

# Strategic affinity: engaging international alumni to support internationalisation

A UK case study approach

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## I. Executive summary

Effective internationalisation delivers more than a portfolio of activities; it serves the whole university community and achieves a deep-rooted and rewarding culture, with measurable impact. Successful alumni engagement programmes align institutional priorities with graduates' interests, needs and giving potential (philanthropic and otherwise). The benefits of effective alumni relations extend beyond fundraising, and the costs of undervaluing graduates' contributions are becoming clearer. Alumni are contributing to a wide range of programmes that add value to institutions' international efforts in meaningful and innovative ways.

Recent developments in internationalisation and alumni relations have been significant, and both are the subject of debate, research and investment. However, little exploration of the potential synergies between the two agendas has been undertaken, particularly in the UK. Building on existing work, this report highlights case studies of good practice, references the latest research, and makes recommendations to institutions hoping to develop activity in this area.

The report begins by highlighting the latest trends in internationalisation and international alumni relations, and proposes a conceptual framework for developing synergies between them. The studies are presented under three headings, and recommendations are drawn from each. These recommendations inform the final commentary, which offers a number of strategic principles for maximising the contributions of international alumni to internationalisation.

Colleagues who generously shared their practices and insights are acknowledged in the concluding section, and the report is also partly informed by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) seminar hosted by the University of York in late 2012, entitled 'Engaging Alumni to Support Languages and Internationalisation'.

## 2. Internationalisation in UK higher education

In 2006, almost 90% of UK universities included internationalisation in their mission statements (Ayoubi and Massoud, 2007), and all UK government policy documents published on higher education between 2006 and 2008 referred to it explicitly (Foskett, 2008). Historically, there has been some confusion over the term, and even some scepticism that internationalisation was simply a post-hoc rationalisation for the recruitment of international students to boost the bottom line (Scott, 2011).

The driving forces of change in UK higher education are wide-ranging, and have been accelerated by rapid globalisation. Internationalisation and globalisation are related: the latter is the combined effect of the economic, political and cultural trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the former includes “the policies and practices undertaken by...institutions and individuals to cope with the global...environment” (Altbach and Knight, 2007: 290).

In their study into the internationalisation of UK business schools, Bennett and Kane concur with this view, and extend it by adding that “internationalisation involves sets of activities, managerial inclinations, organisational and funding arrangements, and strategic decisions...” (2011: 2). Far beyond coping, internationalisation has developed from a peripheral interest to a core activity, and “in order to maintain global relevance, internationalisation of both teaching and research have become critical objectives” (British Council, 2012: 4).

One noteworthy trend is the proliferation of transnational education (TNE): the delivery of UK education programmes in overseas locations. In 2009-10, for the first time, there were more international students studying UK courses overseas than came to the UK to study (Universities UK, 2012). TNE presents significant opportunities for institutions wishing to extend their internationalisation efforts, and will further diversify what it means to be an alumnus from a UK institution, and how universities engage with graduates.

To determine how international alumni can contribute most effectively, it is important to define success in internationalisation. As the agenda has gained prominence in UK higher education, there has been a resultant drive to benchmark institutional progress. In order for this exercise to be undertaken meaningfully, institutions are challenged to develop a shared understanding of success, outside of published league tables.

While recognising that international 'league tables' have currency with some (but by no means all)...there are limitations and even dangers in taking them too seriously in institutional planning; at best they may offer pointers for areas of apparent differences with overseas competitors that should be explored in more depth. (HESA, 2011: 33)

In the report commissioned by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from PA Consulting Group (*ibid*), the benchmarking of internationalisation activities is explored. Alongside a thorough review of practices, and a critique of the available resources, the report also presents a schematic framework for assessing organisational maturity in relation to internationalisation.

The framework proposes four levels of strategic maturity, from ‘beginning’, where institutions are starting to explore internationalisation, to an integrated level. In this latter stage, internationalisation is much more than an *ad hoc* collection of operational activities; it is firmly embedded in the culture and operations of the institution.

Internationalisation is a concept firmly rooted in traditional structures of higher education which has evolved over recent years in response to globalisation.

As experience of internationalisation processes in 21<sup>st</sup> century contexts has matured, so these processes have themselves gained currency and legitimacy right across the sector. At the same time definitions have become less ambiguous and more readily applied in operational contexts. (Caruana, 2011)

This framework provides useful terms of reference for exploring the contribution that alumni can make in promoting internationalisation.

Figure 1: A schematic framework for assessing organisational maturity in relation to internationalisation, HESA (2011).  
Reproduced by permission of the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited.

Maturity level	Beginning	Developing	Extending	Integrating
<b>Strategic priorities</b>	Growing overseas recruitment and revenues	Plus growing international research capability/profile	Plus growing international delivery, partnerships, and shared campuses	Plus establishing the university as a global business and brand
<b>Management models</b>	<i>Ad hoc</i> , stand-alone activities driven by individual enthusiasts	More centralised planning and control, with targeted projects	Institutional ventures and programmes with corporate support	International goals integrated into all academic practices
<b>Focus areas</b>				
<b>Students</b>	Overseas recruitment led from faculties or departments, little planning	Central coordination of overseas recruitment, mainly using agents	More recruitment through agreements and joint ventures	“All students are international”, through two way exchanges and joint awards
<b>Overseas presence</b>	All operations based in the UK	Some courses delivered overseas through franchises and online	Substantial offshore delivery through partners and overseas campuses	Up to half of earnings come from international activities
<b>Benchmarking approach</b>	Internal comparisons across departments and versus past performance	Intra-national comparisons with domestic peer institutions	Focus on student and staff perceptions and international choices	Using international data for predictive market intelligence



### 3. International alumni relations in UK higher education

A distinction is typically made between alumni relations (programmes and communications designed to involve alumni in activities that do not typically involve donating money) and development (a synonym for fundraising). Although there have been noticeable innovations along the way, international alumni relations in the UK has historically featured reunions and social gatherings; efforts to keep alumni engaged have often been perceived as a docile adjunct that, in some small way, contributed to the main act of fundraising.

Despite the economic downturn, fundraising in UK higher education has become an increasingly significant income stream, with the total amounts raised reaching £560 million in 2010-11. The Ross-Case survey and its accompanying report (National Centre for Social Research, 2012) offer a substantial review of the current status and progress of fundraising and alumni relations in UK higher education – the 2013 report is due to be published in March 2013. The longstanding nature of the survey also makes longitudinal comparisons possible.

The report highlights the “positive correlation...between investment in alumni relations and the percentage of...alumni who made a gift” (*ibid*: 67). It is intuitive that international alumni will be more motivated to give financially if they are effectively engaged in the life of the university. However, international alumni engagement opportunities that were once designed solely to move prospective donors up the ‘giving ladder’ (Matheny, 2010), are now widely considered to add institutional value in their own right – especially in the areas of employability, recruitment and enhancing academic programmes.

The number of alumni in UK higher education who are contactable by their alma mater is over 8.7 million, with over 160,000 making financial contributions. The UK higher education alumni community, which increased by almost 600,000 in 2010-11, is a significant asset. John Lippincott, President of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE: the professional association serving institutions and professionals working in fundraising and alumni relations) notes that “in this era of constrained resources, public scrutiny, global competition, and digital communities, a strong alumni relations program should be valued as critical to the success of educational institutions” (2011). Institutions are also increasingly aware that in order to connect with busy graduates, engagement programmes need to be more than self-interested; alumni relations works best when programmes are underpinned by mutual benefit.

An international perspective [in alumni relations] is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity in planning any successful...operation.  
Lippincott (2010), President of CASE

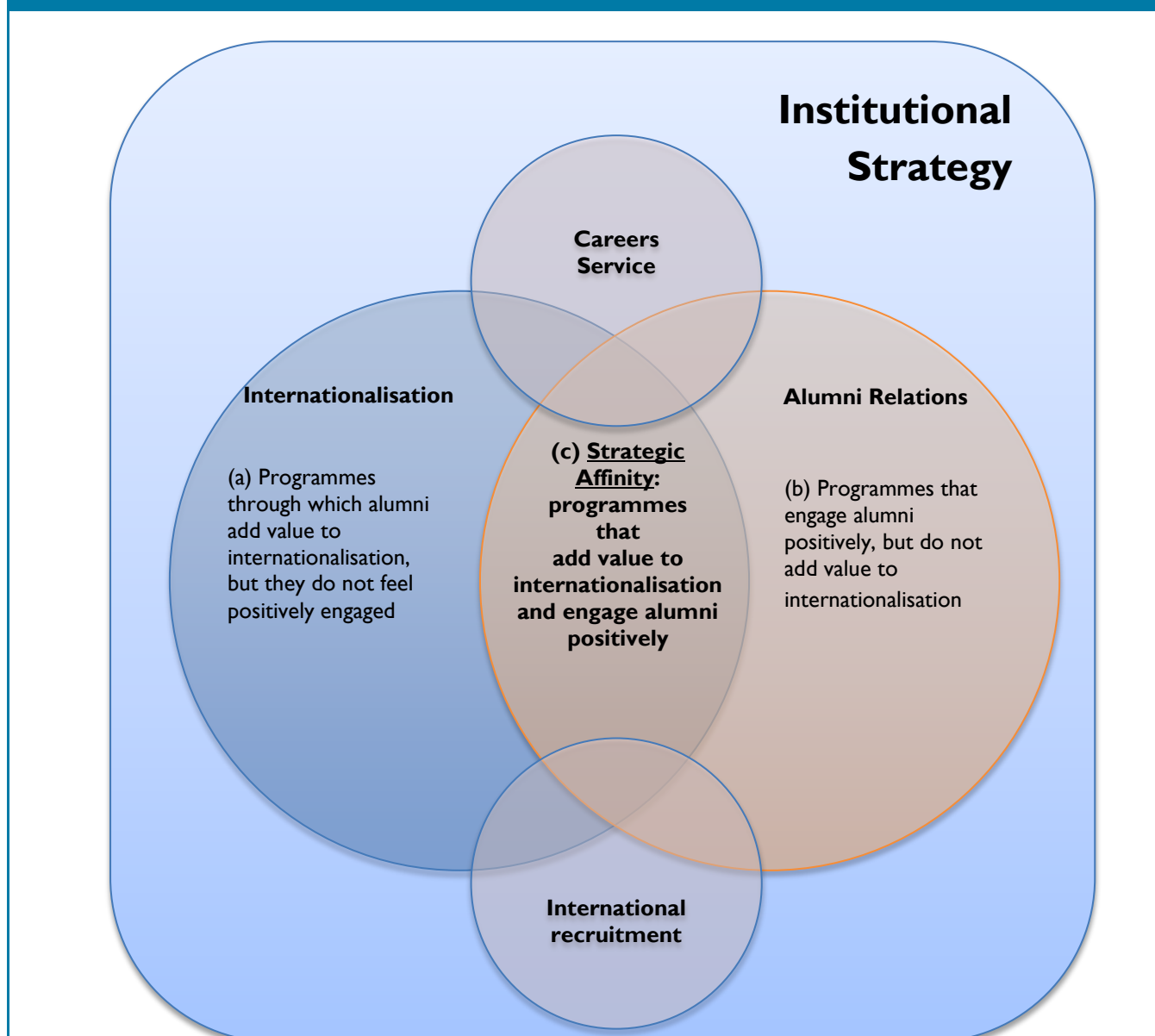
For many universities, international alumni engagement is not a priority, and for some it may never feature in strategic plans. Fielden identified that many institutions’ attempts to develop relationships with overseas alumni were ‘being thwarted by poor information and support from an alumni department that is primarily UK-focused’ (2008: 28). The quality of contact databases for international alumni is still variable (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b), but a number of interrelated forces are motivating institutions to reassess how they interact with their overseas graduates. The time and financial costs of international communication have been reduced, international student recruitment is still rising, personal mobility is growing, and most universities’ outlooks are increasingly international in teaching and research.

Institutions are challenged to design innovative ways to maintain links with international alumni communities, where the traditional UK models of engagement may not be appropriate or practicable. Financial support from alumni can directly support internationalisation by, for example, enabling international research programmes or capital projects overseas. Alumni engagement and fundraising are closely related, but this report focuses on international engagement programmes designed to support internationalisation in ways that are not directly financial.

## 4. Strategic affinity

The principal purpose of this report is to explore how alumni relations can add value to internationalisation. Without considered strategic planning, there is a risk that programmes may serve one purpose, and not the other, or that they can become disconnected from the institution's core academic strategy. For example, a programme that mobilises alumni to offer students international placements, without the rewards of meeting the students, might leave a supportive graduate feeling useful, but not effectively engaged - (a) in the figure overleaf. Similarly, a project that overvalues making an alumnus feel warm-hearted, without due consideration to how their engagement might contribute effectively to the institution, can be purposeless - (b) in the figure below.

Figure 2: Designing programmes that achieve strategic affinity in alumni relations and internationalisation.



In order to systematically develop programmes in (c), close partnerships between colleagues leading on internationalisation and alumni engagement are required, alongside pro-active collaboration with complementary functions (Careers and Recruitment are highlighted here, but many others could be included, such as Business Development). Sustainable programmes respond to the institution's core academic strategy, and engage with academic colleagues in ways that add value. Alumni typically regard

academic colleagues (and their department/school of study more generally) as their most affectionate point of contact with the institution, and their involvement can therefore motivate engagement.

The case studies that follow are examples of programmes based on strategic affinity between internationalisation and alumni relations. They are grouped under three major themes, although overlaps naturally develop between them. The report is not intended to provide a detailed analysis of these themes, but each is introduced to contextualise the studies.

The case studies are taken from UK institutions, primarily because case studies from outside the UK are well documented in Dobson's publication (2011), and also in recognition of the challenges that are specific to the UK higher education sector. The programmes are typically at a developmental stage, rather than at steady state. This enables challenges and opportunities to be more closely inspected, and provides colleagues who are considering developing similar activity with a perspective that is not too distanced from their own.

The case studies have been drafted as a result of email and phone exchanges with practitioners, supported by additional materials such as websites, brochures, evaluation reports and conference presentations. The recommendations that emerge from the studies also take account of additional material that has been developed in this area, most notably by Dobson (2011) and in the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (DTZ, 2011). Some of the key recommendations are also echoed between case studies, so that they can be explored in different contexts.



## 5. International alumni supporting academic development

An internationalised curriculum provides students with global perspectives of their discipline, and broadens their global knowledge base for future careers (Higher Education Academy: 2012). Much like international employability, this involves programming effectively for international students, but also ensuring that all students are taught a curriculum that is robustly informed by a global view. Learning in this context prepares students for multicultural and interdependent environments, and challenges academic colleagues to operate beyond local and national perspectives to strive for “...academic learning that blends the concepts of *self*, *strange*, *foreign* and *otherness*” (Teekens, 2006: 17).

Caruana (2011) identifies three key concepts related to internationalising academic programmes: inclusion, multiple perspectives and cross-cultural capability:

Inclusion:

“Teaching practices that are student-centred, embrace students’ experience as a resource, [and] engage relevant pedagogies and learning activities which enable them to deconstruct their own lives and to imagine alternatives...” (4).

Multiple perspectives:

“Questioning learning materials and experiences from multiple cultural standpoints, integrating, applying and extending the bounds of knowledge, are essential components in achieving the multiple perspectives which heighten awareness of the contestability of knowledge in a globalised world.” (4).

Cross cultural capability:

As defined by Killick (2006):

- intercultural awareness (awareness of self in relation to ‘other’);
- skills that enable students to communicate effectively across cultures;
- international and multiple perspectives on the discipline that have traditionally characterised the ‘content’ approach to internationalising the curriculum.

Caruana continues by contesting that, although cross-cultural capability is unlikely to feature across all units of study, the two principles of inclusion and multiple perspectives should “be in evidence across the board” (5). Furthermore, internationalisation of the curriculum does not necessitate a comprehensive reworking of teaching materials, but should recognise the following key enablers:

- the presence of international students and/or home students with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in campus classrooms;
- international collaborations and partnerships;
- links with organisations in the community (business, industry, voluntary sector, public sector, third sector, etc.) which are either representative of cross-cultural interests or are involved in work which has a cross-cultural dimension;
- international accreditation of programmes;
- international staff who are contractually available to teach, and staff who have experience of teaching and research in other countries;
- learning materials and resources which originate outside the host country;
- opportunity to learn languages.

These enablers provide a useful framework for beginning to understand the contribution that international alumni can make in this area.

### 5.1. Case study 1: A community of alumni translators at the University of Birmingham

Financial support from alumni receives a high profile in the University of Birmingham's publications. Less celebrated are the many alumni who contributed thousands of hours of their time in 2012. The institution has a range of activities that engage graduates, and has appointed to a new post in 2012 (Volunteer Manager) in recognition that effective volunteering programmes require investment.

The new appointee has been challenged to grow the existing activities, including mentoring and the international alumni networks, but also to begin to work collaboratively with academic colleagues to identify and develop bespoke opportunities for alumni to add value to teaching and research projects. One area of success has been the involvement of alumni in translating materials associated with academic projects. Alumni are typically recruited through personal contact, the University's online volunteer postings, and the e-newsletter. The experience at Birmingham is that international alumni often feel stronger ties to the institution than home students, and are typically keen to engage in volunteering opportunities. Previous experiences have also shown that international graduates respond more positively to volunteering opportunities that meet a specific need, as opposed to more generic requests for support.

Alumni have collaborated to add significant value to a project based at Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute. Working online in partnership with academic colleagues, a community of alumni has translated an innovative smartphone application that allows visitors to interactively explore Stratford, with the aid of virtual guides, historical information about artefacts, and maps of the town. In order to extend the reach of the Eye Shakespeare project, alumni were engaged in a number of countries, including Japan, China, Germany and Spain. In each language, one graduate led on translating 12,000 words from the application into their native language, while a fellow alumnus proofread and approved the content. Alumni also recorded the spoken introduction in their native language, and the application is now available in seven different languages.

The tremendous generosity of alumni in giving time to help translate...is not only a measure of their relationship with the town and with Shakespeare, but it is also testimony to the international outlook of the University.

*PhD student at the Shakespeare Institute,  
University of Birmingham*

A number of further projects have emerged, including the recruitment of volunteer alumni to translate a number of letters from the Hans Schwarz collection - he was a Jewish Austrian artist who was forced into exile in England. The letters contain correspondence between Schwarz and his father in Vienna, who later died in Auschwitz. A further project involves translation of an interactive smartphone tour of the university's Blue Plaque Trail, which marks the influential achievements of people who were based at the university and shaped its heritage.

The translating opportunities enable alumni to use their language skills remotely to add value to the University's academic activity, and extend the international reach of projects established in the UK. They have given alumni a chance to reconnect with their academic subject, and this has proved to be very motivating. The project also links international alumni with an aspect of their time at Birmingham that they are likely to remember fondly, i.e. living close to the birthplace of the world's most famous playwright, or celebrating the famed academic achievements of the institution on the Blue Plaque Trail. The graduates have also commented on the way in which they have benefited from engaging in the translation programme - it adds to their CV and challenges them to practise language skills in a formal environment where precision is essential.

The success of these pilot projects is leading the University to explore how graduates' involvement in translating academic materials could be extended into more general use. For example, colleagues are

beginning to explore engaging alumni in translating teaching materials (mainly lecture notes), to support students' learning, and so that they can be made easily accessible to alumni across the world.

## Recommendations

**Alumni are usually willing to contribute to engagement activities without remuneration, but successful volunteer programmes require careful co-ordination and sufficient investment.** While graduates should be viewed as a valuable and cost-effective resource for supporting internationalisation, their involvement must be carefully planned and costed, and recognition activities, such as celebratory dinners and awards events, included in budgets.

**Alumni can be usefully engaged to extend the international reach and impact of programmes that have been established by academic colleagues.** Across the case studies and literature, alumni are typically involved in extension activities, rather than the initiation of teaching and research projects.

**Projects that are specific and make use of international graduates' skills are likely to motivate alumni to be involved, rather than more generic asks for involvement.** This is especially true when engagement opportunities reconnect alumni with their discipline and enable them to engage with the institution on terms which are relevant and interesting. In this way, alumni will see that they are adding value, and the experience might be usefully added to their CV - outcomes that are likely to secure and sustain involvement.

**Engagement opportunities which relate to themes, historical events, or cultural references associated with the institution are likely to enthuse international alumni.** Projects that resonate with fond memories that international alumni associate with the institution (Shakespeare in the Birmingham case study; every international student at Birmingham is likely to visit Stratford), are likely to provide a good hook for engagement.

## 5.2. Case study 2: Language Landscape at SOAS, University of London

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) is the only higher education institution in the UK specialising in the study of Asia, Africa and the Near and Middle East. Approximately 50% of the School's students are from outside the UK, and over 25% of the degree programmes offer opportunities to study abroad. A languages project, initiated and run by alumni and students, is creating a valuable academic resource, raising the profile of the School's activities, and engaging the global graduate community.

Language Landscape is a tool for mapping where languages are spoken around the world. At its heart is a collection of samples - audio, video or photographic representations of languages.

A marker on the map, which is placed exactly where the sample was made, represents each sample. Language Landscape has three main purposes, all contributing to the institution's internationalisation agenda:

- academic - the site is a valuable tool for researchers. Samples can be used for research in linguistics and other disciplines and, in the longer term, the site will chart global linguistic diversity with a focus on where and when languages are spoken - a map of 'language in space and time';
- recreational - people have an appetite for languages, whether it is a passion for their own tongue or a desire to learn another. The site gives people the opportunity to hear languages they may otherwise never hear, and to celebrate their own language by contributing samples;
- awareness raising - the site serves as a significant platform for speakers to promote their language and highlight the plight of threatened languages worldwide. With over 50% of the world's 6,000 languages in danger of becoming extinct in the next century, Language Landscape can help raise the profile of minority and endangered languages.

The project website was launched in 2012, during Endangered Languages Week, and is designed to be as flexible as possible, supporting individuals and communities to document their own language varieties in new ways. The site is proving to be an

Students and alumni are working together to promote linguistic and cultural diversity on a global level. The project engages participants from around the world and raises the profile of SOAS in different environments: within academia, among pupils at school, and among the public worldwide.  
Linguistics researcher at SOAS.

innovative alumni engagement tool, as the School's global alumni community can upload languages from their locations around the world. The site has developed a creative form of alumni networking which is closely linked to the academic content and ethos of SOAS. The management and the operation of the site also actively connect alumni with current students, adding value to students' experiences, and inspiring graduates to stay involved.

The project has gained significant momentum, and the collective sense of achievement has developed positive relations between students and international alumni. In June 2012, the team presented at the Charting Vanishing Voices workshop, at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge. The programme has limited costs, and is supported by the SOAS Alumni & Friends Fund. The fund is made up of alumni donations, mainly from the annual telephone fundraising campaign, and managed by a panel (including academic and fundraising staff, students and alumni) which identifies priority projects to support. The Language Landscape project is especially good use of the fund, since contributing alumni can also be actively involved with the project and experience it remotely.

### Recommendations

**Online networks for international alumni are more sustainable if they have a focused purpose, or output, especially if they relate to academic projects.** Online relationships might, for example, be based around the development of a specific project related to the institution's academic strengths, or more generally around shared professional interests, or a lecture that may have been broadcast by the university.

**The potential scalability of programmes should be considered at inception, and online programmes typically offer the best opportunities for this.** Alumni relations teams should be hesitant about initiating international projects that have little prospect of being developed because of limited resource. As pilot programmes become successful, expectations are raised among colleagues, and larger numbers of alumni are likely to want to engage.

**Alumni are likely to be enthused by opportunities to work collaboratively with students.** Projects should have defined outcomes, so success can be recognised and celebrated, and also have the potential to be scaled up as more people wish to be involved.

**Alumni relations and fundraising can be mutually reinforcing, where graduates are invited to fund programmes that they can co-create with students.** Many alumni are motivated to give by the opportunity to be involved in a project which their donation has enabled, and to combine financial contributions with other types of giving, such as expertise, advice or general support.

### 5.3. Case study 3: Alumni opening doors at the University of Roehampton

The University of Roehampton has successfully extended the international reach of a flagship Masters programme through its global alumni networks. The Masters in Special and Inclusive Education was initially a collaboration between three European institutions (Roehampton, Oslo, and the Charles University Prague), delivering the first programme of this kind. The seed-corn funding came through Erasmus Mundus, a European Commission programme designed to promote dialogue between cultures through mobility and academic cooperation.

Now in its second phase, the programme awards a joint Masters' degree in Special and Inclusive Education from its three participating EU institutions and has added an additional opportunity for students to research in Malaysia or South Africa.

The major aspect of the joint degree is to undertake comparative action research, by looking at SEN policy in Europe and selected third country contexts. The programme is unmistakably international in its content and community. The students' ages range from 21 to 57 and include university lecturers, Ministry of Education employees and Non-Governmental Organisation staff. In five years, over 110 students have graduated from five continents.

Alumni have played a critical role in raising the awareness of the programme overseas, translating it into new international markets, and protecting the academic brand. Collaborating with graduates has informed our international developments, and opened exciting new opportunities which would otherwise have required significant investment.

Head of Professional Learning and Development, University of Roehampton

Evaluations of the first phase resulted in the developments of additional international links, most of which have been enabled through the advocacy of the programme's alumni. For example, a UK India Education Research Initiative was established by a graduate from the programme, delivering professional development at primary level. Another project developed through the alumni network was based in Botswana, Swaziland, Kenya and Uganda, and developed modules to help build capacity for inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Graduates of the programme have been instrumental in translating the programme to international markets. Alumni have helped to ensure that content and delivery modes are appropriate to local audiences, while preserving the academic rigour and process that they became accustomed to through their studies. This helps guard against a 'one size fits all'

approach, and alumni and academic colleagues have worked in close partnership to expand the programme.

Developing links through alumni connections has been positive, underpinned by their familiarity with the aims and outcomes of the programme, and the trust established with academic colleagues. Many of the links made through alumni would not have otherwise been possible, or at least they would have taken considerably longer to develop. Graduates have facilitated contact with international networks that are typically hard to access, including the ministries of developing countries. Alumni have also helped to raise the international profile of the institution through their networks. This has proved especially important for a brand that was relatively unfamiliar in some international markets.

Although alumni have initially negotiated many of the connections, the established programmes have the potential to expand beyond their original scope. Graduates have opened doors and the network is widening as relationships develop.

## Recommendations

**Alumni can facilitate international opportunities for academic colleagues that might otherwise be inaccessible, or have required significant investment.** If nurtured carefully, these networks can extend beyond an alumnus' direct links and reach out into secondary contacts, growing the international scope and impact of academic programmes.

**Alumni are valuable advocates, and their authentic voice can help to raise the awareness and credibility of academic programmes in new international markets.** This can be especially beneficial for institutional and course brands that are less recognised overseas. Alumni can help to promote courses remotely, often capitalising on their trusted networks and social/professional status in their home country.

**Alumni can support academic colleagues in contextualising and adapting curriculum content and delivery modes into international markets, while preserving the academic rigour that they have become accustomed to during their studies.** This can be especially important in areas such as social policy and educational studies, for example, where contextual factors play a significant role.

**In order to undertake academic development work, it is essential that alumni collaborate closely with academic colleagues.** Trust established between academics and students during study often underpins future relationships, alongside the shared interest in increasing a programme's status overseas.

## 5.4. Case study 4: Alumni enhancing teaching and learning at King's College, London

King's College has developed a focused strategy for engaging international alumni to enhance the internationalisation of curriculum, teaching and continuing education. The imperatives for this work are the rise in the College's international student population and, more importantly, the globalisation of academia and the requirement to express the value of a King's degree in international terms.

The alumni relations team works in collaboration with departments and the careers service to carefully identify topics, or particular areas of the curriculum that might benefit from the input of international alumni working in specific areas. This needs-driven approach ensures that alumni are pro-actively engaged to add value to academic colleagues' activities, rather than academic programmes being used to provide inexhaustible opportunities to get alumni on board.

The College has moved away from engaging self-selected volunteers to contribute to teaching and curriculum. Alumni typically engage in these activities once a relationship with the institution is well developed, and they have previously been involved in a number of ways. Alumni contributing to teaching programmes have invariably met with academic colleagues (or they have heard the graduate speak at an event) and, where needs are identified that cannot be met through the existing alumni network, graduates are approached to mobilise their network of contacts - King's graduates or otherwise. These controls help to ensure that matching academic need with alumni contribution is a positive process.

For example, an alumnus from the General Counsel at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently gave the IMF's perspective on the Euro crisis. The event enriched students' understanding of this critical subject, and helped to contextualise local issues within a global context. The event included time for questions and an opportunity afterwards for students and staff to network with alumni and one another. King's is beginning to explore the use of technology to expand the engagement of alumni around the world, and is planning on trialling the use of webinars.

The College has also established alumni advisory boards for some subjects, partly to support activities that internationalise the curriculum. To introduce the scheme in a focused way, the College has identified priority disciplines that are likely to benefit from an alumni board, based on having a critical mass of alumni, whether they are a recruiting priority, and whether specific fundraising targets exist. The advisory board has been especially successful in the Dental Institute, where positive leadership from the Dean has motivated alumni to become involved, and ensured that the board has operated effectively.

At King's, it has proved critical to ensure alumni are clear that academic colleagues have the responsibility for curriculum development, but that value can be added in defined ways. In the School of Law, where graduates are internationally mobile, alumni are offering insights into how the curriculum relates to what global employers value in new recruits, and helping to propose case study materials that help students' global outlook.



## Recommendations

**It is important to adopt a needs-driven approach when engaging alumni in supporting academic programmes.** Academic colleagues should lead the way in identifying opportunities for alumni to make contributions to internationalising the curriculum, and work in partnership with the alumni relations team to secure contributions from graduates.

**Quality control is critical when engaging alumni in academic activities, and it is likely that graduates will be involved at this level some time into their relationship with the institution.** Alumni should typically travel through a staged process of increased engagement, undertaking more meaningful and involved activities over time, with contributions to academic programmes likely to come later in the journey.

**It is important to define the scope of alumni engagement in academic programmes, and to manage expectations about the extent to which involvement is likely to be possible.** Advice on international perspectives and helping to contextualise teaching materials for new international audiences may be valuable, but it is unlikely that graduates will have the expertise or experience required to offer substantive adjustments to academic programmes.

**Graduates' most affectionate point of contact with the institution is often with their department, and with the academic colleagues who taught them.** This can be pertinent to international students who study as postgraduate students in the UK, because they are more likely to have a strong relationship with a specific academic. The involvement of senior academic colleagues, who have been based on campus for some time, can add status to an international engagement programme, and also provide a familiar contact point for alumni.

## 6. International alumni promoting global employability

International employability in higher education has two different, but overlapping, divisions: the global employability skills of home students, and the employability of international students studying in the UK.

The recent Government White Paper promotes the better preparation of students for the job market (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011a). Since November 2012, institutions have been obliged to publish Key Information Sets, disaggregated by course, including the percentage of alumni in professional and managerial roles (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2012a). Students in England are expected to become more sensitive about the return on investment from their studies as tuition fees increase. Further afield, students across the UK, principally motivated to enter higher education because of improved employment prospects (Futuretrack, 2008), are likely to be increasingly concerned about trends in graduate employment.

When surveyed in June 2012, top employers had recruited less than 1% more UK graduates to start work in 2012 than were employed in 2011; graduate recruitment remains below pre-recession level (High Fliers Research Limited, 2012). Fundamental changes to the structure of the job market have also redefined employability in higher education: “As business focus changes with globalisation of markets, so too do expectations for the graduate workforce... the skills to become socially adept, cross-culturally fluent global learners and citizens are... more important than ever” (Trilling and Fadel, 2009: 81). The recent ‘Global Graduates into Global Leaders’ report (Diamond *et al*, 2011) consulted with leading employers and proposes strategies for developing graduates with the skills outlined by Trilling and Fadel:

- achieving global graduate competence is not just about attaining qualifications and excelling in a knowledge-based or professional capacity. It is also about holistic development including outlook, values and character;
- experiential learning is a valuable part of professional development alongside formal education. Placements, study trips, years out and even holidays can all contribute;
- an international dimension should feature in...degree programmes;
- experience of working outside their home country and immersion in a different culture can catapult a graduate into being considered for rewarding and challenging roles. However, many UK graduates are reluctant to accept the demands of mobility, whether within their home country or beyond and may even choose to study close to home. (*Ibid*: 21)

Student mobility underpins many of the recommendations in the report. The UK is the second highest receiver of international students worldwide, with over 420,000 non-UK domiciled students in 2010-11 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2012b). However, UK students are hesitant to take up international exchange opportunities: in 2009-10, more than 213,000 students received ‘Erasmus’ grants, with fewer than 12,000 of them from the UK (European Commission, 2011). Comparatively, Brazil, Russia, India and China have expanded student mobility by around ten times over three decades, and their graduates are consequently profiting from learning and working within other cultures.

The recommendations submitted to the Minister by the Joint Steering Group on Outward Student Mobility (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) advocated the involvement of alumni in promoting mobility, and developing an infrastructure to facilitate uptake. However, the report does not indicate how this might work in practice. International alumni can help to promote student mobility, provide professional and social support to students studying abroad, and help to bridge the gap for those students who are not, or cannot, be mobile during studies.

This has particular implications for widening participation, since students from lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented in the Erasmus programme (European Parliament: 2010) and there is a risk that increases in higher education costs will exacerbate this. The advantages of student mobility in

relation to employability are clear. The socio-economic imbalance in enrolments in Erasmus may intensify disadvantage, as any students from disadvantaged backgrounds miss out

Much of the advice and activity aimed at improving home students' international outlooks also applies to international students studying in the UK. Arguably, the sector does not yet have a developed understanding about the diverse careers service needs of international students. The inclusion of international alumni in the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey from 2012 should develop this understanding, although no minimum response level has been set for the opening two years. Concurrently, The International Student Employability Survey was launched in March 2012 as part of the National Union of Students' Global Future campaign (NUS, 2012). The survey is designed to identify the issues affecting international students' employability. These new insights should enhance our understanding about the process and outcomes of international student employability, and help to inform how alumni can contribute most effectively in this area.

International students are attracted to study in the UK by the reputation of the system and by "a belief that employment and earning prospects will receive a boost" (DTZ, 2011: 45). Historically, international students have been critical about the lack of specialised careers support (Higher Education Careers Services Unit, 2005). This could be attributable to differences between the roles of careers services in UK and some other countries: some international students may not see the immediate value of careers services designed to enhance employability, as opposed to providing employment. Sometimes, having studied in the UK may actually be a disadvantage, because it means a graduate may become disconnected from local contacts that can help find employment at home. In some countries, such as Thailand, university is seen as the time when you make your contacts, and international alumni could have an especially important role to play for students in the UK who are from cultures like this. The provision of careers services for international students is challenging.

A minority of international students take up graduate employment in the UK, and the challenge for many Careers Services is sustaining a wide-ranging and up-to-date knowledge of global labour markets. The more recent benchmarking survey from the UK Council for International Student Affairs (2011) reveals that specialist careers provision for international students has increased from 42% in 2009-10, to 60% in 2010-11. This is partly because 33% of the careers services that responded now make links with overseas alumni and employers to boost the employability of international students.

The second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education was launched in 2006, and funded a number of international student experience and employability projects (DTZ, 2011). In 2010, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services was funded to pilot projects to promote better links with employers and alumni overseas: ten projects were undertaken, and the body of evaluative reports adds considerably to knowledge in this area (AGCAS, 2011).

Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education also supported a number of other initiatives aimed specifically at involving alumni to support international students' employability. The report from the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA, 2010) highlights innovative activity at the University of Manchester and the University of Warwick. The outcomes of some of these initiatives are considered in the recommendations made in this report.

## **6.1. Case study 5: Alumni-generated labour market guides at the University of Bath**

Almost 30% of the 80,000 contactable alumni from the University of Bath are resident outside the UK (with the greatest concentrations in the USA, China and Malaysia). The alumni engagement team has invested resource to stay connected with international alumni, and more than 20 groups driven by alumni provide the foundation of Bath's international alumni engagement. The groups tend to be socially focused, and while that is helpful in maintaining connections with alumni, the groups require clearer objectives and associated projects if they are to engage with the University in more impactful ways.

In accordance with trends in the sector, prospective applicants to Bath and current students are increasingly anxious about job prospects. In 2012, the University was ranked in the top ten universities most targeted by key employers in *The Times Good University Guide*. However, most expertise and resource is focused on the UK job market, and international employment enquiries (from international and home students) can sometimes be challenging. Colleagues from the Careers Service with responsibility for international employability undertook a study tour to China in 2011; one of the outcomes of the trip was a labour market guide aimed at Chinese students. The now completed briefing includes job sector intelligence, insights into employment prospects in specific cities, information about what employers typically look for, and listings of resources and events to support job searches.

The guide has proved popular among Chinese students, but the team is faced with two challenges: firstly, keeping the guide updated is problematic, since resourcing regular trips to China for this purpose (and even sustaining a number of remote relationships with key contacts) is impractical and, secondly, it is important to expand the service to include other countries. Students at the university represent over 100 nationalities.

Working in partnership with the alumni engagement team, colleagues in Careers Services have recruited 'alumni employment gurus' in China, whose occupation is directly linked to human resources. The lead has been taken by a colleague in the School of Management with responsibility for employment programmes: the School has the highest number of students (international and Home/EU) who are interested in the China labour market, and has resources available to invest in the development of the guide. Recruiting alumni has been a relatively straightforward process, mainly achieved by promoting the opportunity at an alumni event in China, through the e-newsletter, and by enthusing targeted alumni through personal contact.

Alumni have volunteered to update and enhance the labour market guides, which will include:

- information about the top companies in the country, and in specific cities;
- insights into interview and professional etiquette in the Chinese job market, specifically aimed at students who are not from China;
- guidance on preparing a CV for the Chinese job market;
- advice on how to effectively present a UK degree, and the associated experiences, to prospective employers in China, including the unique Bath experience;
- a directory of alumni based in China who can be contacted by students to gain additional advice, and to help make introductions to companies.

On completion of the enhanced guide, alumni will translate it into Chinese for students, and similar guides will be prepared for additional target regions, including the USA, Malaysia, Korea and India. There are challenges around quality control of information. The guide is not designed to replace careers advice from experts at Bath, but is intended to provide up to date background information to support conversations with students. The guides are also not intended to replace the information offered by organisations such as [prospects.ac.uk](http://prospects.ac.uk) and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Country Profiles, but they offer supplementary and bespoke advice based on the Bath experience, and specific advice on selling this to prospective employers in China.

The labour market guide is beginning to contribute to the University's internationalisation strategy, by providing students and careers staff with bespoke and timely information, some of which is privileged information, providing competitive advantage to students seeking employment in China. Significant benefits are likely to be felt, however, once the programme is extended to other international markets. This could present challenges in terms of the capacity of careers service staff, since they are engaged in quality controlling the content and ensuring it is being communicated in the most effective way. The guides are also supporting recruitment, as they are being used to encourage prospective students who are concerned about employment prospects.

The initiative is also a helpful engagement opportunity for the younger international alumni community, who can often be harder to engage. The International Labour Market Guides offer an opportunity for them to contribute by applying their specialist knowledge to provide observable benefits to students. The tangible output of the programme is also important, since volunteers can see a product associated with their efforts, but it is also a continuous engagement process which may enable the University to develop long-term relationships with alumni. Critically, international alumni can also contribute remotely, and the initiative brings international graduates together in teams to work collectively on a specific project – in this way the programme is also supporting the development of international alumni networks.

The labour market guides are proving to be invaluable in improving our students' international outlooks. The programme is also strengthening our links with our alumni in Beijing, which in turn is raising profile among prospective students, and developing better research and business links internationally.

Molly Southwood, Alumni Relations Manager, the University of Bath

Since the materials are web-based, measuring their use (in terms of amount of uptake, and gaining insights into which students are accessing the resource) is relatively straightforward. The best indicator of the impact of the guides will be the employment outcomes of students, but the relationship between cause and effect is hard to define, and a programme of evaluation is currently being given consideration.

## Recommendations

**Effective overseas alumni groups provide the foundation for international alumni engagement, but innovative programming is likely to maximise graduates' contributions to internationalisation.** Carefully planned engagement programmes that align the institution's international objectives with the giving potential of alumni can give alumni groups focus, and cultivate greater commitment from graduates.

**Alumni are a good resource for extending the international knowledge and reach of the Careers Service.** Graduates can provide up to date labour market intelligence, and help to give students access to privileged information. Alumni can also combine their experiential knowledge of the institution with their awareness of employers' expectations, and support students in pitching their academic and extramural experiences at interview.

**In providing careers support for students, it is important that alumni are partnered with experts from the careers service.** Alumni can usefully provide students with information and advice, but are unlikely to have sufficient expertise and time to provide sustained guidance and support. It is also important that opportunities to engage with alumni are an embedded part of the overall careers service offering, and students do not view them as tangential.

**Programmes that are focused, and have specific outputs, are most likely to enthuse international alumni.** This may be especially true for younger graduates, who may be less interested in social events and reunions; they are likely to be busy in their professional lives, so try to focus their time usefully, making use of their particular expertise.

**Engaging international alumni to work in project teams can help promote the alumni network, provide additional extra quality control (since team members peer review one another's work), and mitigate against the risk of graduates suddenly becoming unavailable (since they can cover for each other).** Working with fellow graduates can also help international alumni to feel connected to the university, and help remote activity feel more enjoyable and engaging.

## 6.2. Case study 6: New York City Scholarships at Queen's University Belfast

Queen's University developed a City Leadership Group (CLG) in 2011, based in London and mainly comprising alumni, to address two challenges. Firstly, similar to many students in UK higher education, those studying at Queen's can consider working in the City too late in their studies, and compromise their ability to compete for the most sought-after jobs. This is partly attributed to some students' lack of

focus on employability in the early stages of their degree, but also because many of them do not have access to City professionals through family and social networks.

The second challenge is that many of the institution's high-level giving prospects are based in the City, and Queen's was keen to create opportunities for them to reconnect with the University; graduates' propensity to give accelerates once they are effectively engaged.

The process of establishing the alumni City group was strengthened by good research into graduates (occupations, prospective wealth, contact details, etc.) and the personal connections that were initiated and developed by the Head of Major Gifts. Colleagues at Queen's were alert to the dangers of establishing alumni groups not driven by a specific purpose, and the creation of student internship opportunities was identified as a key outcome. This resonated with alumni on the CLG, because there was a residual feeling among some graduates with successful City jobs that the work placement opportunities offered during their time at the University were inadequate.

The CLG Scholarship Programme provided ten of the best first year Queen's students with a week-long placement at a number of law and finance firms across London in June 2012. The programme offers students a stipend for living costs, and is focused on first-year students to put them in a stronger position to compete for formal summer internships at the end of the second year. An evaluation was carried out, based on quantitative and qualitative feedback from companies and students, and key strengths were identified:

- the outcomes of the placement, in terms of skills and opening up future career paths;
- the organisation of the programme and the use of a pre-departure briefing;
- the friendliness and attitudes of the host company staff towards the students.

Institutional leaders, including the Vice-Chancellor, were enthused by the outcomes of the programme, and keen to develop the model to extend the University's international employment reach. The expansion of the programme also tied in strategically with the launch of two new mathematical finance degrees, and the fact that Belfast had become the world's top destination city for financial technology R&D investment. The University is now putting plans in place to extend the programme to New York, with the potential for it to be rolled out to additional sectors, e.g. engineering and management consultancy.

The second iteration of the programme is being developed in a controlled and focused way, so that it can be carefully nurtured. The institution has defined a manageable new market for the programme's expansion, rather than spread the programme too widely and risk diluting its effectiveness; the decision to develop the initiative in New York was based on the Irish diaspora, the importance of the city as a global employment hub, and the potential of the alumni in the area to support it.

The placement has had a huge impact on my career development, both short and long term. The experience opened my eyes to the possibility of a legal career outside Northern Ireland. I am now intending to apply for vacation schemes in London for my second year.

Student on the scholarship programme

It is hoped that investing heavily in a defined area will enable the institution to build a sustainable community of high-level alumni. The CLG in London is now self-sufficient, and it is the ambition to get the New York Group to a similar stage within 18 months. Backing from senior colleagues has helped with approaches to higher level prospects in New York, since the programme has become a flagship activity for the institution.

The programme is not only helping to raise students' expectations. Successful international alumni engagement is also helping to sharpen the Careers Service's provision, and highlighting the importance of ambitious international employability programmes internally. The relationship between the Careers Service and the alumni relations team is important to furthering the growth of the programme. While the mechanics of the programme are owned by the Careers Service, it is critical that the personal



relationships with alumni are developed and maintained by the alumni relations team. The engagement with the graduate extends beyond the scope of the internship initiative, and relationship management and stewardship is especially important where financial gifts are involved.

In recognition of the increased financial burden on students who secure internships in New York, alumni who join the New York City Leaders Group are also asked to contribute a minimum of \$3,000 to enable students to access the opportunities they are creating. Fundraising and engagement are working in tandem, and the two strands are mutually reinforcing.

A powerful model is emerging for extending the University's international reach, the quality of careers provision for students, and the strategies for engaging alumni with high giving potential.

The programme promises to be self-perpetuating, with those students who have benefited from the initiative likely to be positive about contributing to it after graduation.

## Recommendations

**Growing alumni engagement programmes in new international markets should be undertaken through measured and staged processes.** The temptation to expand programmes simultaneously into numerous markets is usually best resisted, especially if staff capacity is limited. Establishing a new programme internationally is likely to require differentiated approaches, in terms of marketing and delivery, which are sensitive to the cultural norms and expectations of different international audiences.

**Alumni engagement and fundraising can work in mutually supporting ways to boost internationalisation.**

Alumni engagement offers experiential opportunities for fundraising. Asking graduates to help fund programmes which engage international alumni with students may offer a useful first step in underdeveloped donor markets overseas.

**In employability programmes that engage alumni, the careers service will typically own operations, and the alumni engagement team will own the relationships with graduates.** It is important that the careers service is able to embed the programme within wider provision for students so it is not an isolated activity, and equally important that the alumni engagement team can nurture relationships, and effectively thank graduates for their involvement.

**Assess the completeness and quality of data on international alumni, before launching ambitious engagement programmes.** An institution's ability to grow its international alumni engagement activity is underpinned by the quality of data on graduates; exciting programmes can quickly fade if alumni are unreachable, or if the design of a programme is based on inaccurate information (occupational data, for example). Although engagement programmes can sometimes provide the incentive for alumni to update their details, institutions should invest in schemes to improve data before launching large-scale engagement programmes.

## 6.3. Case study 7: Oxford University International Internship Programme

One of the challenges of educating students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is equipping them to work, live and lead in a global context, and internships are increasingly important in competitive job markets. As part of creating a more international experience for students at Oxford, the Careers Service and Alumni Relations Team have collaborated to develop the Oxford University International Internship Programme (OUIIP).

The University Careers Service promotes a number of established internship programmes with leading corporate firms, but OUIIP is specifically designed to give students a cultural exchange to extend their global awareness, as well as provide insights into a particular profession. The programme has developed over the last five years, from 15 internships in 2008, to over 280 in 2012.

International alumni have enabled this rapid growth by ‘donating’ opportunities: around 90% of the internships have been offered by Oxford graduates. Alumni are encouraged to provide opportunities through the graduate e-newsletter, and profiling graduates who have benefitted from engaging Oxford students early in the scheme has helped inspire alumni to be involved. Alumni have enabled the programme to become global: the range of internships on offer in 2012 spanned 30 countries throughout six continents. Internship sponsors offer placements of eight-ten weeks, which are generally undertaken over the student’s summer holidays. Many alumni take a pragmatic approach to sourcing opportunities

I worked on the development of a mobile incubator for small businesses. I developed a manual on how small businesses in rural areas can be supported in improving their business plan. The organisation helped me to find accommodation and my boss also organised...BBQs where she invited all the interns so that we could socialise with each other and with the other employees.  
Student who undertook an internship at Instituto del Sur, Arequipa, Peru.

for Oxford students at their organisations. Through a Sponsor Internship Form, which all employers are required to submit, the Careers Service aims to ensure that opportunities are meaningful and appropriate for students, and that the sponsor is committed to assisting the intern in some way. Support can take the form of a local stipend, paid flights, provision of free accommodation, assistance in finding accommodation or, in some cases, all of the above.

Alumni typically introduce an extra level of care than might normally be expected from an internship, meeting with students on arrival, and co-ordinating orientation and social activities. The programme is a particularly effective tool for engaging younger international alumni, a group for whom it can be more challenging to find engagement opportunities.

As a result of the development of OUIP, students’ engagement with the Careers Service has increased. In the past year the OUIP pages were the most viewed information pages on the Careers Service website (with the exception of the home page) and the programme has had a significant impact on the overall footfall at the Careers Service. The programme therefore encourages the students to obtain more general career guidance and advice.

To maximise their learning, and to help advertise the programme to the following year’s students, all interns are required to complete a reflective report, including a critical assessment of the way in which the internships are administered, and a short account for the yearbook to help inform future applicants’ decisions.

Managing expectations is central to the programme, and complete transparency throughout the process is valued by students, alumni and the co-ordinating team. The expectations of students and sponsors are clearly outlined on the website, and both parties can read the guidelines for one another. Applicants for the internships access a directory of opportunities, and read about previous students’ experiences through the OUIP yearbook. Students then apply through a competitive process that is managed by the OUIP team. The complete applications, which include a standardised application form, a CV, a reference, and, if required, a letter of support from the student’s college or department, are forwarded directly to the appropriate internship sponsor who selects the successful intern, often by interviewing a short-list of candidates.

Last academic year, more than 1,300 applications were considered and forwarded by the OUIP team. This creates a considerable workload for the OUIP team around the application deadlines, and ways of streamlining the process are being explored. Challenges also emerge from multiple applications, as students are allowed to apply for up to three internships. On rare occasions this can lead to places not being filled as several offers are made to one candidate.

The co-ordinating team is cautious to position themselves as brokers of the internship opportunities, rather than providers: the emphasis is clearly on both parties to take responsibility for making the experience positive for both sides. This approach has ensured that the workload generated by the programme is manageable, and that the team has been able to scale up the operation to accommodate more students.

There is also a range of financial support available for students who are successful in securing an internship, and a number of scholarship programmes for which specific internships have been sourced. The OUIIP team can also allocate bursaries from various funding pots to internships which fall within specific criteria, for example to undergraduate students undertaking internships in China. Many Oxford colleges have travel bursaries, and the OUIIP team supports students' applications for funding.

Students are also encouraged to contact the alumni group based in their home town, or in the country to which they are travelling to work. Many of these groups also have modest travel funds as part of their activities, and get satisfaction from enabling a student to undertake a placement which has been generated by a fellow graduate. While the OUIIP team does all it can to ensure the internships are fully supported, more resources are necessary to make all the placements offered affordable to all students. A balance has to be maintained between providing as many valuable internship opportunities as possible and attempting to ensure that adequate financial support is in place so that the opportunities are open to all.

## Recommendations

**International alumni can promote student mobility, particularly to those students who may be hesitant to engage in study abroad programmes.** The stimulating opportunities created by alumni, and the extra level of care typically offered, can be especially encouraging to first year students who might not otherwise engage in international employment. These experiences can then act as 'controlled rehearsals' for more ambitious mobility programmes, such as Erasmus.

**Alumni can enhance mobility experiences for students. The additional level of care offered by alumni providing international placements can help to support students' cultural fluency, as well as help to develop new professional insights.** The coordination of orientation and social activities, and the level of personal interaction can add value to the experience, and help students to reflect on their learning during, and after, a placement.

**Engaging alumni to offer international placement opportunities can act as a hook to draw students into wider careers service provision.** Students who might not otherwise make use of the careers service can be engaged through alumni interaction. Alumni are in a strong position to inspire students to think seriously about employability throughout their studies; this message may be especially powerful delivered by a successful graduate.

**As programmes become established, peer advocacy can be used to promote increased involvement.** This might include alumni connecting with fellow graduates to encourage their engagement, generating online profiles of participants, or engaging students to promote opportunities to engage with alumni to their peers.

**The provision of international internships is a complex process, and coordinators are advised to position themselves as brokers, rather than providers of opportunities.** This has implications for scalability, but more importantly the emphasis should be on alumni and students to make it work. Teams involved in brokering internship opportunities do, however, inherit a responsibility to have financial support packages available to ensure opportunities are accessible for all.

**It is important to manage the expectations of programme participants from the outset, especially working with international alumni where expectations are likely to be more diverse.** Expectations can be managed verbally, but for consistency written guidelines are recommended. It may seem heavy-handed to issue guidelines, but alumni are likely to react positively to programmes that appear professionally managed, and provide written reassurance about the terms and level of engagement.

## 6.4. Case study 8: International alumni mentors at the University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh Careers Service currently promotes 'Careers Contact', an online directory of alumni through which students can access graduates and ask for general careers advice. In the current model, alumni are considered to be an underused resource for careers and labour market advice, especially since they are typically keen to remain involved with the university in some practical way. After soliciting feedback from students and alumni, the Careers Service and Alumni Office identified the need for a more interactive way of connecting students and alumni for professional advice, and a jointly delivered e-Mentoring scheme has been developed which was launched in October 2012.

The use of an e-Mentoring system as the main vehicle for engaging alumni with students for careers, employability and labour market advice was driven by a number of factors. The programme exploits the existing functionality of the student and alumni portal, so new investment is minimal, and the delivery of the programme has limited administrative overheads, and can therefore be readily scaled up according to demand. The model also enables international alumni to give current students and alumni insights into global job markets, and to develop a global network of professional contacts.

Edinburgh undertook some initial research, visiting other universities to explore their mentoring activities to gain insight into the requirements of the system. At each stage of development there has been review and feedback from both the Alumni Office and the Careers Service, and they have made use of student and alumni focus groups. One of the Schools at the University that already provides a mentoring scheme also gave feedback on the system. These measures ensured that the team could learn from good practice, and plan for anticipated issues.

The contact between alumni and students is conducted via the MyEd portal, the secure web system that has been used by students and alumni since 2004. Students are typically in the portal every day during semesters, and the Careers and Employability tab for current students include an e-Mentoring channel to raise the profile of these opportunities.

Correspondingly, channels relating to the programme have been added as part of the default view when alumni log in.

The main advantages of using a portal for communication, as opposed to encouraging students and mentors to directly exchange emails, is that the programme can include associated online resources which outline the programme benefits, promote productive conversations, and signpost to careers events on campus. Critically, it also enables the Careers Service to monitor the amount of use, the length of relationships and to gain insights into students' needs, and the ways in which alumni are assisting.

To help promote productive and sustained relationships, the matching of e-Mentors and e-Mentees is a self-selecting process, similar to that on networking sites like LinkedIn. Alumni can also use the e-Mentee service, if they would like support and advice from a fellow graduates. The system works as follows:

- 1 alumni indicate they wish to be an e-Mentor, submit a profile and sign up to a set of standards for the programme (outlining expectations relating to response times, topics of conversation, etc.);
- 2 careers and the alumni team evaluate e-Mentor's submissions before they go live on the system;
- 3 students and alumni search for and identify a suitable e-Mentor (searching by occupation, sector, school of graduation or location) and invite them to 'connect';
- 4 the e-Mentor has the option to accept or not. Should the e-Mentor turn down the invitation, the student or alumni proceeds to finding an alternative mentor;
- 5 once the relationship has started the e-Mentor or e-Mentee can conclude the relationship at any time.

One of the anticipated challenges of the programme was to manage issues of supply and demand between the student and alumni communities. In marketing the programme, the team at Edinburgh is putting plans in place to overcome two potential problems.

On the supply side, there is little anxiety about the enthusiasm of alumni to sign up, but the team has noticed differences in attitudes to volunteering around the world; the international alumni volunteering community is not homogenous. It is important that the composition of the e-Mentors broadly reflects the diversity of the student population, and more pro-active marketing is required in some areas of Western Europe and Asia, including a more explicit expression of the benefits to being involved. The Careers Service also actively identifies shortfalls in e-Mentor supply, and targets specific sectors or regions to address the imbalance.

There was anxiety that a large number of alumni would sign up, and there would be insufficient demand from students. The Careers Service and Alumni Relations team work well with the Students' Union to engage students in alumni programmes, but the transient nature of the sabbatical posts can make long-term relationships problematic. A range of digital and poster marketing approaches were adopted to promote the scheme to students, but promotion via student societies (international societies and others) proved to be one of the most effective methods in other programmes. The Careers Service also engaged a student intern to develop a plan to market the programme on campus, because they are most in tune with which channels are most effective.

Another mentoring model that has emerged at Edinburgh is the Toronto Alumni Club's Career Connections programme, a collaboration between the Careers Service and a dynamic alumnus based in Toronto. The Alumni Club in Toronto has over 100 members of varying ages and an active programme of events. Acting as a broker, the alumnus receives specific enquiries from a wide range of students (about professions, industries, the local labour market, or general experiences of finding work) and then connects them with an alumnus in the city who is best positioned to offer advice.

Boundaries are set in the promotional materials relating to the scheme: alumni are not acting as spokespeople for their organisation, nor are they in a position to offer jobs or advice on employment visas. Expectations about time are also set, and the materials state that the interaction may be a one-off discussion by phone or email. The system is self-sustaining and adds to the Careers Service's capacity, but there are challenges with the programme around monitoring the level and quality of advice given. However, the group is committed to keeping colleagues at the University updated. This is helping colleagues gauge whether it is advisable to develop a similar model in other key areas. Alumni are working relatively autonomously to support internationalisation at Edinburgh, and replicating this model in other countries has the potential to add a great deal of capacity and knowledge to the careers provision.

## Recommendations

**Effective collaboration between careers services and alumni engagement teams is critical to programmes that connect alumni with students for employability purposes.** The partnership should be developed at programme inception, with both parties actively engaged in the programme design and evaluation. Activities that indicate effective collaboration might include regular informal contact between teams, shared funding models, shared key performance indicators, evaluation models which account for both parties' interests, and joint reporting to senior colleagues.

**The international alumni community is not homogenous, and flexible models of marketing, delivering, and evaluating programmes are likely to be required.** The graduate population is as mixed in its interests, motivations and cultural norms as the student body, but also has added diversity of occupation.

**Alumni engagement teams should focus on facilitating relationships between alumni and students that are based on benefits for both parties.** Programmes should account for personal interests and preferences, rather than forcing relationships which are unlikely to be sustained.

**The distinction between 'personal' and 'organisational' should be carefully considered when engaging alumni in careers support.** Both can be desirable: impartial careers advice is important in mentoring schemes, but an alumnus' organisational connections may generate internship opportunities, or corporate sponsorship of activities.

**In programmes that connect alumni and students, it is important to have processes in place for managing supply and demand.** Tactics for this might include pro-active marketing to harder to reach audiences, carefully managing participants' expectations from the outset, and having alternative engagement opportunities if demand from students does not match the supply of supportive alumni.

**Colleagues working in alumni relations should establish a good peer network, and take advantage of opportunities to learn from good practice.** Numerous formal and informal opportunities exist to benefit from colleagues' experiences and expertise; CASE is the main body that supports this.



## 7. International alumni promoting international recruitment

Since 2000-01, the number of non-EU students studying in UK higher education has more than doubled, with an increase of 11.7% in the last year (approximately four times the equivalent increase in UK-domiciled students). Income to UK institutions from non-EU domiciled students in 2009-10 exceeded £2.58 billion (Universities UK, 2011); in the same year, the median institutional income from non-EU student fees was £8.4 million, and the median income as a percentage of total income was 8%.

In 2009 3.5 million students were mobile in 2009 (British Council, 2012). Universities UK (2012) predict that demand for UK higher education is likely to remain strong in the short term, presuming policy initiatives such as student visa restrictions do not restrict growth.

The report is less certain about medium term prospects, and this caution is echoed in the recent British Council report, *The Shape of Things to Come*. One of the key findings of the British Council report is that at a global level, demographic and economic slowdown will affect the growth of the tertiary education sector: it is expected to grow 1% per annum on average, down from 5% per annum in the previous decades. Overall the global 18–22 age group population outlook is stable, but this will still mark a significant change from recent decades where the 18–22 age group expanded rapidly. By 2020, four countries will account for over half the world's 18-22 population: India, China, US and Indonesia (British Council, 2012).

The predicted slowdown in international student mobility has implications for student recruitment departments, variable by country depending on their demographic and economic outlook. Some countries such as China and South Korea will see a decline in their outward mobility (mainly affecting the US and UK recruitment markets), whereas others such as India, Malaysia and Pakistan are set to grow.

The development of domestic higher education systems in emerging economies, such as China and India, will shape the global education landscape of the future, and the increasing delivery of trans-national education offers both opportunities and threats to the long-term sustainability of international recruitment to UK higher education. "International student recruitment is an inherently complex, costly and competitive domain". Furthermore, "although student mobility is expected to grow, institutions have to compete hard..." to achieve competitive edge in established markets, and are challenged to adopt intelligent approaches in new and emerging markets. The recruitment of "talented and self-funded students" is likely to be "implemented in a shorter timeframe and under tighter budgets...institutions need to invest in understanding the decision-making process of their prospective students and monitor the effectiveness of their recruitment channels" (World Education Services, 2012: 17).

International alumni are becoming increasingly involved in universities' recruitment efforts, with some institutions achieving demonstrable impact. However, these activities are not typically planned systematically.

### 7.1. Case study 9: International ambassadors at the University of York

The appointment of a Director of Internationalisation in 2010, and an associated team, has raised the profile of internationalisation at York, and facilitated greater coordination of activity. There is a collaborative approach to engaging international alumni at York, with initiatives driven by the alumni relations team, but often emerging from the international recruitment team, academic departments, and the international relations office. This includes joint planning of international visits, shared budgets, and collaboratively preparing briefings and promotional materials. The teams have become effective at identifying opportunities to host alumni engagement events overseas, when colleagues might be travelling for other purposes, in order to increase capacity and visibility in priority areas.

On international visits, colleagues from the recruitment office typically engage alumni by hosting graduate networking events (funded by the alumni relations team), and by involving them informally in recruitment activities, including recruitment fairs and school talks. Alumni get satisfaction from speaking about their time at York, and for prospective students and their families an honest account of campus life from an authentic source is a compelling recruitment tool. It has also helped give some alumni events greater focus, where they have previously been informal gatherings.

The University was keen to develop this work to extend the reach of recruitment activity in established markets that are geographically large. Colleagues make regular recruitment visits to China and North America, visiting major cities where the returns on recruitment activity are most fruitful. They typically miss out on other markets within a country, such as the Midwestern United States and areas of inland China, because a comprehensive visit is unfeasible. Research undertaken with the alumni relations team revealed that the university has a considerable number of alumni based in 'outlying' recruitment areas. Some of these graduates were well known to the University, and could be depended on to engage prospective applicants in schools and universities, delivering presentations and workshops independently.

Careful consideration was given to alumni undertaking recruitment activity as sole representatives, since previous contributions to recruitment had invariably been carried out in partnership with an international recruitment officer. Assurance about the quality of information given to prospective students (and the way in which it is presented) was critical, and two controls were introduced to the programme.

The first alumni cohort to engage in the programme is made up of postgraduate students, who have just completed their academic studies. Between students' final submissions and graduation (September-January, while many international postgraduate students are still in York), the alumni relations team and the international recruitment team recruit a team of postgraduate students who become 'International Alumni Ambassadors' and promote the institution to prospective applicants when they return to their home countries. This window in the autumn allows for face-to-face interviews and briefings to take place on campus, which include rehearsal presentations, advice on how to set up talks, and the signing of a memorandum of understanding that outlines expectations.

As a second quality control measure, International Ambassadors are given password access to a set of online resources to assist with their activities. These include:

- a copy of the memorandum of understanding, prominent each time alumni log on;
- a recorded exemplar presentation, delivered by an experienced international recruitment officer;
- a template presentation, with numerous pictures and headings, into which alumni can place personalised text;
- an online log, where they record communications with schools and universities in their home region, including recording information about talks delivered;
- a formal letter from the University reassuring schools and universities that the alumnus has been briefed and trained to represent York;
- an FAQ sheet, providing up to date information on various details, from bus regularity to assessment methods of particular courses.

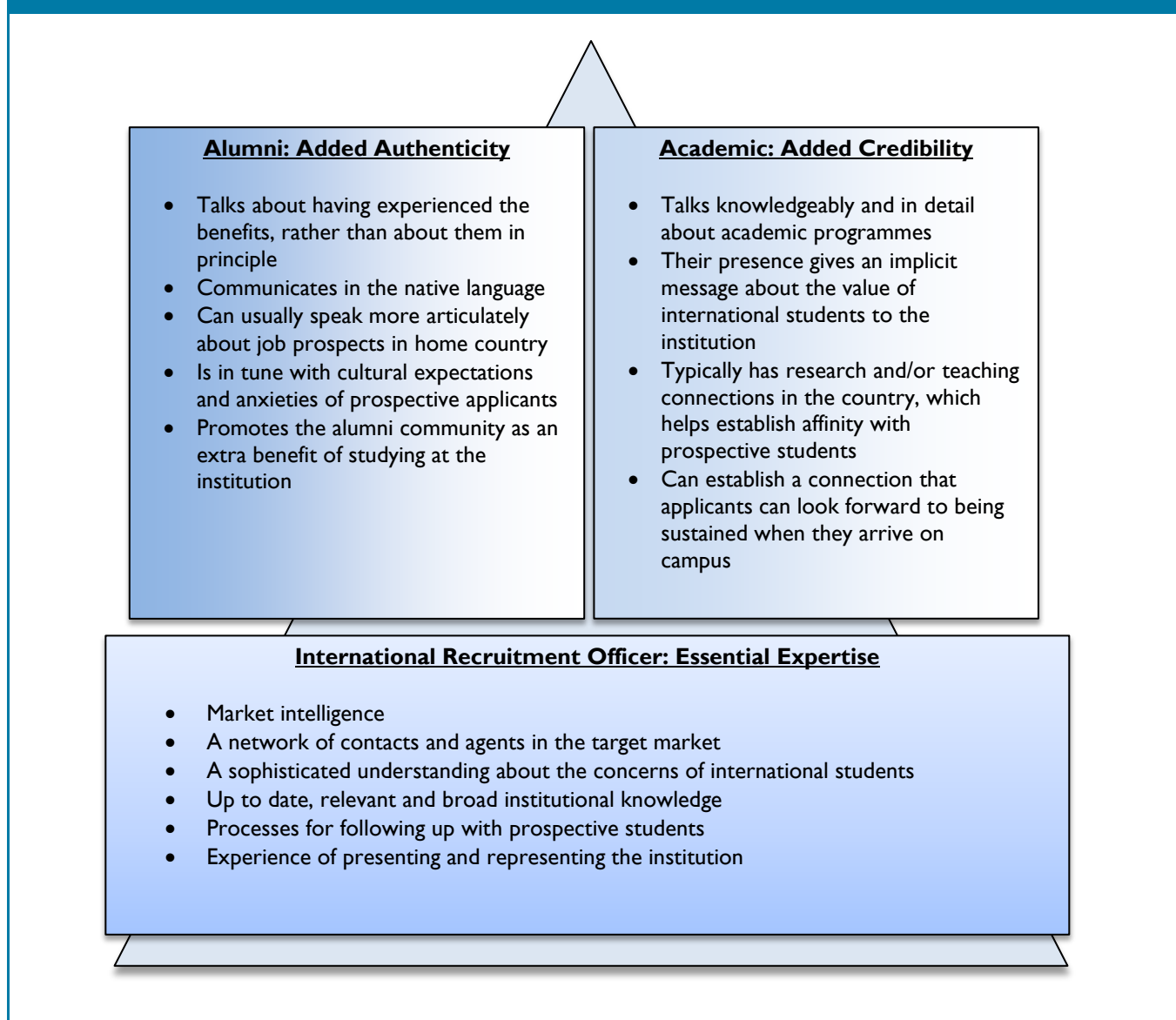
The programme is beginning to add significant reach and impact to international recruitment in key markets. The programme is also helping to address the challenge of engaging international alumni based in cities where mainstream events and activities are not usually focused. Alongside a more sophisticated online engagement strategy, the International Ambassador programme is a significant addition to the international engagement programme, and there are ambitions to extend it into new areas, including India and South America.

In addition to involving alumni remotely in 'outlying' recruitment areas, the international recruitment team at York is also mindful that academic colleagues can complement alumni in recruitment activities at mainstream recruitment fairs, and the involvement of both communities is mutually reinforcing.

A fund administered by the international recruitment office is available to academic colleagues, in order to promote their involvement in recruitment activities. The fund is competitive and its disbursement is tightly informed by recruitment priorities, but in practice is usually allocated to academic colleagues who incorporate recruitment activity with existing travel plans. Rather than being incidental to recruitment, academics' research and teaching links in a particular region can enhance their contributions to international recruitment, since their connections and familiarity with the country can be encouraging to prospective students.

Academic recipients of the fund must undertake significant activity, rather than simply attending a recruitment fair, or delivering a school talk, and there is an expectation that colleagues engaging in recruitment activities will talk enthusiastically and knowledgeably about the institution generally, as well as about their specific academic programme.

Figure 3: An emerging tripartite model for connecting with prospective international students



In mainstream recruitment activities, the inclusion of academic colleagues can add extra credibility to the efforts of international recruitment staff, partly because more detailed information can be offered about specific courses, but also because of the implicit message it sends to prospective international students about the way departments value overseas students. The involvement of academic colleagues in

recruitment overseas also has the powerful effect of motivating international alumni to contribute. Much like prospective applicants, graduates are also enthused by meeting staff who are involved in teaching and research, especially in their studied discipline. Attempts are being made to develop this powerful tripartite model.

The seed-corn funding has also helped to raise awareness of international recruitment and alumni engagement among sections of the academic community, and helped to initiate some longstanding relationships. The awards are gradually helping to ensure that international recruitment and alumni are not afterthoughts for academics planning overseas trips, but become embedded considerations in some colleagues' planning.

## Recommendations

**Alumni can be mobilised to extend the institution's recruitment reach, engaging communities that might otherwise have been inaccessible.** Alumni can act remotely to deliver institutional objectives in outlying markets, and help to reach a wider audience by acting as representatives of the university.

**Alumni can add significant capacity, but it is important to balance autonomous alumni activity with mechanisms for monitoring activity, and ensuring quality control.** The desirable balance will largely depend on the inherent risks of a particular activity, the maturity of the programme, and the stage of the relationship with the alumnus. Controls must be introduced to guard against alumni contributions which might be unhelpful. This could include piloting new programmes in tightly controlled circumstances, and producing clear guidance materials to support and steer alumni who are acting autonomously.

**Engaging with international students' parents can help to boost recruitment efforts, and grow connections overseas.** The main opportunities to meet face to face with international students' parents are during recruitment and graduation. During the recruitment phase, alumni are well positioned to help establish connections with parents, since their voice may be viewed as more authentic and they can communicate in the native language, where this is relevant.

**At least some of the institution's international alumni programmes should engage those graduates who are resident outside major cities overseas.** The Edinburgh e-Mentoring programme, and York's International Alumni Ambassador programme are good examples of schemes which do not depend on where alumni are based geographically, and can be scaled up to engage larger communities.

**The combination of alumnus, academic and international officer can be a powerful triumvirate in international recruitment efforts.** The international officer brings essential expertise of the market, alumni offer added authenticity, and academic colleagues offer added credibility.

## 7.2. Case study 10: Online Points of Contact at Royal Holloway, University of London

Royal Holloway, University of London, has been running a programme for 18 months that recruits alumni to lead their network of global Alumni Chapters, with graduates typically running social events and assisting with recruitment activities. Colleagues have found that alumni can add significant value to recruitment efforts at face-to-face events, and wanted to develop this online, so that larger numbers of prospective students and graduates benefit from this interaction.

International graduates have now been recruited to be a 'Point of Contact', a role specifically designed to support international recruitment. Points of Contact are appointed through self-selection, or by nomination, and successful applicants sign a contract that outlines the role and their responsibilities in relation to being contactable by prospective students. The graduate's profile and contact information, including personal telephone number and Skype address, are uploaded to the website and prospective students can make contact

I have had the opportunity to interact with many prospective students, who have come to me for advice on studying in the UK in general, and at Royal Holloway in particular. Quite a few of them are even my Facebook friends now. Students typically ask about life in the campus, level of study required, comparison with the Indian system of education, difficulty level, and time available for extracurricular activities. Often some of the conversations run for weeks, and often for hours over the phone, this is aside from the emails that are exchanged.

Alumni Point of Contact at Royal Holloway

at any time. To monitor communication, staff from the alumni relations team stay in regular contact to establish the quantity of communication (to intervene if an alumnus is being overwhelmed, or receiving no messages) and to identify recurring themes in students' enquiries.

Prospective students who are at the preliminary stages of their application can sometimes feel that the university is offering a 'sales pitch', at a time when they are still researching the course and/or institution. Furthermore, admissions tutors are viewed as gatekeepers by international students, and this can deter some from making initial inquiries as they may feel that their English language may not be up to standard at the time of enquiry.

Engaging alumni in the recruitment process helps to address these two issues, insofar as they provide an authentic and informed voice about the University. They cannot be 'primed' to answer prospective students' questions, and their views are therefore considered to be more credible than those of someone working directly for the University. Moreover, alumni are able to converse with prospective students in their native language, which can help to alleviate students' anxiety, because they are reassured by this early and friendly contact. As well as general advice about courses, and the institution, alumni also often give detailed and experiential guidance on adapting to the UK culture and education system, and information on obtaining financial support from a particular government.

The most significant advantage of involving alumni in the recruitment process is that prospective students are given greater personal contact time, whereas this might not be possible from within the recruitment team. 'Points of Contact' typically demonstrate great commitment to the responsibility, investing significant amounts of time with each prospective student. This extends to giving their personal telephone numbers and Skype addresses to students, conducting lengthy conversations during their personal time to cover the types of issues outlined above.

The programme has had a considerable impact on applications, and conversion to particular programmes, such as the MBA International Management, has increased significantly. Alumni who have volunteered to be a Point of Contact report that they are excited to undertake a role that has tangible outcomes for the university. Those alumni who take a lead in international regions recognise the importance of holding events within their Chapter for graduates, but some are now extending the invitation to applicants holding offers from the University. This is helping to increase the interaction that students have with Royal Holloway before they arrive on campus, and also aids transition.

The university has found that the model of engagement, and the way it is marketed, needs to be adaptable. Although it is unwise to make broad generalisations, some trends are emerging. For example, alumni based in India are especially active via Skype, whereas some platforms are problematic for Chinese alumni, who wish to engage mostly via email. Alumni in the US recognise the importance of helping with recruitment, and are happy to make and receive telephone calls. Graduates in South America are equally responsive, and particularly helpful in providing detailed information about obtaining scholarships, although appear to be less willing to take up a formal Point of Contact role. It is important to be aware of these different attitudes, and to ensure the programme adapts to them.

## Recommendations

**Alumni are a powerful resource in international recruitment**, since they can empathise with prospective students, talk authentically from experience, and communicate in the native language where appropriate. This may be an especially effective marketing tool when prospective applicants are in the early stages of their research, when a 'sales pitch' could be off-putting.

**Developing existing models of working onto online platforms can help to scale activity up, and engage alumni and prospective students who are not based in major recruitment cities.** However, it is still important to appreciate diversity in expectations and approaches, even when the engagement is exclusively online, and to monitor the level and quality of graduates' contributions.

**Institutions are encouraged to monitor the impact of alumni involvement in recruitment, so that the sector can generate a better understanding of the potential benefits.** Unlike in some other areas of engagement, there are quantitative indicators that allow for this in recruitment. Changes in application and conversion rates, benchmarked against trends in the sector, might usefully indicate whether alumni involvement is having a meaningful impact on recruitment activities.



## 8. Making it work: commentary on key recommendations

### Institutional alignment and commitment

Dobson (2011) asserts that two related interests should inform international alumni engagement programmes: an analysis of challenges and opportunities, and an alignment with institutional objectives.

In order to maximise alumni contributions to internationalisation, directors and operational teams working in alumni relations and internationalisation are challenged to identify and respond to strategic overlaps, and to be vigilant about potential collaborations that serve one agenda, and not the other. These latter programmes may be desirable on some occasions (manufacturing opportunities to engage a prospective major international donor, for example), but sustainable programmes in this area must be aligned with the institution's overall internationalisation objectives.

In his evaluation of alumni relations, Stenko (2010) positions the operation as a critical contributor to institutional strategy: "... we have a unique opportunity to serve as gatekeepers for alumni mentors, employers, lecturers, advocates and donors. We have more tools to access, educate, excite, engage and cultivate... than at any time in the history of our business" (93). There is also a risk that alumni relations become "a catch-all for programmes and services that belong elsewhere within the institution" (85). A strategic compass, informed by institutional objectives, is critical in planning alumni relations, since the operation can appear to have infinite possibilities. A vigilant approach to aligning international alumni engagement programmes with institutional objectives will encourage managers to stop unnecessary activity, even if certain stakeholders want it to happen, and to endure obstacles that may arise. Such obstacles may include insufficient resource, lack of data about the alumni community, or a reluctance to invest because practices for measuring outcomes and benchmarking are underdeveloped.

The decentralised governance structure, which is typical of most UK institutions, can also hinder the strategic co-ordination of activities. Collaboration between the alumni relations team and other functions, such as international recruitment and careers services, will typically involve working across directorates, and requires the development of positive personal relationships. Alumni engagement is also naturally scattered throughout an institution, with graduates maintaining their connection with the institution in ways that are inconsistent and changeable, including with individual academic colleagues, halls of residence, and extramural clubs such as sports or campus media. This can make the strategic co-ordination of activity problematic. The integration of standalone alumni initiatives, which may be operating within academic departments, is an essential part of maximising links in this area. This has been highlighted in a number of case study materials in this report, and in the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education project findings, including at the University of Warwick (UKCISA, 2010).

Management structures can support the integration of activities, as in the University of York case study, but the importance of personal relationships between functional teams and academic units should not be underestimated. Strategic planning in higher education is a combination of 'bottom up' and 'top down' (Mintzberg: 1994), and integrating the "efforts and systems of multiple internal departments, each benefitting from international alumni involvement and with something different to offer them" (UKCISA, 2010: 16), is critical.

An international engagement programme that is aligned with internationalisation objectives is also more likely to capture the attention and energy of senior colleagues, as in the Queen's University case study. The advocacy of institutional leaders can be motivating for operational teams, and senior support can also help enthuse internal collaborators, and high profile alumni. Engaged senior colleagues can be mobilised to support the launch or development of new international alumni programmes, especially if the timing can be coordinated with colleagues' international travel plans.

The enthusiasm of senior colleagues may also help to leverage discretionary funds, which can be critical to pilot new international initiatives, or to expand programmes which have been successful locally. Much of the case study material highlights that extensive international travel is not required for alumni relations teams to develop successful engagement programmes overseas. However, one of the most recurrent themes is the requirement for adequate investment in international alumni relations. There are usually opportunities for in-kind support and sponsorship for alumni engagement activities, but a realistic operational budget and staffing capacity are essential in developing effective programmes. New collaborative efforts with careers services, international recruitment teams, and academic departments also offer opportunities for maximising impact by pooling resources, including finances, staffing and expertise.

Pitching the business case for investment in alumni engagement can be exasperating. International alumni engagement strategies typically have some clear benefits in the short term, but the necessity for playing the 'long game' in alumni engagement is well documented. CASE annually collates a range of performance indicators from UK institutions; the International CASE Alumni Relations Survey (ICARS) has now run for six years and allows for detailed benchmarking. In a study of the 2011 results, Kroll (2012) employs statistical analysis to determine alumni activities that are associated with greater success. One of her key findings is that successful international alumni relations takes time: "do not expect your programmes, reunions or professional networking events to provide the magic bullet. Be prepared for a long haul" (*ibid*: 8).

The business case for engaging alumni in internationalisation should have utilitarian foundations: alumni are a unique, cost-effective, and routinely underused resource in internationalisation activities. None of the case studies involve the payment of alumni, and yet graduates are adding significant value to institutions' internationalisation activities. Moreover, in some undertakings, alumni are contributing in ways that other stakeholders could not deliver: the authentic voice of endorsement in international recruitment; the empathetic careers mentor who can connect familiar campus experiences with the employment market; or a teacher who can marry industry expertise with their own experiences of the academic programme.

## Understanding the international alumni community

Alumni communities are not homogenous, and strategies for engaging segments of the population should be differentiated. International alumni communities are diverse, complex, and changing. The graduate population is as mixed as the student body in its interests, motivations and cultural norms, and has the added diversity of occupation and family status.

An alumnus' cultural norms may affect their attitudes to alumni engagement, as observed in the University of Edinburgh case study. Dobson (2011) has also documented cultural differences in attitudes to volunteering, and Walker (2010) outlines disparities between graduate attitudes in the US and the UK. Graduates may have fundamentally different attitudes about the ongoing relevance of the alma mater, and the perceived value of staying connected. As well as adopting differentiated marketing approaches, the most appropriate models for alumni engagement may also vary depending on where they are being implemented. Dobson (2011: 7) highlights dissimilarities between alumni chapters (regional groups) in the US and Asia, citing fundamental differences in formality, hierarchy, communication, and planning.

The more we can connect international students with alumni at an early stage, the more we can reciprocally support each other in the future. The long term aim is that we build up well networked and active alumni communities overseas to support recruitment, business links, opportunities and fundraising.

Brett Arnell, Alumni and Development Manager, York St John University

An effective system for updating and storing information on international alumni is critical to understanding graduates' needs, interests and potential contributions. Information about where alumni are resident, what type of work they are undertaking and their previous engagement can help to understand the size, shape and character of the international alumni population. This intelligence enables

alumni relations teams to explore potential synergies with the internationalisation strategy, looking at where there is a critical mass of alumni, and to identify graduates' professional expertise. Effective data systems accurately record previous involvement with the institution, so that levels of engagement can be monitored, and relationships with key individuals nurtured.

Data is likely to exist in different parts of the institution, and often departments and academic colleagues will hold information locally. Merging these data sets can often be the first step in developing a comprehensive database to underpin international alumni engagement programmes. The mobility of international graduates means that good data is harder to maintain. Practical issues exacerbate this, such as the non-return of postage directed to international addresses (UK postage is marked 'return to sender' where addresses are invalid, and this is a useful way of tracking changes in graduates' addresses). Social media is also increasingly being used to connect with 'lost alumni', although this can be resource intensive in the UK where data protection laws are stricter than in the US.

Beyond cultural and geographical diversity, the international community is also diverse in the same ways as any population: it is important, for example, to take account of the age profile and the occupational interests of groups when planning engagement activity. Additionally, it is also an oversimplification to generalise about the cultural norms and expectations of alumni in a particular country, especially when alumni communities overseas comprise a mixture of graduated international students, and emigrated home students. Personal contact with every alumnus is impossible, but being attuned to international and personal diversity can help to ensure that more general contact is positive, and give confidence when co-ordinating activity remotely from the UK.

Understanding the diverse cultural expectations of alumni can be challenging, but assistance is at hand. Alumni are often keen to help alumni relations teams navigate unfamiliar territory, and "a willingness... to learn and adapt will help establish good relations all round" (Dobson, 2011: 7). Alumni relations colleagues around the world can also be a useful resource for researching graduates' expectations in a particular country, and will also typically offer advice on practical matters, such as event venues, travel considerations, and useful contacts in the region.

## **Nurturing the international alumni community**

The routine activities that help to develop and nurture the international alumni population have received little attention in the case study material, since much of this work is well rehearsed. However, engaging alumni to support internationalisation activities will be problematic if there are not sustained efforts to maintain a general level of engagement and interest. This is largely achieved through an effective communications strategy, the nurturing of alumni associations in key areas, and a modest events programme.

Communication plans typically emphasise message, channel and audience (Amos: 2010). Email and social media allow communications to be channelled to increasingly segmented audiences, and offer a cost-effective means of mass marketing. However, while the alumni e-newsletter may be the best way of communicating news items, this impersonal channel may not effectively engage alumni. Where face-to-face or phone contact is not feasible, a personalised email may strike an effective balance. Social media is playing an increasingly important role in alumni communications, and offers exciting opportunities for developing online alumni communities that are self-sustaining.

The running of international alumni associations (sometimes called chapters, or groups) is likely to provide a foundation for alumni engagement. Guidance on establishing and managing alumni associations overseas is widely available (Feudo and Clifford, 2008; Feudo, 2010). Popular and sustainable international alumni associations are based on mutual benefit: alumni stay engaged because their involvement is personally beneficial, and the institution invests in the group's success because it contributes to internationalisation objectives.

In order to develop a broad events programme overseas, alumni relations teams typically collaborate internally to take advantage of colleagues' overseas travel plans. An international events programme should also aim to include a mix of activity to appeal to a wide range of alumni. It may include a blend of social and professionally focused events, and activities that are appropriate for families. The balance of activity should be informed by the age profile of the alumni population, the preferences of members, and by institutional priorities (for example, a professional networking event may be a good event at which to encourage alumni to offer international internship placements to students). The engagement of parents may also feature as part of the programme, in order to access a new community of advocates. It is, of course, not always necessary for staff to host events, and alumni taking ownership for the planning of international events and programmes (as with the Toronto Alumni Club in the University of Edinburgh case study) is indicative of a mature level of engagement.

One of the most effective ways to promote longstanding connections with students after graduation is to ensure that they are well-versed in the benefits of being an engaged alumni before they depart. This can be especially true in international alumni engagement, where the connection is more easily lost and typically harder to rebuild.

### **8.1. Case study 11: Integrating international students and alumni at York St John University**

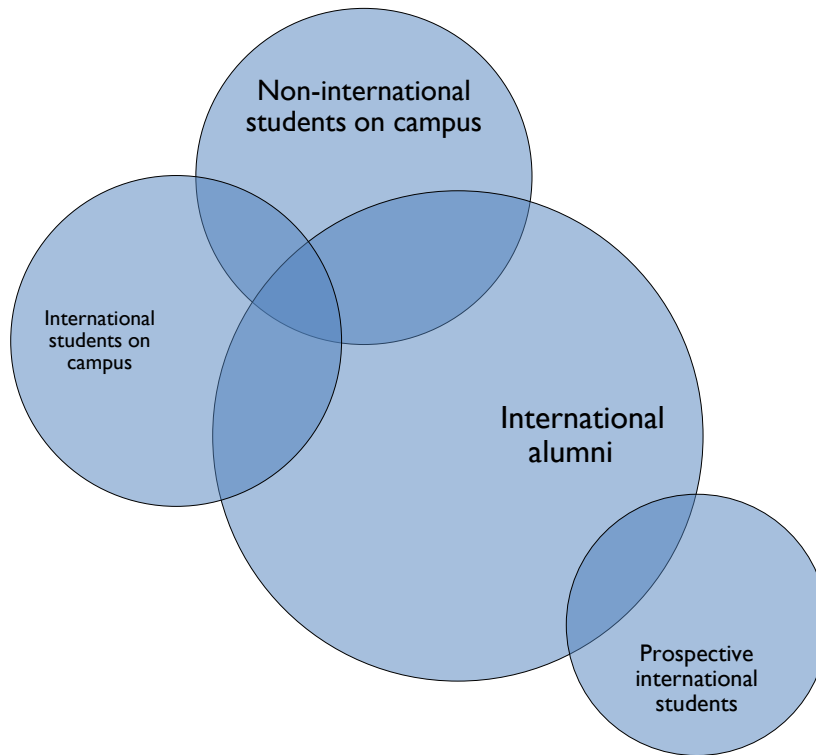
York St John University has an intimate campus environment with just over 6,000 students, 9% of whom are international. The University is in the early stages of forming international alumni groups, and their development supporting the institution's internationalisation objectives.

A two-stage strategy for developing international alumni groups has been adopted, to help ensure that the transition into overseas alumni groups is a natural step in the student lifecycle. Initially, international societies are established and fostered on campus, driven by identified champions from the student body working in partnership with staff from the alumni relations team. The societies undertake cultural and social activities, which are inclusive and help to raise awareness of social, cultural and religious diversity among the student body as a whole. The societies also welcome new international students to campus and provide support and advice in relation to accommodation, job opportunities, and adapting to a new culture.

In the early stages of their operation, new student international societies are put in touch with alumni resident in the relevant home country, to help establish connections, and to introduce students to the concept of being an alumni long before graduation. International alumni often meet with students while they are still studying at York St John, on campus or in their home country. This process has now been undertaken for a number of international groups, including Kenya, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

On graduating, the students from the international society are then welcomed back to their home country by alumni, and the transition into the graduate community is an instinctive process. The international societies, established in the last few years, have now matured into active alumni groups, which add significant value to recruitment efforts in their home countries. The presence of active international societies on campus, which have clear links to alumni, is a selling point to prospective international students, particularly where they might be concerned about settling in. The links which have been established between international alumni, students, and applicants are mutually reinforcing, but not closed communities. York St John is encouraging home domiciled students and staff to become actively involved in the international societies to enhance their global outlook, and to connect with international alumni groups when planning and undertaking travel overseas – whether this is related to their studies, or for pleasure.

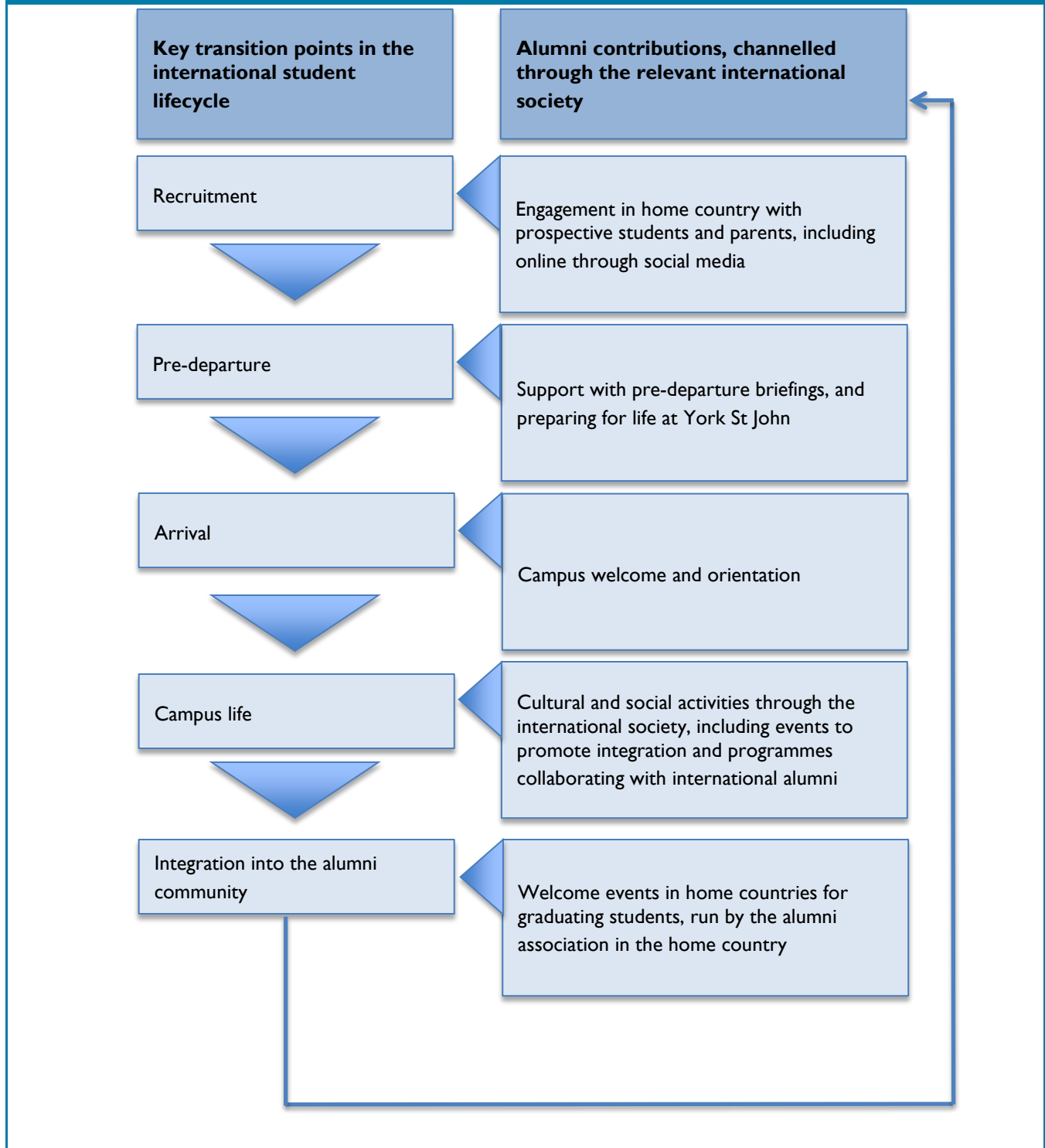
Figure 4: Engaging multiple communities at York St John University.



Alongside growing existing groups, new international societies are being initiated and are learning from the experiences of the established societies. Many students whose international backgrounds are not represented hear about the advantages of connecting with international alumni, and this often motivates them to establish new groups focused on their country. Most recently, a Sri Lankan and a Pakistani group have been established, and the corresponding enthusiasm from alumni in those countries is beginning to flourish.

A model is emerging at York St John for the sustained engagement of international alumni, in a way that contributes to internationalisation throughout the student lifecycle, and also adds to home students' global outlooks.

Figure 5: Engaging international alumni throughout the student lifecycle.



This work is still developmental at York St John and the aim is to increase the community of alumni who can help to welcome new students before they even step on to our campus. Capacity of staff in the alumni engagement office is a potential issue for the future, and volunteers from the student and alumni communities are likely to become even more critical to developing this model.



## Recommendations

**International alumni relations are most effective if programmes engage students with alumni throughout the student lifecycle, introducing them to the concept of being an engaged alumnus long before graduation.** Involving students in alumni activities while they are on campus is key to sustaining their engagement after graduation. This can be especially true with international students, where the connection can be more easily lost, and harder to rebuild.

**Engaging international student societies with overseas alumni can promote mutually beneficial relationships, and ensure the transition into the alumni community is instinctive.** These connections should not be exclusive, but encourage home domiciled students and staff to become actively involved, to enhance their global outlook.

**Alumni can support international students at various transition points, including pre-departure briefings, welcoming international students to campus, and helping integrate graduates into the alumni community.** In this way, alumni can contribute significantly to the internationalisation of the institution, by helping to enhance the experience of international students at vulnerable stages of their student journey.

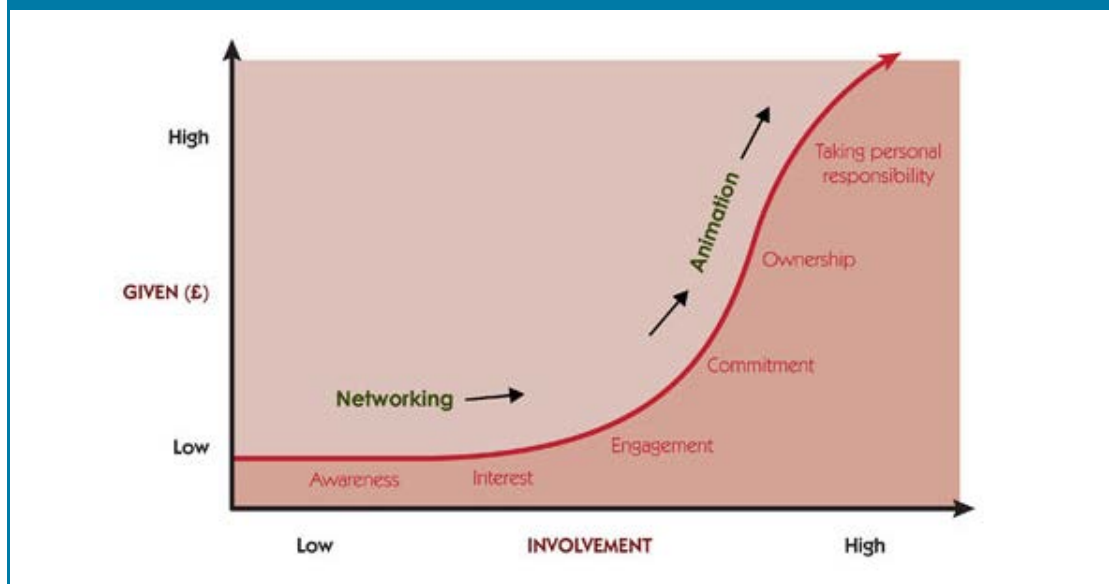
**At smaller institutions, engaging international alumni to take a leading role in establishing and sustaining alumni communities is especially important.** This can add capacity and reach where staffing levels may be minimal, and also help to raise the profile of alumni relations internally.

The importance of engaging new graduates is highlighted in a number of the case studies, since early engagement builds sustained involvement in the future. However, since recent graduates are likely to be especially busy establishing themselves professionally, it is important that they are engaged in finite projects which are not time intensive and, where possible, involved in projects that make use of their skills. As in the University of Birmingham case study, this can add meaningfully to the graduate's CV. Younger graduates are also likely to be much more motivated to engage in networks that are professionally focused, particularly if they can see the advantages of connecting with peers and more senior alumni for professional advantage.

As well as bringing international alumni together to nurture the community, it is also possible to engage them in activities that are taking place on campus. This might include engaging international alumni in campus events virtually, through live streaming and webinar debates, or as part of a discussion post-event. E-mentoring programmes can also be effective at engaging international alumni virtually in campus life, and account for many international alumni who will be based outside the major cities where alumni events typically take place.

Nurturing the international community is a balance of engaging new support, and building the involvement of existing contributors. It is important that systems for recording alumni engagement are reliable, so that the institution has effective mechanisms for celebrating contributions, and thanking those involved. The staged development of relationships with alumni has been widely debated in relation to fundraising, but a similar approach should be adopted in engagement more generally; it is important to move alumni through a series of increasingly involved engagement opportunities.

Figure 6: The Tarnside curve of involvement © - reproduced by permission of Tarnside Consulting.



## Developing outcome-driven programmes

Effective data systems, energetic alumni associations, and intelligent communications plans provide the foundation for international alumni engagement, and innovative programming maximises alumni contributions to internationalisation. The case studies and the literature point toward the development of programmes beyond routine engagement that have a specific purpose, defined objectives, and are aligned with the internationalisation strategy. A needs-driven approach is critical, especially when engaging alumni in academic programmes, as illustrated in the King's College case study.

Programmes that are designed to achieve strategic affinity between alumni relations and internationalisation should have outcomes which reflect this dual purpose, and systems in place for measuring them. Shared outcomes are likely to motivate closer collaboration, and might include the number of volunteer hours contributed by international alumni to an e-Mentoring programme (shared between alumni relations and the careers service) or increases in the number of international alumni offering industry masterclasses in an academic programme (shared between an academic department and the alumni relations team).

Alumni engagement programmes will typically have short-term outcomes which are measurable, and longer-term outcomes which may only be quantifiable through longitudinal analysis. Whereas some evaluative tools can be prohibitively expensive: benchmarking against time (are our programmes more effective now than they were last year?) and against peer institutions (how are we performing relative to the sector?) is an instructive and affordable exercise. The International CASE Alumni Relations Survey is invaluable, and allows for annual benchmarking within the sector.

Various models are emerging for evaluating success in alumni relations (Kale and Rulnick: 2010; Dobson, 2011: 19 – 27). Much can also be learnt from outside the sector, including the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' extensive bank of impact measurement tools (NCVO: 2012). Impact evidence can also be compelling for alumni who are not yet engaged, since it validates the importance of their involvement, and can be essential in securing additional resources.

A business case for expansion is frail without indications of previous success. Justifying the expansion of an operation not typically viewed as essential to the institution's core business is problematic if it cannot

prove its value, especially if resources are stretched. If the return on investment cannot be quantified, then the assumption of sceptical colleagues is likely to be that there is none.

## **Managing expectations: balancing control and autonomy**

In much of the case study material, there is a fine balance between mobilising alumni to become self-sufficient ambassadors, and ensuring controls are in place to quality control and align activities to institutional objectives. The appropriate balance is largely dependent on the risks associated with a particular activity, the maturity of the programme, and the stage of the relationship with the alumnus. The case studies suggest that risk management controls should be introduced in the early stages of new programmes - these might include memorandums of understanding, populating new programmes with graduates who have proved reliable in the past, or providing alumni with institutional materials on which to base their activities, as in the University of York case study.

Institutions are likely to have a range of programmes, some of which are tightly controlled, and others that are broadly self-sufficient. Ultimately, it is important that all programmes are regularly evaluated and that risk management controls are regularly reviewed. Regardless of the balance between control and autonomy, the case studies highlight that managing expectations is vital. It is important that the intensity and duration of involvement, the skills required, and the support on offer are all made clear to alumni. Graduates should also appreciate the boundaries of their involvement, which is important when working with students, and critical when contributing to academic programmes. Correspondingly, students should also understand the limitations of alumni contributions: employment advice and support securing a work placement are legitimate alumni contributions, whereas proofreading last-minute assignments would be less well received.

Expectations can be managed verbally but, for consistency, written guidelines are recommended. Such guidelines may seem overly assertive, but alumni are likely to react positively to programmes that are professionally managed, and provide written reassurance about the terms of engagement. The Oxford internship programme provides a good example: clear information is set out for alumni and students, and both parties are given access to each other's guidance.

It is important that the expectations of alumni relations staff are also realistic. Alumni based overseas can add value to a university's internationalisation strategy, but they are not the panacea to poor institutional performance, or large operational gaps. Alumni have limitations on their time, and often manage unpredictable workloads, and programme planning should account for sudden unavailability. In circumstances where robust control measures are not required (in lower risk activities, e.g. organising informal social events), it is still important to maintain close links with alumni in order to record the level of activity to assess progress and celebrate success.

## **Expanding engagement programmes into international markets**

Alumni relations teams should be hesitant about initiating international projects that have little prospect of being developed because of limited resource. As pilot programmes become successful, expectations are raised among colleagues, and larger numbers of alumni are likely to want to engage. Enthusiasm at a programme's launch can quickly become disappointment if co-ordinators cannot capitalise on success. In most instances, international alumni programmes are not new models of working, but a translation of existing practice into international markets. Some of the case studies demonstrate ways in which this can be carefully managed to ensure maximum success, such as in the Queen's University study, and in the Edinburgh and Roehampton models.

In a diverse and seemingly infinite international market, focus is key. The temptation to expand programmes simultaneously into numerous markets is usually best resisted, especially if staff capacity is limited. Establishing a new programme internationally is likely to require approaches, in terms of marketing and delivery, which are sensitive to the cultural norms and expectations of the audience. It is

difficult to undertake this when a programme is being developed in multiple new markets, where the temptation is to expand in a homogeneous way.

Best practice from the case studies suggests that programmes should be piloted in defined areas, with an emphasis on control over autonomy in the first instance. Working more intensively to ensure success in the first instance promises rewards in the medium term, as positive case studies and participant profiles can be developed for future marketing. Alumni, students, and other stakeholders who are participants in successful pilot projects can also be engaged in peer advocacy to promote the expansion of the programme to colleagues; this is often the most influential form of marketing in alumni relations.

The expansion of alumni engagement programmes is likely to require some additional resource. One indicator of a mature international alumni engagement programme is a diverse resource base, which might include corporate sponsorship, funds raised from alumni to support programme development (such as in the SOAS case study), pump prime funding from senior colleagues' discretionary budgets, (such as the PMI2 project, cited earlier), and shared operational budgets across functions (as in the Oxford case study, with colleges supporting students' travel).

Additionally, as international engagement programmes develop, it may be that opportunities arise for activity to generate a different type of contribution. Dobson (2011) speculates that profit generating alumni engagement programmes will "become part of the alumni programming menu for more universities in the next decade" (*ibid*: 111). An example of such a programme is the 'travel-learn' programmes, which are a regular feature in some US institution's calendars. These trips enable alumni to spend time with peers on educational excursions that are typically directed by academic experts from the institution. This has implications for the levels of service provided, and most UK institutions are likely to challenge their capacity or appetite for delivering programmes which, in reality, are likely to turn relatively small profits.

In developing new programmes, and expanding existing ones, the case studies suggest that this process should be reflective, and that planning should include time to evaluate practices and extract learning from them. This exercise may be largely qualitative, but is likely to involve some quantitative benchmarking and relating established practice to peer institutions. Another common theme in this area is willingness of alumni relations teams to learn from each other. Alumni relations is not a territorial profession, and bodies such as CASE facilitate learning between professionals, alongside some of the UK mission group alumni relations forums.

Finally, the effective expansion and sustainability of alumni relations programmes can be overly dependent on an individual's relationships, energy and knowledge. Programmes that are mainly dependent on an individual's relationships and knowledge are likely to fracture when that person eventually leaves the institution. The sharing of information and contacts, and training across the alumni relations team can help to ensure succession planning underpins the development of engagement programmes.

## **Collaborating to maximise international links**

Collaboration is the most prevalent theme arising from the case study materials and the literature. Healthy partnerships between the alumni relations team, the internationalisation director/team, the careers service, international recruitment teams, and academic colleagues are essential to developing effective alumni relations programmes.

The advantages and practicalities of collaboration between institutions in delivering effective international alumni relations are underexplored in the UK. Combining resources through collaboratively hosted alumni events can be an effective way to maximise impact. Younger alumni are usually more attracted to events with a professional focus, but developing this provision can be problematic in cities and countries where alumni numbers are minimal, particularly when networking is focused on specific professions. By working in collaboration, institutions can create economies of scale that allow for more ambitious work,

and offer alumni the additional advantage of connecting with peers from other UK institutions. United by their experiences of studying in the UK, alumni can find common ground on which to develop professional relationships.

Working overseas in partnership with other UK institutions can also help to more generally raise the profile of UK higher education in overseas markets, thereby supporting internationalisation at the macro-level. The possibility of securing eminent venues increases if universities approach organisations in alliance, and pooled resource increases the likelihood of engaging high profile speakers and hosts.

There appears to be a widespread appetite among international alumni for networking with fellow alumni who graduated from institutions in the same country (Dobson, 2011; Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2009). Collaborative networking events have been delivered in the UK by university consortia for some years, and these have recently extended into international markets. The Russell Group, for example, has hosted a number of collaborative networking events in the UK, and a joint event at the European Parliament in April 2012. This practice might be usefully expanded into wider international markets, and emerging models shared.

## **8.2. Case study 12: Collaborative professional networking events**

A group of UK universities came together to pilot the development of a collaborative alumni programme in international markets. The initiative is partly motivated by wanting to engage younger alumni in key international markets, and to maintain their connection after they graduate. Younger alumni are typically much more motivated to engage in activities that benefit them professionally, rather than social events or reunions.

For medium-sized institutions, or at younger universities, it is not unusual for the size of the alumni population in an international city to be small, especially if events are aimed at graduates in specific professions to encourage focused networking opportunities. Furthermore, professionally focused events often demand greater levels of planning to ensure the potential benefits of attending are realised (structured networking, guest lists published in advance, prompt follow-up, etc.).

The group identified New York as a key market where each institution's alumni community is active, but younger graduates are enthusiastic to network with professionals in the city who also studied at other UK universities. It was anticipated that collaborative working would enhance the potential benefits of attending for alumni, and economies of scale would allow for more ambitious work with a higher profile. For example, a leading bank has been approached to host the event and, because of the collective approach, has agreed to provide a downtown venue in kind. Furthermore, since the event represents new collaborative practice, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the British Council are supporting the initiative, and adding value to the planning process.

The event accommodated around 100 guests, and places were allocated to the participating institutions proportionate to their overall alumni populations in New York. The schedule included a welcome from a senior leader at the hosting bank (promoting the value of UK education, and the importance of networking in modern professional life), and the HEA and the British Council are likely to take the platform to advocate for future collaborative programmes.

A number of the participating institutions were present at the event, and others sent relevant materials and briefing notes, so that colleagues at other institutions could communicate with alumni on their behalf. There was some anxiety about following up effectively with alumni who attended, particularly if they were offering to support in various ways, and mechanisms for this were explored. The planning of the event was done in close liaison with all partners, but it was important that an identified person had overall responsibility for the delivery of the event, so that colleagues were clear about communication lines and hosts were liaising with a key contact.

The event sought to:

- raise the profile of UK graduates based internationally;
- promote relations between UK graduates so that they can work collaboratively to promote UK higher education;
- provide UK graduates based in New York with an opportunity to network professionally inter-university and intra-university;
- explore a wider range of student exchange opportunities with key organisations in the US;
- rehearse this type of collaborative working, with a view to extending it to other locations, including China;
- recruit UK graduates based in the US to act as hosts for UK students on exchange to US universities;
- engage with a key sponsor to explore the potential for this innovative approach to international alumni relations, and to learn from the process.

There is the possibility of scheduling an annual event, involving a wider range of institutions. Additionally, the model may translate into other international markets, but the shape and style of the event will have to account for a different context. The partnering institutions are all committed to continuing to offer events in New York that are exclusively for their alumni, but an annual collaborative event could add value to the alumni calendar, and act as a vehicle for collectively supporting the internationalisation of UK higher education.

## Recommendations

**Working overseas in partnership with other UK institutions can help to raise the profile of UK higher education in overseas markets,** thereby supporting internationalisation at the macro-level. High profile venues and speakers are more likely to engage with an alliance of universities, and partners such as CASE, the Higher Education Academy and the British Council, may offer their advocacy.

**Combining resources on events through collaboratively hosted alumni gatherings can be an effective way to maximise impact.** By working in partnership, institutions can create economies of scale that allow for more ambitious work, and offer alumni the additional advantage of connecting professionally with peers from other UK institutions. Collaborative events will typically be run in parallel with events which are exclusively for the institution's alumni.

**The real value of events is unlocked in the follow up with attendees; pledges at events to support internationalisation activities should be translated into activity.** This can be challenging in international alumni engagement, where institutional staff may not be able to attend an event.

**Partnership events should be planned in a way which reflects their collaborative nature, but an identified person in one institution should take direct responsibility for the events management.** This ensures communications lines are unambiguous and that there is control over the planning, delivery and evaluation of the activity. It is clearly important that this role is undertaken in an inclusive and consultative way, but that responsibility for the event rests with them.



## 9. Conclusion

The case study material and literature point towards an exciting opportunity in UK higher education to build on existing practice in this area. As internationalisation and international alumni relations become increasingly important strategic areas, a number of factors are motivating institutions to develop areas of strategic affinity. These include intensified global competition, constrained budgets, the growth of international student recruitment, the accelerated globalisation of academic endeavours, and the increasing ease of worldwide communication. International alumni are being recognised as a valuable asset. Graduates are an institution's greatest ambassadors; they can advocate the institution with an authentic voice, connect meaningfully with students on campus, and there is a shared interest in promoting and protecting the institutional brand across the world.

Accurate data systems, alumni groups and effective communications provide the foundation for international engagement, but innovative programming maximises alumni contributions to internationalisation. The shape and outcomes of these programmes are contextual, and should be aligned to institutional mission and culture. In order for initiatives to be developed systematically, however, a number of strategic principles might be considered. The case studies highlight a number of these, including the fostering of internal and external collaborations, balancing autonomy and control, developing outcome focused initiatives, and carefully managing the expansion of programmes.

Substantive growth in this area will only take place if a business case is built on compelling evidence that international alumni can make substantive contributions to institutions' internationalisation efforts. The main barrier to growth in this area is the lack of reliable impact evidence; programme leaders are challenged to embed models of evaluation in their work, and to use metrics in a more strategic and systematic way - possibly through the International CASE Alumni Relations Survey (ICARS).

This report is selective, not exhaustive, and there is a large body of good practice in the UK, and beyond, which is not documented here. The report highlights the advantages of networking within the sector, in order to gain insights from colleagues' experience and expertise, and the benefits of professional associations, such as CASE. There are also areas that remain underexplored, and warrant closer attention. The use of social media in international alumni relations has been well documented (Isurus, 2010; Shaindlin & Allen, 2010), but there is further understanding to be generated about how to employ it as an engagement tool, and how to connect through international sites such as Weibo and VK.

The synergy between fundraising and alumni relations in international markets also merits further study. A number of the case studies highlight the potential for engaging international alumni in a mixed model of direct involvement and financial support. Experiential giving in this way may be a good first step in fundraising with new international markets, especially in cultures where donating money to the *alma mater* is an unfamiliar concept.

More fundamentally, much of the case study material points towards the diversity of the international alumni community, and the need to understand more about different attitudes to volunteering and staying connected with institutions. Greater knowledge in this area will empower UK institutions to design and promote programmes that respond to the needs and expectations of international alumni. The growth of Transnational Education also presents significant opportunities for institutions wishing to extend their internationalisation efforts, and will further diversify what it means to be an alumnus from a UK university, and how institutions engage with their graduates.

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