they experience a mental health problem.

There are lots of small, inexpensive measures employers can implement.

Offering things such as flexible working hours, generous holiday allowances, subsidised exercise classes and access to employee assistance programmes (24-hour confidential support lines) can all make a difference.

Employers that prioritise mental health policies and wellbeing initiatives tend to see greater staff loyalty and productivity, and lower sickness absence. Find out more at *mind.org.uk/work*.

Emma Mamo
Head of Workplace Wellbeing, Mind

No one wants to be a lifer

Going into this research project, we were aware of the stereotypes around Gen Z being flaky. We knew that some employers are concerned that students will be job-hoppers who place little value in staying in a role over the long run.

Our hypothesis was that this was likely to be out of touch with reality. In an unstable world, students would place a high value on a job that offered the *option* of a longer-term stay – which, for the sake of the study, we defined as being 5-10 years.

We were wrong.

Hardly anybody ranked it highly as a factor in their decision about where to work in their first job. Most students said it was nice to have, but virtually no one said it was important. They expected to be in their first job for between 1-2 years, so most weren't thinking long-term.

This wasn't because the students interviewed didn't like the idea of committing to a job, but because they felt that their first job probably wouldn't be one worth sticking around in. There was a perception that, if you were to stay in a job for longer than a few years, your career prospects would suffer. They thought you would become a 'lifer', trapped in a dead-end job with no hope of progression.

Most students, however, did say they would be happy to stick around in the job if given the opportunity to progress – it's simply that they were sceptical that they could get this without leaving. The majority of the students we interviewed placed great importance on getting a job where you could progress far in a period of 3-5 years.

So, the next time you visit a careers fair, maybe don't bring the person who has worked for the organisation for 20-odd years. That is an alien concept to most students. Find someone younger who has been around for only 5-6 years but who has progressed a huge amount during that period.

Graduates stick around for longer than they think

Most of the students in our focus groups said they expected to stick around for 1-2 years in their first job. Despite that, we know they stick around longer.

1-2 years

Around two-thirds of our focus group attendees said that they expected to stick around in their first job for 1-2 years.

3.6 years

Average amount of time that entry-level graduate employees stay in a graduate role (source: The Institute of Employers).

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:

Showcasing 'the lifer' – i.e. someone who has been around for fifteen years at your organisation – when you're recruiting is unlikely to resonate. Instead, you should be highlighting examples of people who have progressed quickly and achieved a lot after 3-5 years.

Tristram Hooley
Chief Research Officer
ISE

That's your lot.

Thanks for reading – we hope you enjoyed it. (No, really, we do. We hate dull industry research papers and so we always try to make something a bit more interesting.)

We'll be running two more sets of focus groups later this year about travel and the student home.

If you've got any burning questions or bright ideas about either of those areas, we'd love to chat. Drop our MD, Simon Lucey, a line on simon@hypecollective.co.uk.

HYPE COLLECTIVE

Hype Collective is a student marketing agency. We work with clients such as Co-op, Monster and Abercrombie & Fitch to deliver campaigns on campus, on social and in the media.

We work with a network of over 5,000 sports teams and societies from across the UK, with a combined membership of around 250,000 students. We utilise this network in our campaigns, helping us to promote our clients both online and offline.

We also conduct regular focus groups and panels with students, in order to keep in touch with how they perceive the brands we work with and the industries we work in. It's what led to this very magazine.

Institute of Student Employers ise.

The Institute of Student Employers (ISE), formerly the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), is an independent, not-for-profit member organisation that was established in 1968.

As the UK's leading independent voice for student employers, our vision is that the success of every business is maximised by full access to student talent.

We achieve this by bringing together employers, the education sector and supplier partners, providing leadership and support in all aspects of student recruitment and development.

Steering group

Special thanks go to our steering group, who gave up their time and shared industry insights to help give direction to this report.

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

IET The Institution of Engineering and Technology

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

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JACOBS

Please note that our steering group helped us by offering up their time for interviews at the start of the project. This helped us to decide how to structure the focus groups.

They do not endorse the findings themselves.