

# **JOB READY:**

**universities, employers and  
students creating success**



**We want to open  
your eyes to the real  
success of universities,  
employers and  
students working  
together.**

# Foreword

**Universities are stepping up to the challenge of producing job-ready graduates in the 21st century. When it comes to both the quality and the job-readiness of our graduates, Alliance universities are competing with the best in the world.**

Alliance universities offer programmes that are co-designed with employers and students, where students engage in real-world, practical projects alongside their academic study. Students also have the opportunity to undertake placements and internships with a wide range of employers, often co-funded by the university, to develop their employability skills and sector knowledge.

We want to dispel some myths about the value of a degree. In an unstable global economy, underpinned by technological advances and increased complexity, a degree is still by far the best preparation to succeed and make a difference in the world.

Alliance universities provide a real-world learning environment where students and businesses come together through innovative platforms and supported through

state-of-the-art facilities. From major blue-chips down to small, rapidly-innovating businesses, the stories we are presenting here demonstrate that employers value this approach. And we know that students value it too, with huge over-demand for our leading degree programmes that are attracting outstanding students and delivering some of the most exciting graduate employment opportunities.

Of course there is always more that can be done. But these stories demonstrate some of the excellent work that is already going on. University-business partnerships add huge value to students, businesses and the UK's economy and society. This is not a traditional university experience but it is a world-class offer that is driving growth and creativity in the UK. We are celebrating success.



**Steve West,**  
Chair, University Alliance

# Foreword

**The UK's universities are amongst the best in the world, producing graduate and post-graduate students with world-class subject knowledge. Whilst we rightly celebrate academic excellence, however, we must also ensure that those young people leaving university are work ready.**

As the head of the UK's leading business organisation, I hear regularly from employers who struggle to find young men and women with the right mix of skills, knowledge, attitude and attributes. This despite the fact that more people now study at university than ever before.<sup>1</sup> As the economy rebalances around high value, high skilled activities, this problem will become more acute, unless all of us – government, business, universities and other skills providers – work together to ensure that our young people are better informed and better prepared for the world of work.<sup>2</sup>

As the case studies in this publication ably demonstrate, great things are already happening across the UK as universities and businesses work together to give young people a better understanding of the workplace through quality work experience, careers advice and access to “real life” work-based projects and resources. But we need more – and I hope that the broad range of university-business collaborations contained in *Job Ready* will encourage and inspire others to step up to the challenge.



*John Cridland*

**John Cridland**  
CBI Director-General

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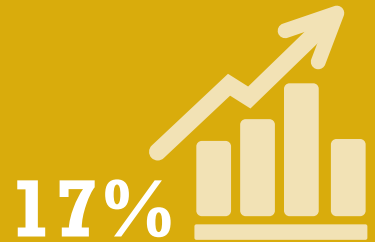
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## Introduction

**We have interviewed over 40 employers, big and small, to find out what they think about working with universities. What they tell us is that they really value the experience. They like partnerships with universities that deliver results and they especially value partnerships that result in graduates who are ready to hit the ground running.**

For Alliance universities, partnership is at the heart of their approach. These universities have been in the business of working with employers for over 100 years. Many were set up in partnership with employers around the time of the industrial revolution to respond to the needs of a changing economy. They continue to operate this way now, working closely with employers to deliver a relevant, real world learning experience for students (which is why we deliver half of all sandwich courses in the UK).



**The percentage growth in high-skilled roles in the UK by 2022.**

*Working Futures 2012-2022, UKCES, March 2014*



**1/3+**

**The number of students who take a placement year with large, graduate employers who go on to secure employment with the company.**

*High Fliers Research (2012)  
The Graduate Market 2012*



**85%**

**of employers increased or maintained their graduate recruitment levels in 2012-13.**

*Changing the Pace, CBI/ Pearson education and skills survey 2013*



**The additional earnings of a male graduate (an additional 28%) over their lifetime compared to someone without a degree. For women this rises to £252K (an additional 53%).**

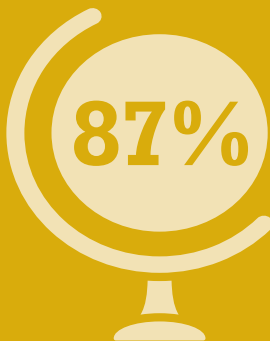
*The Impact of University Degrees on the Lifecycle of Earnings, BIS, August 2013*



**50%**

**of sandwich course students in the UK are studying at Alliance universities.**

*HESA 2012-13*



**The percentage of international students at Alliance universities who study so that they can get a good job (compared to 83% at other UK universities and 83% globally).**

*Growing Global Graduates, University Alliance, 2013*



**21,000+**

**interactions between Alliance universities and businesses in 2012-13, ranging from small to very large companies.**

*HE-BCI survey 2012-13*



**100+**

**The number of years Alliance universities have been in the business of working with employers.**

**The interviews we have captured here offer just a snapshot of the 21,000 interactions with business that Alliance universities undertake each year. They show us that both universities and businesses have a role to play if they are to make their partnership a success:**

- Alliance universities are proactively **bridging the gap** between the academic and the corporate worlds.
- Employers and universities are developing relationships and ensuring **open communication**, so that both parties understand the others' needs and capabilities
- Alliance universities are ensuring their students gain the best employability skills on top of their degree – this means developing excellent **core capabilities and strengths alongside resilience and an enquiring mind**
- Employers are **engaging across the whole of the university** – from the careers department to individual faculties and with specific academics who share their business interests and can help them to identify sector-specific talent and opportunities
- Employers are **getting involved in a range of activities**, from course design and careers presentations to taking interns or placement students

All of this runs counter to what a lot of people say about a university degree – that its value has fallen in recent years. Stories of this nature have increased as the media have focused on apparent high levels of graduate unemployment or underemployment in the wake of the recent recession.

The experience of the employers we spoke to demonstrates that this narrative does not tell the full story. It projects the dangerous message that it is not worth undertaking higher study, despite the fact that obtaining a higher education degree is one of the best guarantees of stable employment and economic security over one's lifetime. Most of the employment growth in the UK is in graduate jobs, those involving analytical, problem solving and complex communications.

Through building close relationships, such as those described in the pages that follow, universities and employers can maximise talent, plug skills gaps and create progression routes for people from a wide range of different backgrounds. For the employers involved it is not merely altruistic but is about their bottom line. Ultimately it is helping them to recruit the best people they can, to support their future business success.



**This report is split into different economic sectors and contains interviews with a selection of employers.\* This is what they have to say about working with universities...**



\* NB: some of these companies will span more than one sector. They are **categorised here for ease**

# CONSTRUCTION

**Construction is one of the biggest economic sectors in the UK, comprising more than 280,000 businesses, employing nearly 3 million people and contributing nearly £90 billion to the UK economy.<sup>3</sup>**



**LIVERPOOL JOHN  
MOORES UNIVERSITY**

**Philip Williams,**  
Principal Design Manager,  
WATES Construction

**wates**  
construction



**“Liverpool John Moores University is engaging very effectively with employers, offering support and guidance, and making it an easy partnership to have. They really are playing a key role in bridging the gap between business and education.”**

Wates Construction is a family owned construction business with a deep commitment to the communities in which we work. We have an annual turnover of £1 billion and we deliver across the UK. Our values of integrity, intelligence, performance, teamwork and respect for people and communities are at the heart of what we do.

As an employer, we fully recognise the importance of giving young people an opportunity, especially with the tough competition for graduate jobs in the industry. We could see the benefit of the World of Work programme at Liverpool John Moores University and how extensively it prepares its students for the industry – so many graduates that apply for jobs with us have no experience, and this puts them at such a disadvantage. The University is effectively ensuring that their students have the best possible chance of securing employment upon graduation and we were delighted to support them with this.

We kick-started the partnership by sitting with the World of Work team, listening to them talk about

what works for their students, and then proceeded to put together a programme of works. The team also gave us excellent advice on funding available, and the various options for placements etc. We have worked with them to develop mock interviews, placements, seminars and opportunities for students to attend our client functions and site taster days. We also looked at how we can assist in getting students Construction Skills Certification registration, which ensures they could go straight on to site upon graduation. We want to build on this programme of works and we see this partnership as a long-term commitment.

It is refreshing to work with a university that truly understands the industry and how the economic turmoil in our country has affected employment for young people. Liverpool John Moores University is engaging very effectively with employers, offering support and guidance, and making it an easy partnership to have. They really are playing a key role in bridging the gap between business and education.

We attended their careers fair in October for the Built Environment, and all the top construction employers were in attendance. This really demonstrates that employers are keen to work with the University.

**The students are attractive to us, as we know they are getting the best employability skills on top of their degree, and this sets them apart from many other students in the country.**

It is not just the University that benefits from this partnership. We believe it is key to the development of our staff. They are having to get out of their comfort zones by addressing groups of students, carrying out mock interviews, talking at careers fairs etc. This all plays an important part in their personal development, which benefits us as a business, and also demonstrates it is a two-way partnership between us and the University.

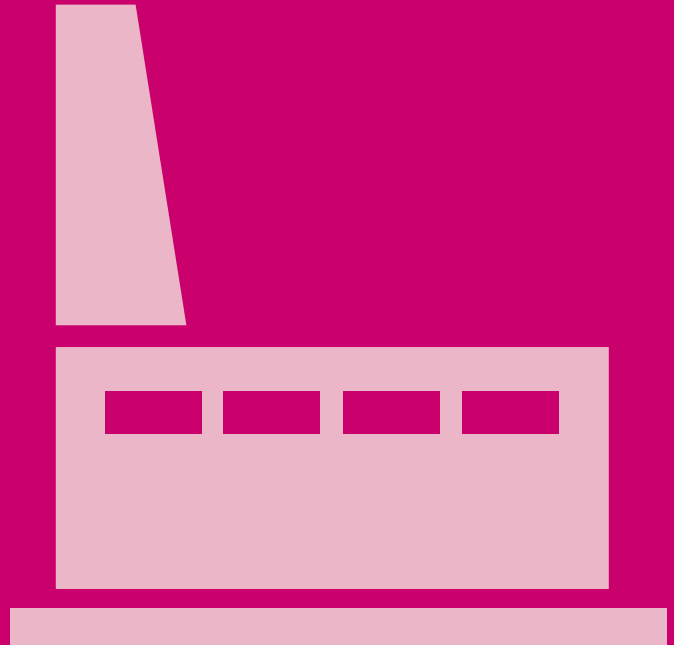
# ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

**Manufacturing is a £6.7 trillion global industry and the UK is one of the top 10 manufacturers in the world, employing 2.5 million people. The UK's manufacturing industry accounts for 10% of the UK's national economic output and goods produced by the sector make up nearly half of all UK exports.<sup>4</sup>**



**PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**

**David Webber,**  
Business Development Manager,  
AGUSTAWESTLAND



**“When working with Plymouth University students on any project the benefit to me is that they are so questioning. The questions they come back with make us think twice in terms of why do we do it like that? It’s the open mindedness of the students that challenges us. That helps us to be innovative as a company.”**

AgustaWestland, a Finmeccanica company, is a helicopter manufacturer with a growing global fleet of over 4,800 helicopters and supporting over 1,400 customers. The company employs about 3,200 people at its facility in Yeovil, Somerset, and 10,000 more mainly in Italy, Poland and the USA. The area I work in is Customer Support and Training. Once the Business Unit has sold the helicopters, and the production area built and delivered them, our responsibility is to provide ‘through-life training’ and ‘in-service support’ to ensure our customers maximise the operational use of their helicopters.

We have a number of undergraduate placements, where students are with the company for a year. Over this time they do various 4-6 month placements moving around within the company and we have some who then come back into our 2-year graduate scheme.

**I expect students to come in highly motivated, energetic and with a very good core base of up-to-date skills in terms of technology, computing and presentation skills.**

I also expect them to come with an enquiring mind because all of those skills are immediately applicable to the roles we put them into. After this, it’s the task specific knowledge that we are looking to provide for them. We’re looking for self-starters really.

All the students I’ve worked with from Plymouth University have very much fitted that bill. They’ve all come with excellent core capabilities and core strengths, such that they have fitted into our teams immediately. I think there’s an element of resilience that they have because they’re coming into a working environment. And I’ve always been very pleased that they come to us to ask for more work, keeping themselves busy and getting the most out of their time with us.

When working with Plymouth University students on any project the benefit to me is that they are so questioning. The questions they come back with make us think twice in terms of why do we do it like that? It’s the open mindedness of the students that challenges us. That helps us to be innovative as a company. The Aerospace industry is understandably safety orientated

and so to have a fresh pair of eyes helps to drive change, it makes us question.

It can be hard work taking on students. You have to be prepared to invest time in them. But this investment can be rewarding as the work and feedback you receive benefits your team output as well as identifying new opportunities and ways of working. And if we then employ the students as graduates they are up and running straight away, you can immediately give them projects, they’re ready from day one.

I would definitely recommend working with Plymouth University, taking advantage of everything I’ve said; their open mindedness and challenging outlook in addition to their up-to-date technology and business knowledge.

# ENGINEERING

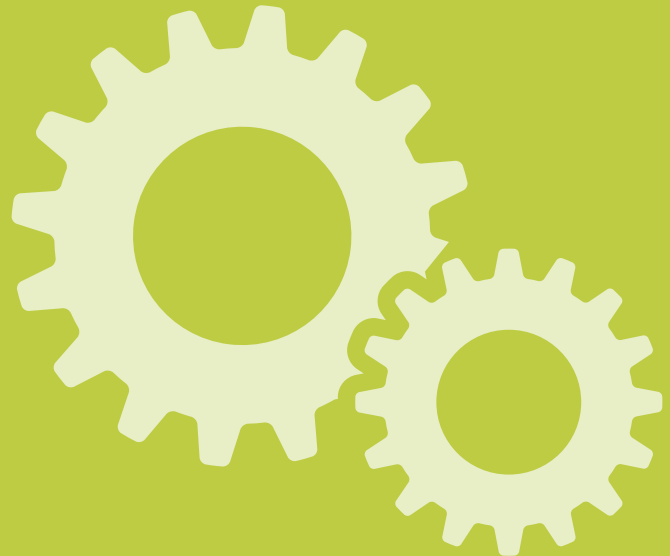
In the year ending March 2012 engineering turnover was £1.1 trillion with 5.4 million people working in the sector. Engineering now accounts for nearly 25% of the turnover of all enterprises in the UK.<sup>5</sup>



**UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH WALES**

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**Rhys Williams,**  
Government and Business  
Relations Leader, GE AVIATION



**“We work with the University of South Wales because we are looking for top talent... For us to maintain our competitive advantage we need to be finding and nurturing talent to develop a future pipeline of highly skilled employees. We’ve been working with the University for 10-15 years.”**

Our company is based just North of Cardiff, a few miles from the University of South Wales. We’re a maintenance repair and engineering facility for commercial aircraft engines, with over 90 worldwide customers including Emirates, British Airways, Qatar and easyJet.

We have a strong internship programme for university students – we take on between 50 to 60 interns every year into the support functions of the business – engineering, procurement, IT, communications, finance and HR. The intern programme drives our graduate recruitment. Of these, we’ll take on approximately between 5-10% and offer them a bursary to complete their studies and then come back to work for us. Some interns have gone on to management positions.

We work with the University of South Wales because we are looking for top talent. We’re a world-class overhaul facility and the only facility in the world that overhauls the GP7200 engine. For us to maintain our competitive advantage we need

to be finding and nurturing talent to develop a future pipeline of highly skilled employees. We’ve been working with the University for 10-15 years. Our intern programme means our recruits can hit the ground running when they join the business. We also partner with the University in a workplace learning scheme to develop existing employees within the business.

The key to working with the USW is partnership. We’ll host tours for their students to come onto our site and learn about our business. We give talks at the university and contribute to lectures, giving real world examples and business application for the theory they’re learning.

**The University supports the company by helping to nurture and develop our next intake of students and collaborating with us to ensure they are equipped with the skills and attributes that the business needs.**

The facilities the University has developed have been outstanding, unbelievable – they are top class. It’s important for us as a global business that we have universities of that calibre within the area to support our business and the whole of the Welsh economy.

It doesn’t matter what your business is doing or trying to achieve, there are opportunities, both big and small, for businesses to link up with universities for research or future talent. The University of South Wales intern programme has been hugely successful for us. You just need to start building relationships to maintain and improve your business and competitive advantage.

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

The finance and insurance sector employs nearly 4% of the total UK workforce and contributes nearly 10% to the UK's total gross value added (GVA). In 2011 this amounted to £125.4 billion.<sup>6</sup>





**“Manchester Metropolitan University is today putting their students in a really strong position to begin a career with us. Their proactive nature is refreshing and I’d encourage other employers in the North West to work with them.”**

Bank of America Merrill Lynch operates in more than 90 countries around the world. Our mission is to partner with employees, clients and stakeholders to help make financial lives better. In everything we do we are committed to a diverse and inclusive workplace. This gives us the business advantage of understanding and meeting the needs of our diverse clients and communities.

In our Chester office, in addition to our credit card business, MBNA, we have a large and growing Global Technology and Operations division. Over the past three years, we have experienced significant growth in this part of our business, and are able to offer an increasing number of graduate-level opportunities.

Our contact with Manchester Metropolitan University began when we were invited to join an employability forum at the University. I liked the fact that they had team members there talking to a broad variety of employers – from small local companies, to large global organisations such as ourselves. Much of the discussion focused on questions to these

companies about where they thought the skills gaps lay in the graduates being recruited, and how the University team could “raise their game” in preparing and supporting their students in their career search.

At this event, and others since then such as Graduate Fairs, I’ve been very impressed by how open and responsive the MMU team is to feedback. With these open channels of communication, and a few tweaks being made to the format of the events, we’ve seen a huge improvement in students’ skills and attitude.

**I’ve been very impressed by the interactive and targeted results-driven nature of Manchester Metropolitan University student events.**

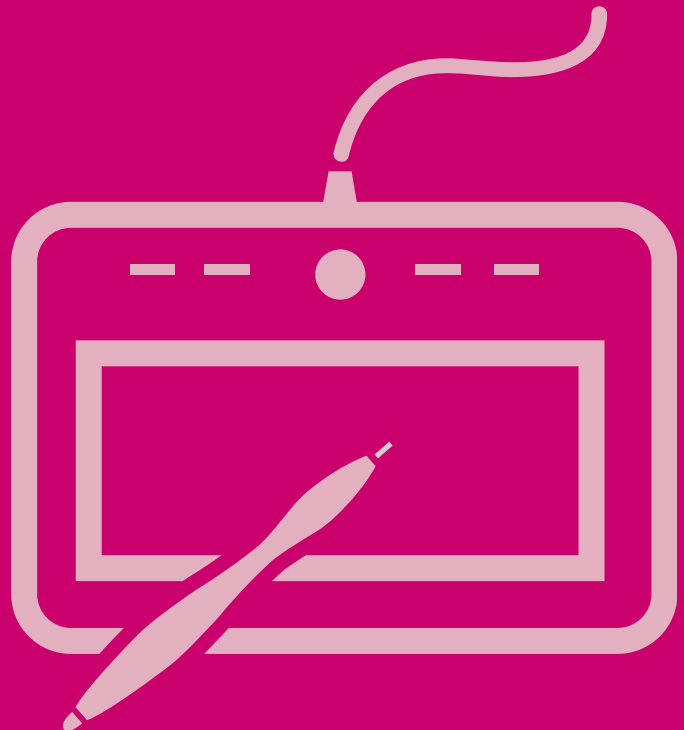
They’ve done things like breaking up the standard fair and incorporating “speed networking” activities which are engaging, relaxed, and where students feel they can ask more questions; this promotes discussion and leads to better outcomes for all. Today, we leave their events with a list of people we want to see again – and

it’s us who follow up with them, which is quite a reversal of past roles!

We’re growing our site here in Chester, and we are very focused on recruiting talented individuals who want a fulfilling career, not just a job. In return we offer significant, in-depth training and a wide scope of development programmes that help shape their futures. Manchester Metropolitan University is today putting their students in a really strong position to begin a career with us. Their proactive nature is refreshing and I’d encourage other employers in the North West to work with them.

# CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

**In 2012 the creative industries sector in the UK employed 1.68 million people. It is worth over £70 billion per year to the UK economy, generating £8 million per hour.<sup>7</sup>**



**“All the students from Bournemouth University have been a great success, they are clued up before they join us so they can really hit the ground running.”**

Wunderman is a big advertising agency that focuses on direct marketing and digital. We work with Bournemouth University primarily on the Z-Academy which is our international internship scheme and one of the main talent initiatives we have. It has three main aspects: we pay students, students work on real client projects (no photocopying or admin) and it's international – students can apply to any roles worldwide from account exec, data and social media to new business, knowledge exchange and project management. Since the programme launch in 2010 we've taken 761 students worldwide. In Europe, the Middle East and Africa (including South Africa) we have taken over 150 students.

We started working with Bournemouth University because we heard a lot of good things about the university and they offer lots of courses that are relevant to our business. We might even say that Bournemouth is our favourite university! One reason it's worked so well is the University team is really engaged in helping the students find placements, they

didn't charge us and offered considerable help and advice.

Prior to working with Bournemouth we'd had some really great relationships with universities, as well as some not so good. With some it was difficult to make initial contact and they were not very proactive in promoting our company or what we were offering to students. We didn't know what to expect from Bournemouth University but our first meeting was as guest lecturers to a group of advertising and marketing students so we got to talk direct to the students. It was a great help that we were talking to students interested in things relevant to our business and they already had a better understanding of who we were and what we did. The relationship has flourished since then.

So far we've taken 19 students from Bournemouth University. Five of those have been converted to full time employees and some of them have gone back to university. We had one student doing her placement year with us. She worked in London for nine months and then

finished it off with a three-month stint at our office in Singapore. We had another student who did a placement in Munich and is now working for the Nokia global team in London. All the students from Bournemouth University have been a great success, they are clued up before they join us so they can really hit the ground running.

**We work with universities because students are the direct marketers of the future. They bring fresh ideas and talent and our existing teams can learn from them. I would definitely recommend working with Bournemouth University.**

The University is very focused on career development which is useful for us, from a business perspective, and we've benefited a lot from our relationship: our Z Academy scheme has grown and we've even taken on people we didn't have a role for because the students were so good.

# PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS SERVICES

The UK's professional and business services sector includes important services such as accountancy and recruitment. They provide highly skilled expertise essential to the success of the wider UK economy. The industry is also highly competitive internationally, with a trade surplus of £19 billion.<sup>8</sup>



**GLASGOW CALEDONIAN  
UNIVERSITY**

**Giles Penderleith,**  
Joint MD, ASPIRARE  
RECRUITMENT



**“Glasgow Caledonian University has real energy and passion for their graduates, especially in the careers service: enthusiasm to be creative, to do better and to add more value, not just stagnating and going with the flow; the team are dynamic in terms of moving things forward.”**

Aspirare is a professional and technical recruitment company – we place professional and technical roles within the engineering, oil and gas, I.T, banking and finance sectors. There is a real skill shortage in these areas so we engage with a lot of universities to try to plug these gaps and transfer our knowledge within the student community. There is huge financial commitment by the graduate when embarking on their education and we support some of the graduate community in developing self-awareness with our talent reports.

**I was really impressed actually by Glasgow Caledonian University. Their employer engagement team are very entrepreneurial in their way of thinking and how they go about things, there are a lot of creative and unique ideas and solutions that they are driving forward which really differentiates them from other universities that I have had experience of.**

Particularly helpful has been the University's educational based seminars, putting on programmes, bringing employers in and talking about the dos and don'ts of what you should be concentrating on as a student and graduate. That works really well.

**Bridging the gap between academia and the corporate world adds huge value.**

The University has real energy and passion for their graduates, especially in the careers service: enthusiasm to be creative, to do better and to add more value, not just stagnating and going with the flow; the team are dynamic in terms of moving things forward. I engage with quite a lot of universities and I don't expect to see that new stuff coming through. It was good to see that.

There'd be no reservations at all in recommending other businesses to get involved with universities in this way, and with Glasgow Caledonian University in particular. We're actually setting up a project at the moment that a team of graduates

are going to be assisting us with and there's going to be a competition with an award for the team who gets the best results. We always speak very highly of GCU and refer on. There is a lot of value there, particularly with their experience of both academia and the commercial world as well. Their careers team are results oriented.

# BUILT ENVIRONMENT

**The built environment is a central basis of employment and economic growth; it provides both personal shelter and the infrastructure needed for businesses to be successful. In 2013 real estate activities directly employed over half a million people in the UK and in 2011 added £144 billion GVA to the UK economy.<sup>9</sup>**



**“Nottingham Trent University is working hard on the employability front. Every single graduate that we’ve had from there has been superb. I couldn’t ask for anything more to be honest.”**

Most people probably think of Barratt as a company that builds ‘boxes’. But we’re actually building a wide range of fantastic homes and buildings across the UK; from new starter homes, detached family homes and luxury penthouse apartments to retail units and leisure centres. Our developments are innovative in their design and we’re working hard on the sustainability agenda. And of course we don’t just have careers in construction, we develop careers in quantity surveying, engineering, HR, finance, and in sales as well. So there are lots and very far-reaching management and development opportunities.

Although we’re in the FTSE 100, we’re perhaps not an organisation that would ordinarily be considered to develop a graduate career. But we’ve won lots of awards for our graduate programmes – including best training programme for women in construction. We’re ranked first in The Job Crowd’s Best Companies for Graduates to Work For list in our sector, and second overall to Microsoft.

**We’re not looking for people who just want a job, we want people who are work-ready and have high potential in terms of their management and leadership skills as well as their core discipline.**

Nottingham Trent University continues to have a great reputation and also delivers a wide range of courses in the built environment and business school as well, which capture all the backgrounds that we’re looking for.

NTU also works really hard and is really proactive. For example, the University frequently invites us in for mutually beneficial events, where we contribute as a guest speaker or take part in a networking session but also get to see and engage with students who perhaps ordinarily wouldn’t have considered Barratt as an employer. That’s excellent. That’s what I really like about Nottingham Trent.

Nottingham Trent University is working hard on the employability front. Every single graduate that we’ve had from there has been superb. I couldn’t ask for anything more to be honest.

**Working with NTU gives us really work-ready, employable graduates with the potential to do really well. That helps our business no end.**

We’re also working with the University on a business project, a research project. This gives us better links to businesses, universities and other stakeholders to solve real world problems together.

I would absolutely recommend working with Nottingham Trent University. You’ve got to be prepared to invest some of your time and effort to do it, which can be difficult (and I know how busy I am and how busy my colleagues are in different organisations). But it absolutely pays off to create those relationships with the university because it means you’ll be rewarded with some great candidates coming through who have some great work-ready skills and who are very employable.

# INFORMATION ECONOMY

**‘The information economy is transforming the way we live and work. It is crucial to our success on the global stage, our competitiveness and our connectedness – to our whole economy.’ The ICT sector contributed over £100 billion to the UK’s GVA and provided 1.3 million jobs in 2011 alone.<sup>10</sup>**





**“The great thing about Sheffield Hallam University is that the people we get into IBM on placements and graduate schemes are prepared to work. They have a strong work ethic already, they know about business so there is less of a learning curve, less handholding.”**

We're a technology services and solutions company. We operate in 170 countries worldwide with about 480,000 employees. Our services range from deep technological solutions to management consultancy and we underpin a lot of technology in a lot of different areas. We have a graduate scheme where we take on about 300 graduates a year into different business lines and we have an industrial placement scheme which is a 12-month placement aimed at sandwich degree students, for a range of different roles – HR, finance, marketing, I.T, software development, and pretty much everything technology related.

Our whole aim of working with Sheffield Hallam University is to raise the profile of IBM on campus so that people know what we do and that we have schemes to offer. A lot of people don't think of IBM as it's perceived as a computer company. But its remit is much wider. We've interacted with different departments and faculties at SHU such as the business school, arts and humanities and they've been very proactive in setting up events

for us, free of charge, to allow us to promote IBM. At events we typically talk about who we are and what we do, but we also run skills workshops to help people write good CVs and hone their interview skills. We help them and they help us, they've been very proactive, really good.

**I think a recurring favourite moment is organising an event and me being able to sit at the back and watch Sheffield Hallam students currently on their placement at IBM promote the company to other students. Their presentation skills are really good, they are so good at presenting and selling their University.**

I have been surprised by the proactivity at SHU around getting students on placement. There was no encouragement to get me out and into work at the university I went to.

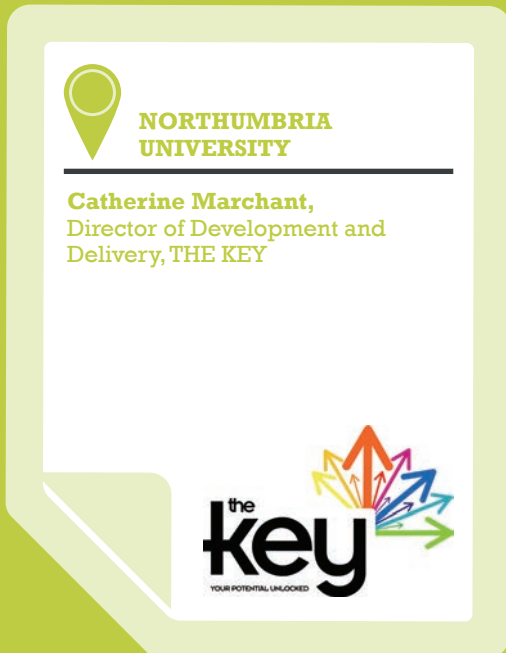
The great thing about Sheffield Hallam University is that the people we get into IBM on placements and graduate scheme are prepared to

work. They have a strong work ethic already, they know about business so there is less of a learning curve, less handholding. It's only a 12-month placement and we want to get them up and running as quickly as possible so both parties can most benefit. SHU students hit the ground running.

All employers should work with SHU. The academic staff and the careers staff are all very proactive in organising events, reaching out to you and suggesting new ideas about how we can work together. The main effort is setting up the initial contact and getting the dates in diaries but it's not a monumental task. And you get so much back.

# NOT FOR PROFIT

**The Third Sector in the UK contributes over £100 billion to the economy and its workforce has grown by 24% from 1997 to 2010, compared to 9% in the private sector and 16% in the public sector.<sup>11</sup>**



**“We began to engage with Northumbria University for a number of reasons. Obviously as a small charity working with young people it’s good to have young people within the organisation. But it also resonates with what we’re doing, it’s good to have their views, ideas and creativity..”**

We’re a North East based charity working in the community to develop skills and help young people, particularly from disadvantaged areas, to achieve their ambitions. We’re a small charity with big ambitions, with 12 current staff.

We began to engage with Northumbria University for a number of reasons. Obviously as a small charity working with young people it’s good to have young people within the organisation. But it also resonates with what we’re doing, it’s good to have their views, ideas and creativity, and working with the University is a great way of accessing great young people.

Engaging with the University also provides us with an opportunity to bring young people in to nurture them. We take students from the business management course on a two-year placement. We like taking students on a longer placement as it gives them more time to get to know the charity, and enables us to train them to be effective and give them a good experience.

The experience is not always about the business supporting the university, Northumbria University is always open to having discussions and suggesting ideas, and they make you feel very welcome and as if you’re part of the university. These relationships have been easier to develop and maintain at Northumbria than perhaps some other universities.

**The students we’ve worked with have been phenomenal people. I love that moment when I’ve given a student some work to get them through the day and within a couple of hours they’ve come back to me for more work. You underestimate their ability and eagerness to do the work.**

**The whole thing about watching them grow and the point where you want to keep them on, to stay with the company beyond the placement. They’ve been so good, so enthusiastic and have done a great, great job.**

It can take a while to get to know the students, what they’re capable of and how far they want to be pushed. But the programme we take students from is a very tough programme, and good at weeding out those not up to the job. The students that come to us are already the ones who are prepared to take on working full time and studying alongside. They come, and they understand the expectations on them.

We see graduates as very good employees. When you get other employees who come in from other organisations, they come with their own views and work and patterns and they have to transition. At Northumbria we have fresh young people we can embed into the culture of the charity so they become part of the charity.

# RETAIL

**The retail sector in the UK employs more than 10% of the workforce and accounts for over 5% of value generated by the UK economy each year. The UK's international retail brands attract considerable inward investment and UK retail accounts for 11% of global internet retail sales.<sup>12</sup>**



**“The University of Greenwich offers a really great and diverse range of courses for students to pursue. But whilst there is a focus on the academic side, Greenwich is one of those universities that is also doing things more actively around employability...”**

We are one of the largest retailers in the UK and probably one of the most well known brands of retailer within the UK. We have been running graduate programmes for 20 plus years in some shape or form. I suppose over the last 10-15 years those programmes have grown and expanded in line with how our business has grown and expanded. The number of schemes we offer has grown exponentially and we now have a hugely diverse number of opportunities and schemes that run across our Head Office. For example, we have expanded our I.T offer from business analysts to include graduates with software engineering skills. There are new opportunities that people might not always associate with a retail organisation. We want to bring people in and train and develop them to be our business leaders of the future.

The University of Greenwich offers a really great and diverse range of courses for students to pursue. But whilst there is a focus on the academic side, Greenwich is one of those universities that is also doing things more actively around employability with their students. Those kinds of activities really help

students to focus on the additional skills that employers are looking for and are absolutely key to graduate success. There are still universities that are very academically focused but their students don't always perform in practical ways with assessment centre tasks.

It's really useful to get insight from Greenwich University's careers service as to what will work best, in which location and for which students. We need that tangible feedback, it needs to be a two-way conversation.

**We do take on non-graduates but the motivation for employing graduates is what you get is an individual who has had the opportunity to specialise and be educated to a really great standard. You've got an individual who has studied to a certain level, they have more experience than those on school leaver programmes, but they still have the raw talent to use the training programme to really develop within the business.**

I'd definitely recommend working with University of Greenwich, particularly if you're looking for students coming out of university with a nice balance of academic focus with a really strong employability ethic.

# Alliance Universities



## Footnotes

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