

get ahead

*Supplying high level skills to
smaller companies*



Spice up your business with a graduate!

Jeanne Booth
for the East Midlands Universities Careers Task Force

Scoping the development of services for the region's smaller companies

The East Midlands HE Careers Services work directly with over 174,000 undergraduates, graduates and postgraduates from their institutions and provide information to graduates from elsewhere seeking opportunities in the region. They handle multiple graduate employment vacancies from over 10,000 employer contacts annually. In September 2002 the consortium launched Em-Grad Online, www.ntu.ac.uk/careers/emgrad, an information website for graduates seeking work in the East Midlands. One of the recommendations from this project was the development of a parallel site for employers seeking high level skills. This report is from the Get Ahead research project which explored potential for the development of graduate recruitment services for smaller companies.



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Introduction

This is the report of a short research project to scope the potential for development of graduate recruitment services for the region's smaller companies. Its purpose is to inform discussion of approaches to generating demand for high-level skills in small companies and of the mechanisms to ensure supply. The research was commissioned by East Midlands Universities Careers Task Group which includes all of the HE careers services in the region. The career services have a strong history of collaborative working. Filling the Gap¹ (1998-9) provided the first aggregated data on the destinations of graduates from the region's Higher Education Institutions and demonstrated that the region is a net exporter of graduates. Em-Grad Online (2001-2)² launched a website providing careers information for unemployed and underemployed graduates seeking opportunities in the region. Together the Careers Services have a direct line to over 174,000 undergraduates and graduates and handle multiple graduate vacancies from over 10,000 employer contacts annually.

Reasons for the research

- The Filling the Gap Project had demonstrated that the region is a net exporter of graduates.
- Emda's Corporate Plan, the Regional Economic Strategy and the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA) all highlighted the East Midlands low-pay, low-skill equilibrium - and the imperative to get high level skills into smaller businesses to increase competitiveness and generate further opportunities for knowledge-based business.
- The Careers Services recognised that the substantial majority of vacancies they handled were for opportunities outside the region and that graduate careers information was dominated by the glossy brochures and presentations from larger companies.
- All of the Careers Services were individually seeking to strengthen their links with local and smaller employers but wanted to explore the additional value that could arise from collaborative action and partnership with others.
- The Em-Grad Online Project had recommended the development of a parallel website for East Midlands employers seeking higher-level skills and it was necessary to explore how this might be achieved and the potential for collaborative activity.
- A starting point had to be greater understanding of the characteristics and requirements of smaller companies in the region.
- Consortia of HE Careers Services elsewhere had secured substantial funding to work with other partners to develop region-wide graduate recruitment services and there was an opportunity to learn from these examples.
- The Careers Services are increasingly involved in promoting good practice in the guidance of HE learners in FE Colleges and contributing to widening participation initiatives. This experience has suggested there is potential for using local labour market information to encourage aspiration raising and progression.
- A key point arising from the Lambert review of Business-University Collaboration (2003) was that regional development could be promoted by helping businesses that are inexperienced in graduate recruitment to access and recognise the right kind of skilled graduates for their needs.
- Emda has commissioned a number of research projects including East Midlands Regional HE Supply and Demand Assessment³ and Graduate Employment Choices in the East Midlands.⁴ It is hoped that the Get Ahead project might add to these efforts to construct a more informed picture of graduate employment issues in the region.

¹ The project report can be found at <http://careers-2.lboro.ac.uk/emu/>

² See <http://www.ntu.ac.uk/careers/emgrad/>

³ PricewaterhouseCoopers to report in summer 2004

⁴ Institute of Employment Studies, University of Sussex

Methodology

The research was undertaken over a period of three months between December 2003 and March 2004. Given the short time-frame and in order not to cause further 'survey fatigue' it was determined at the outset, that the project would largely draw upon the substantial amounts of published research concerning characteristics and requirements of small companies. The research was guided by a small Steering Group with representatives from the Careers Services, emda and East Midlands Universities Association. The research programme included:

- Literature review of national research; review of regional information concerning make-up of East Midland' economy and survey research, including that concerned with emda defined cluster groups. A bibliography can be found on the back the inside cover.
- Eight unstructured interviews and two focus groups with owner-managers, employers and employer representatives drawn from different sectors.
- Web-search and survey followed by telephone interviews of providers of graduate services in other regions.
- Web-search followed by telephone interviews with potential collaborating organisations and initiatives.
- Circulation of draft report and incorporation of comments from Careers Services; providers of services in other regions; owner-managers and small company employers; potential collaborators and Information. Advice and Guidance providers.
- Dissemination and discussion of findings at event on 22cnd April 2004.

Through these means, the project sought to compile a broadbased picture to inform potential development including:

- The characteristics and requirements of smaller companies in the region.
- Examples of regional graduate vacancy information, recruitment and placement services.
- The potential for partnership between regional organisations and initiatives working with smaller companies.
- Added value - the potential for enhancing local labour market information.
- A number of different service options for further exploration.

The potential market

Smaller companies in the region

At the start of 2002 there were an estimated 3.8 million business enterprises in the UK. Almost all (99.1%) were small (0-49 employees), only 27,000 were medium-sized (50-249 employees) and 7,000 were large (250 or more employees).⁵ SMEs accounted for around half of all employment and turnover.

Regional statistics vary but indications are that the East Midlands has around a thousand companies with over 200 employees.⁶ Under their definition of a company employing less than 250 people, the Small Business Service reported that over 98% (236,365) of businesses in the region are SMEs. Of these over two thirds were owner-managed businesses with no employees, 22% have 1-4 employees and only 12% have more than 5 employees. Overall SMEs accounted for 56.8% of employment and 54.2% of turnover.

The demand for high level skills in small companies

Small companies may account for over half of all employment in the region but do they need graduates? According to the Regional Economic Architecture Report 2000 about 60% of SME employment was concentrated in low-value, low-knowledge sectors. Around 24% of employees in the region work in the public sector⁷, which outweighs the private sector as a knowledge economy employer with around 55% in health, education, social work and public administration.⁸ The demand for graduate skills in the region is currently subject to an extensive study being undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers and at this point in time there might seem to be contradictory signals:

- Overall the East Midlands has lots of jobs requiring no qualifications and a shortage of opportunities for those with intermediate qualifications. Approximately 420,000 jobs in the region require level 4 or above qualifications while there are 450,000 individuals in the East Midlands with these qualifications.⁹ Career Services may be uncertain about taking more positive action to persuade graduates to stay if there aren't the opportunities to satisfy increasing numbers within the region.

On the other hand

- Compared to other regions, the East Midlands has a below average proportion of working individuals with higher order skills such as degrees or postgraduate qualifications.
- The interim report from PricewaterhouseCoopers pointed to a 'graduate gap' suggesting that the region is short of 100,000 graduates to contribute to increasing GDP.

The report on Baseline Labour Market Information¹⁰ submitted to the East Midlands FRESA Forum argues that because the region has a below average proportion of graduates the ability of firms to upskill and increase their competitive advantage is constrained. This in turn contributes to the maintenance of a low skill equilibrium and deters would-be inward investors. With fewer high level opportunities available than elsewhere, people naturally leave to pursue higher paid, higher skilled opportunities in other regions.¹¹ It's a 'Catch 22' situation. Not enough graduate level vacancies means people seek opportunities elsewhere and are not able to contribute to increasing competitiveness and growth of smaller companies, which in turn, would increase the availability of high level opportunities. **This suggests that any kind of graduate recruitment service for smaller companies might need to be primarily about persuading them of the potential benefits of using high level skills rather than fulfilling unmet demand.**

⁵ Small Business Service, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) statistics for the UK 2002

⁶ Annual Business Inquiry Workplace Analysis, nomis

⁷ As above

⁸ Baseline Labour Market Information for the East Midlands 2002, University of Leicester

⁹ As above

Demand for high level skills in emda clusters

Notwithstanding the substantial size of the SME market, it might appear that there is little demand from small companies for assistance with high-level skill recruitment. In order to examine this supposition more closely, the research looked at information concerning SMEs in the emda cluster programme. These are sectors that have been identified for priority development and have good potential for future growth. In particular information was sought on:

- size of the sector.
- awareness of high level skills gaps or shortages.
- any information relating to graduate recruitment and employment issues.

The research did not attempt to duplicate the substantial body of regional and national research that has focussed upon identifying skills gaps for the purposes of workforce development, but drew upon these to highlight information that might influence demand for specialist recruitment services. A major source was the Sector Needs Analysis Reports conducted by HEIST during summer 2003 for the New Technology Institute. These included semi-structured telephone interviews with SMEs and included questions concerning the employment of graduates and graduate placements.

Clothing and Textiles

In 1998, there were 2,955 firms in the East Midlands involved in the clothing and textiles sector, employing over 70,000 people. Very small businesses dominate and 57% of East Midlands firms have less than 10 employees and the average company size is 23 employees. Two of the three companies interviewed by HEIST employed graduates - taken on for their degree-based skills and for their tendency to learn quickly. None had taken on graduate placements. Indeed there was a perception that the universities put little effort into placing graduates with local companies with around 50% of design students going into retailing and around 10% getting jobs locally. Many companies have an aging workforce and are finding it difficult to recruit younger people whose perceptions are of low wages, sweat-shops and few long term prospects. This results in skills shortages at graduate and operative levels.

The East Midlands Textiles Association is frequently approached for assistance in filling vacancies and has developed JARTE, a job retention and recruitment service with a comprehensive database of skilled people seeking employment at all levels. The Designer Forum provides programmes for approximately 500 graduates from textile related courses in the region and have observed that it is those that have 'learnt their trade' during two years work experience following graduation who are at a premium with employers. HEIST highlighted need for a 'public or collective' training system in SME based clusters and the NTI Clothing and Textiles Network Group have highlighted demand for a regional student placement and graduate recruitment database.

High Performance Engineering

The crude estimate is that there are 215 supplier firms in the East Midlands of which approximately 80% (172) are SMEs. More than 20% of all firms (around 50) are very dependent on the aerospace sector. Research currently being conducted by East Midlands Universities Association exploring potential for Foundation Degrees suggest that skills gaps have been identified at technician level. The HEIST research identified one company which takes on students for six month placements in their design office and others expressed concern regarding recruiting graduates - *'you will train them and then lose them after a couple of years'*. However discussion with the Sector Skills Manager indicated that generally companies would

¹⁰ Baseline Labour Market Information for the East Midlands 2002, University of Leicester.

¹¹ Emda has been commissioned research from the Institute of Employment Studies concerning The Employment Choices of Graduates in the East Midlands. The report should be available in Autumn 2004.

seek to fill high-level skill gaps by recruitment rather than training and little was known about how those small companies would find suitable candidates.

Health Care

There are around 350 healthcare companies in the East Midlands. Approximately 63% (220) are SMEs. The HEIST report identifies 30 companies, described as core larger firms which have a substantial impact on the sector. A number of regional initiatives including Medilink East Midlands and BioCity are developing to co-ordinate and deliver comprehensive support to the sector, including facilitating the flow of knowledge transfer and employment of graduates. HEIST identified that some of the small companies in its sample employed graduates and there was a placement programme for pharmacists. Recruitment issues concerning availability of suitably skilled labour and lack of applicants were also highlighted. The Health Sector Workforce Market Assessment 2003 suggests that a combination of replacement demand and growth will necessitate replacing over 80% of the existing professional and assistant professional workforce between 1999 and 2010.

Food and drink

The region is one of the foremost sectors for the UK's food and drink industry. It contributes 16.9% of regional GDP and accounts for 17.5% of the region's employment. There are estimated to be 800 food and drink processing units. The majority are very small, with less than 10 employees. 545 have less than 20 employees. There are 135 units with 20 to 99 employees and 85 with 100 to less than 500. There are over 150 packaging companies. The picture of graduate recruitment is patchy but the imperative to encourage access to graduates with particular skills has already led to the 'Growth Through Graduates' pilot run by the Food and Drink Forum.

Creative industries

The creative industries employ 85,000 people in the region. Generally speaking the whole of the sector is characterised by small and micro firms. The HEIST research suggested it is only really the larger companies who regularly employ graduates. The smaller companies do not tend to employ graduates being either too small to warrant this or prefer to use internal promotion. 'Graduates want to start at a higher level and so miss out on the base skills required'. They found that companies had taken graduate placements for particular projects. However, a high proportion of creative industries micro-businesses are graduates themselves and a focus group of these highlighted that this was regarded as an 'aspirational sector' with lots of graduates trying to secure a foothold. As a result micro-businesses receive lots of CVs and only those that demonstrate tenacity, initiative, ambition, and drive (which is also evidence of potential to be a fee-earner for the company) stand any chance of being taken up. An organised central brokerage service might be perceived in this sector as a service for the 'losers' or 'also-rans'. It was asserted that it would be better to teach graduates to operate effectively as freelance suppliers of specific skills.

Environmental Industries ¹²

Environmental industries employ over 20,000 people and generate a turnover of nearly £900 million/year. 47% of companies are in services, agency and distribution, 34% are in consultancy services and 19% in manufacturing. Small and very small companies dominate. Almost half (49%) the companies employ fewer than 10 people. A further 29% have 11-25 employees. Only 10.5% have more than 50 employees. Manufacturing companies tend to be larger than other main sub-sectors.

The survey conducted by ECOTEC confirmed that the workforce is generally highly skilled. 42% of companies have staff with PhDs, masters or equivalent, mainly in technical and scientific disciplines (geologists, engineers, microbiologists etc). The sector is expanding in size. One-third of companies reported that their staff levels had increased since 2000, and 49% of companies expected their workforce to expand in 2002. This is particularly significant in service companies and consultancies. Most recruitment in 2002 was expected to be for professional (consultancies) and plant and machine operatives (services) occupations. 40% of companies take students on work placements. Industrial placements generally considered as being an essential component of a student's training to improve subsequent employability as a graduate.

The ECOTEC report identified a limited number of links between companies and the higher / further education sector although a number of companies indicated that they would like to have the opportunity for greater links. There were only low levels of awareness of the skills and training provision in the region. The report encouraged the use of business services to provide training support specifically for environmental companies in the region, particularly through services targeted towards the special characteristics of the sector as small and micro-SMEs operating in specific environmental growth areas. It also suggested that skills shortages could be reduced through promotion of career opportunities for young people in the environmental sector, support for industrial placements and development of vocational qualifications.

Tourism and cultural sector

This sector is dominated by micro-businesses employing up to 385,000 people directly or around one-fifth of the region's workforce. It is characterised by fast turnover and part-time jobs. The STARS Workforce Development Strategy¹³ identified sub-sectors with very specific and often higher level or technical skills requirements relating to management, ICT, and fund-raising. The report also highlighted that some employers were using sub-standard recruitment procedures that led to greater recruitment costs. Similar to the Clothing and Textile sector, issues concerning the aging workforce and perception of career and progression opportunities were highlighted.

Community and Voluntary sector

There are around 22,000 voluntary and community sector organisations across the region, and difficulties in recruitment and retention have contributed to the undertaking of current research into the potential for a recruitment and/or temping agency for the sector.¹⁴ Management, project and financial management are in demand at the higher levels. The current research has already identified a mismatch between public perceptions of career and progression opportunities in the sector and the reality, prompting a call for the sector to sell itself more effectively and for up-to-date information to be fed through to careers advice agencies. There is also concern about amounts spent on recruitment advertising. Managers in the sector have expressed some doubts concerning established recruitment and temping agencies and approaches to equal opportunities and diversity practices.

¹³ STARS Workforce Development Strategy for the East Midlands Tourism and Cultural Sector. Alan Graver and John Harrison, Impact Research Ltd, 2002

¹⁴ Robert Higgins Associates will report mid-April 2004

Demand for high level skills in emda clusters - key points

- Small businesses and micro-businesses dominate and there is evidence from all the clusters of engagement with graduate employment issues, either from organisations working with them or the businesses themselves. High level skills shortages were asserted in all of the areas considered above. Yet graduate and careers information is dominated by opportunities with larger companies.
- Clothing and Textiles, the Print Sector of the Creative Industries and the Tourism and Culture Sector all expressed the imperative to change perceptions of the industries through better careers information and promotion of career opportunities. The need to attract young people to replace an aging workforce and bring in new energy and skills was stressed as critical.
- Clothing and Textiles and Food and Drink are already undertaking work to practically assist recruitment of graduates through job retention and recruitment schemes, databases and 'Growth through Graduates' programmes.
- There was evidence of concern about current recruitment mechanisms, including lack of skills in the recruitment process, high cost of advertising and uncertainty about equal opportunities and diversity practices.
- Clothing and Textiles, Environmental and High Performance Engineering all stressed the importance of work experience, suggesting that graduates with two years experience, 'learning their trade' were in particular demand. However there were indications that small companies were resentful of graduates that 'learnt their trade with' them and then moved on to better opportunities.
- Creative Industries highlighted the need to equip graduates to operate effectively in sectors which do not have established routes for entry and present themselves as suppliers of skills rather than job-seekers.

Small companies at different stages of development

Examining the requirements of small companies in different sectors brought to light the concept of 'critical moments' in the life of a small company and in particular the time at which a small company might think about employing skilled people to help. The survey by William and Owens (1033 firms)¹⁵ and that by the Federation of Small Business¹⁶ (22,000 firms) demonstrated that micro-businesses employ the fewest graduates, whereas the larger the firm, the more open they are to taking on graduates.

A Review of Business Support in the East Midlands found that the majority of new firms (69%) employed less than five staff but those employees tended to be skilled and employed on a full-time basis. Nevertheless a total of 74% of all new jobs created in the region each year are from recent new business starts.¹⁷ The Review identified practical issues, rules and regulations concerning employment as a critical concern for small businesses. Whilst most people wanted to see their business grow substantially in the future, employment issues were seen as a significant obstacle. Most tended to recruit in response to demand - either new orders or high workload

Employment was a major issue for several individuals who found themselves in a Catch 22 situation where they could not take on more work until they had more staff and could not take on anyone until they had more work. Individuals also admitted that they were often unwilling to delegate and trust others with the work. This was due to a lack of ability to take the time to train the individuals so that they could work in a way that would satisfy the employer. Not only did they find the costs involved with taking on staff a significant constraint on their ability to provide employment and be competitive but also they found employment legislation complex and that too much of the paperwork involved in taking on staff had been passed onto the firms themselves and taken away from government.¹⁸

The National Employer Skills survey 2003¹⁹ found that at least 10% of companies finding themselves with skills shortages didn't do anything about them - just muddled through. Two in five employers in the East Midlands reported that they responded to recruitment difficulties by taking on less qualified, unskilled or less experienced staff. In crude terms, if it were possible to provide a source of help to meet high level skills shortages via graduate recruitment to just 10% of the smaller companies in the East Midlands, placements could be found for a fifth of the region's missing 100,000 graduates.

The other 'critical moment' in the life of a company was identified and characterised by a Business Link Adviser as 'there goes another one'. Faulty selection and recruitment practices can lead to greater cost in re-recruitment. Lack of career development opportunities can lead to trained staff moving on to find better opportunities elsewhere. In the case of the latter some graduate recruiters may look specifically for employees that have 'learnt their trade' in a small business and are at a premium two years on.

An important factor that may influence demand or recruitment of graduates is the need to replace staff as they retire.²⁰ Working Futures predicted that for all occupations together, replacement demand will be ten times higher than expansion demand. Whilst 1.3 million jobs are to be created as a result of expansion, replacement demands arising from retirement and mortality are forecast to create 12 million job openings nationally. Providing for the ongoing existence and success of small companies after retirement or death of its owner-manager may be a critical issue.

Key points from the research covered in this section are captured in the model overleaf.

¹⁷ East Midlands Development Agency Corporate Plan

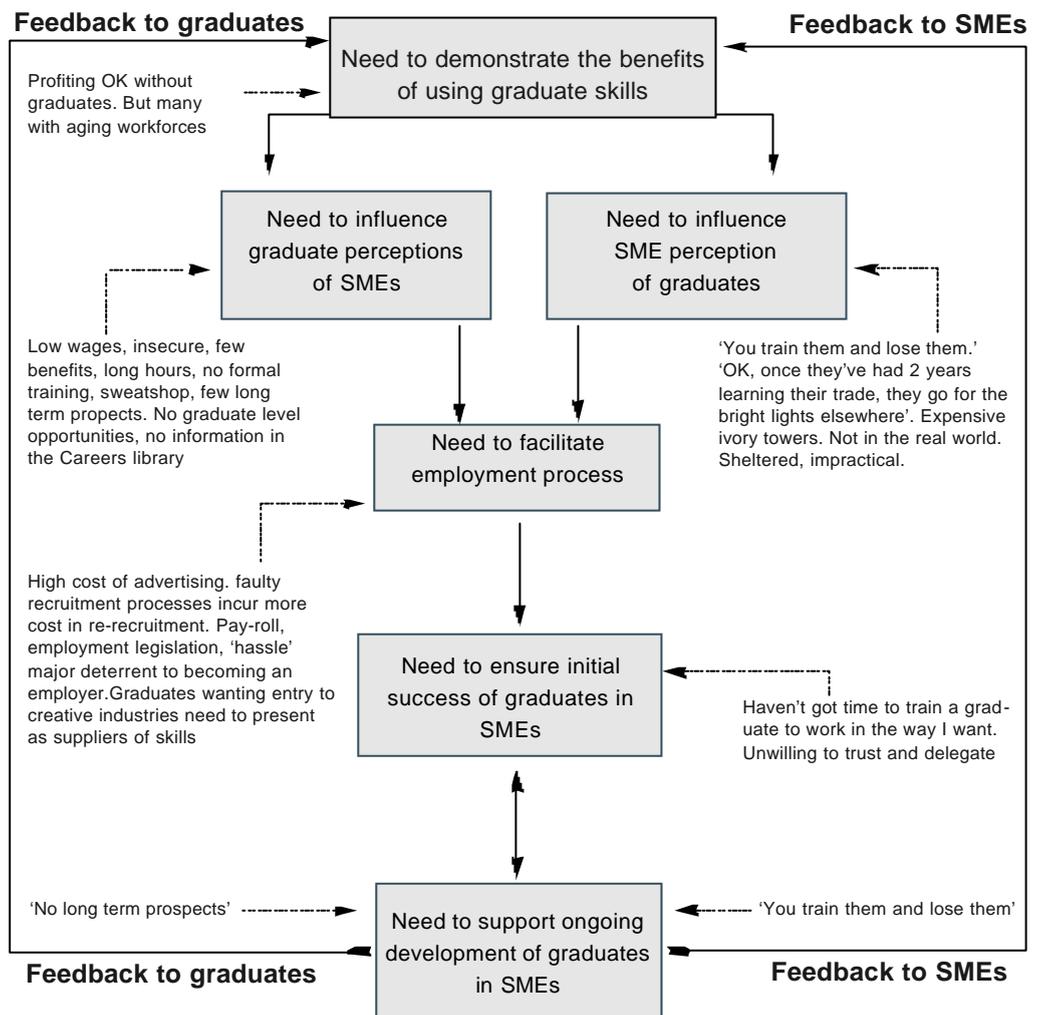
¹⁸ A Review of Business Support in the East Midlands Action Plan 2000 Onwards

¹⁹ National Employer Skills survey 2003: Key Findings, DFES

²⁰ Working Futures: new projections of occupational employment by sector and region, 2001-2 - 12, Vol 1 National Report, R Wilson, K Homenidou and A Dickerson, Institute for Employment Research

Creating the market for graduate skills in smaller companies: key points from research

It is important to develop appropriate interventions at key points.



Adapted from Hanage, Johnson & Mullen
Employing Graduates for Growth, Durham University
Business School

Regional graduate services

There is a range of regional services in the West Midlands, North-West, North-East and South-West as well as in Scotland and Wales. Details of all of these were collected and a number contacted for greater information regarding cost, partners, volume of activity and lessons they might pass on. The motivations behind development of regional services differed. For some, such as the Graduate Vacancy Partnership, it was a means of enhancing information provided to their students and graduates and cutting down on duplicate activity, as each Careers Service was preparing its own vacancy bulletin. For others, graduate retention had been identified as a key regional issue and/or the mistaken perception that graduate jobs weren't available in the area. In Yorkshire and the North-West, research had demonstrated that graduates would like to stay in the region, given suitable employment opportunities. Five examples are described in more detail below and illustrate a range of different partnerships. Some collaboration is as much the result of local history and previous funding opportunities as local labour market issues.

Graduate Vacancy Partnership (GVP) <http://www.gvp.org.uk> @ £6K annually + set-up

Bolton Institute	Liverpool John Moores University
University of Central Lancashire	St Martin's College, Lancaster
Chester College	The Open University in the North West
Edge Hill	University of Salford
Keele University	Staffordshire University
Lancaster University	Manchester Metropolitan University
Hope College, Liverpool	

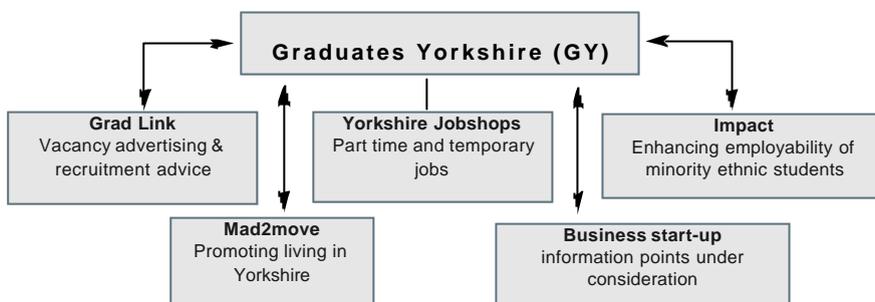
GVP is a non profit making partnership of 13 University Careers Services in the North-West. It offers a free vacancy advertising service to employers. Employers can contact any one of the Careers Services or input their vacancies directly online. About 15% do, and these are checked prior to their appearance on the website. Each Career Service also inputs vacancies they have received individually. Vacancies are password protected and available only to students and graduates of partner institutions and applicants contact employers directly. Employers are also invited to contribute their details to the NW Graduate Employer Directory. This collates information on type of work; disciplines (HND or degree) sought; opportunities for vacation work, industrial placements or sponsorship; attitude to speculative applications and those from older graduates.

The GVP is in its third year and the website and administrative framework was originally set up with a small amount of project funding. Partners contribute around £250 per year for its upkeep in addition to each contributing time to input vacancies. Some of the partners feel that the true cost is hidden through absorption in the everyday vacancy handling activity of each service. There has been virtually no marketing to employers through lack of funds. There are generally about 220 live vacancies on the site at any one time, about 41% for opportunities in the North-West.

Graduates Yorkshire <http://www.graduatesyorkshire.info> @ £300K per year

University of Leeds	Sheffield University
University of Bradford	Sheffield Hallam University
University of Huddersfield	University of York
University of Hull	Trinity and All Saints College
Leeds Metropolitan University	College of York and St John

Graduates Yorkshire is funded by the Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward at a cost of £900,000 over three years July 2002-March 2005. Through the one web-site it brings together three key career service collaborative activities and a lifestyle site under the Graduates Yorkshire brand.



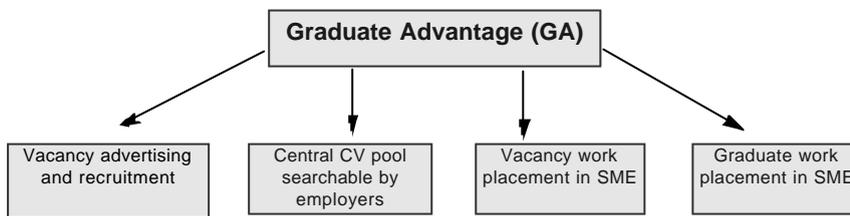
- Graduate Link provides free vacancy advertising and recruitment advice for employers and although initially targeted at smaller companies, now handles vacancies from companies of any size. There is a free online CV matching service which alerts graduates to opportunities that match their skills and qualifications and the Virtual Career Coach which supports career management
- Yorkshire Jobshops provides access to all the Jobshops based within the region's university careers services for students searching for temporary or part-time work and employers wishing to post a temporary or part-time opportunity.
- Impact is a positive action project designed to develop the competitiveness and employability of UK minority ethnic undergraduates and graduates through a range of quality intensive support and personal development opportunities.
- Mad2Move.com provides regional lifestyle information.

The website was developed by a local design and software company. Anyone, anywhere can access the vacancies which are all immediate vacancies suitable for candidates who have already graduated or who are due to graduate within the next 6-8 weeks. Prospective advertisers do so by contacting Graduate Link. The average number of live vacancies at any one time is around 200 and around 70% of the total number of vacancies handled have been from SMEs. An annual target of 350 placements into jobs was achieved within ten months. A further funding application is currently being considered including greater business outreach activity and improved guidance on self-employment with Business Start-Up information points established within each partner careers service.

Graduate Advantage www.graduateadvantage.co.uk @ £700K per year

Aston University	Newman Collage of Higher education
The University of Birmingham	The Open University in the West Midlands
University of Central England	Staffordshire University
Coventry University	University of Warwick
Harper Adams University College	University of Wolverhampton
Keele University	University College, Worcester

Graduate Advantage is funded by the Regional Development Agency, West Midlands Advantage at a cost of approximately 3.5 million over five years. Launched last year, it is actively marketed to students and graduates of partner careers services but can be used by students and graduates of any institution.



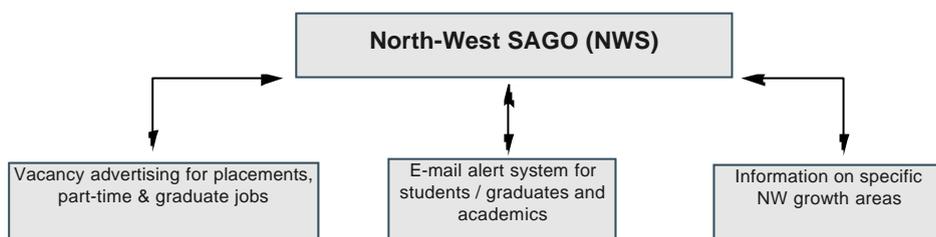
- Free vacancy advertising to employers with opportunities based in the West Midlands. Primarily aimed at SMEs but can be used by any company.
- An online graduate vacancy database with the option for graduates to submit an on-line application form to a central 'pool' searchable by employers.
- A Vacancy Placement Programme provides paid work experience placements in SMEs.
- The Graduate Placement Programme provides recent graduates with the opportunity to work for SMEs on paid projects lasting between six and nine months. SMEs can apply for sponsorship towards the cost of the placement. Applicants are shortlisted through an assessment centre and an induction, training and professional development programme is put in place to support both the placement and company. All the administration including payment of placements is handled through Graduate Advantage.

The Graduate Advantage website was built by GTI and launched in May 2003. The first year figures are not yet available but the Graduate Placement Programme achieved 30 placements within six months.

North-West Student and Graduate Online (NW SAGO) @ £175K per year + £50K set-up
www.nwstudentandgraduate.ac.uk/

University of Manchester and UMIST	Bolton Institute
Manchester Metropolitan University	Lancaster University
University of Salford	University of Central Lancashire
University of Liverpool	Edge Hill
Liverpool John Moores University	Keele University
Chester College	The Open University in the North West
Liverpool Hope University	

North West SAGO is funded by the North West Development Agency and Government Office for the North West at a cost of approximately £175,000 annually. The database and software were originally developed with funds of around £50,000 from a BT Innovation Award.



- Free vacancy advertising for employers offering placements and part time work in regional, national and global businesses and graduate jobs in businesses in the North West.
- Email alert system for students/graduates. Graduates of any institution can register.
- Information on specific NW growth sectors.
- Email services for academics including information on placements for students and on key industry sectors.

There are up to 150 live graduate vacancies per month and SAGO is currently working on building partnerships with organisations promoting specific sectors such as Professional Careers North-West which focuses on accountancy, finance and law; SPICE which provides managed placements for students and graduates in creative and cultural industries and Environmental Mentoring North West which finds career mentors for intending environmental technologists in the regions environmental businesses. A second phase of SAGO is currently underway to provide an HE component to the new network of Business Advisory and Learning and Skills Agencies and to contribute to more joined-up HE to Business provision in the region.

Careers NorthWest (CNW) www.careersnorthwest.com @ £250K per year

Careers North West links with the Graduate Vacancy Partnership and North West Sago but is based within the North West Development Agency rather than a careers service. It provides an information and advice service for young people, graduates and adults across the NW region. It is dedicated to giving individuals and advice givers reliable and authoritative local labour market information, including a series of sector-based fact sheets. The fact sheets highlight the types of jobs available in each sector and the qualifications people will need. In addition, briefs are provided on major regeneration projects in the region that highlight a number of career opportunities in the future. The project works with the Regional Intelligence Unit and is funded by the NW Development Agency at a cost of £750K over three years.

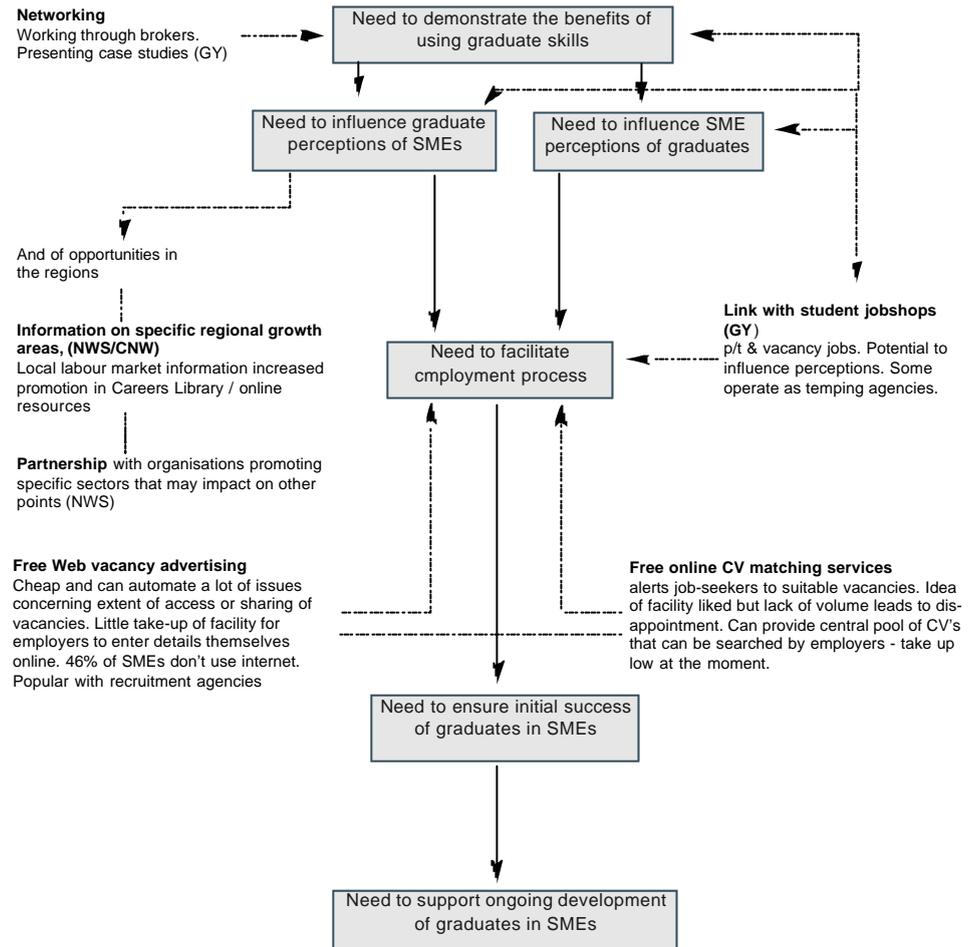
Key points from discussion with services in other regions

- 'A starting point for students, graduates, advice-givers and those concerned with regional high level skills issues is to make the region's student and graduate jobs visible - by putting them all in one place rather than in 13 careers services, 50 newspapers and 200 job centres.' All the services examined averaged around 200 live vacancies per month.
- Cost of building website averages £60-£80K.
- Make a tie in with life-style sites if you are trying to attract graduates from other regions. That way if they see a job they fancy they can explore social and cultural life, house prices, attractions, children's schools etc.
- We addressed the key barriers SMEs have to recruiting graduates - money and hassle. We provide a contribution to the weekly cost of the placement and we work in a similar fashion to a temping agency - the graduate is on our books, we pay them and look after national insurance etc. It's early days yet but we know that research has demonstrated that a high proportion of graduates are kept on after placements. You've just got to ease their way through the door in the first place, 'try before you buy.'
- With graduates and SMEs you have to work on clearing mistaken perceptions each has of the other.
- Outreach is critical. You've got to do loads of networking and presentations to promote the service. This includes working through brokers such as Business Link, Trade associations and Chambers of Commerce, but membership of such bodies is quite low and generally SMEs visit their accountants and bank managers infrequently.
- Three of the services provided facilities for prospective employers to enter vacancy details online and/or search CVs. Usage of these facilities seemed quite low - averaging about 15%. Companies preferred to talk to someone.
- Sharing of vacancies was contentious but we got round this by concerning ourselves only with the immediate vacancies - those that were looking for graduates who would be available within the next six weeks.
- We're linking with business support not just for reaching smaller companies but to support the creation of graduate start-ups.

The diagram overleaf shows how the different regional services address the model for creating the market for graduate skills in smaller companies.

Examples of regional graduate services

Interventions at key points



Link with business support initiatives
Two examples (GY & NWS) of planning greater tie in with incubations and start-up business support both to reach small companies and support creation of graduate start-ups. Includes support for those graduates that need to present themselves as suppliers of skills, eg creatives.
Potential to influence at every point

Vacancy and / or graduate work placement (GA)
Paid placements with bursary scheme towards costs. Applicants shortlisted and pay roll administered by GA - similar to temping agency. Induction, training and professional development programme to support both placement and company.
Potential to influence at every point.

Promotion of national schemes through regional websites, eg STEP, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, Year In Industry, etc.
Potential to influence at every point

Adapted from Hanage, Johnson & Mullein
Employing Graduates for Growth, Durham University
Business School

Potential for partnership

Lots of different organisations, projects and initiatives are trying to work with smaller companies in the region. Some work directly to enhance placement opportunities for undergraduates, including STEP, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (formerly Teaching Company Scheme), Year in Industry, Graduates into Industry, and emda's own Getonwithgraduates. Others provide support to small and growing businesses such as Business Link, East Midlands Incubation Network (EMIN) and the Universities' Business Outreach and Partnership Officers. Key points arising from the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration encourage greater collaboration²¹ of organisations working with businesses in different ways:

- Businesses gain from collaboration with universities, with access to new ideas, specialised knowledge and the chance to quickly spot graduate talent.
- It is to be made easier for such collaborations to take place, with more funds put in place to train students and graduates in business skills and red tape being reduced.
- Regional development to be promoted by helping businesses that are inexperienced in graduate recruitment to access and recognise the right kind of skilled graduates for their needs.²²

Using the models of services in other regions and the knowledge of the Steering Group, the Get Ahead research identified a number of current or developing region-wide initiatives that would merit greater exploration. Each is briefly described and their positioning and potential contribution to the creation of a market for graduate skills is mapped against the model.

Higher Education / Business Link support to smaller companies

East Midlands Universities Association Innovation and Business Outreach Group are exploring with Business Link, collaborative approaches to increase engagement between the regions' SMEs and Universities. In October 2003, the UK Business Barometer based at the University of Nottingham asked its panel of small businesses how often they had contacted (or been contacted by) a university in the region on business-related issues. 47% had never had a contact with a regional university, 16% had only one contact, and 53% were either not aware or only slightly aware of universities' services for business. However, most of the Universities have some form of institutional 'business gateway' and the Group is looking at how a collaborative approach might be adopted to increase awareness and provide mechanisms to ensure enquiries are directed toward the most appropriate institution. Central to the operation would be developing the competence of Business Link Liaison Officers to guide SMEs in an informed but impartial fashion, and in the context of a broader understanding of the business issues pertinent to a particular company.

Undergraduate placement and graduate recruitment are clearly services that could be signposted by Business Link in a similar fashion, and students and graduates should be regarded as part of an institution's knowledge transfer portfolio. The possibility of designing protocols could be explored to ensure impartial referral where there is duplicate provision. However, given the greater proportion of graduate vacancies that do not generally require specific subject expertise, this might be difficult. The understanding is that exploration has just begun between Business Link and the Outreach Group and a scoping study is to be conducted. It is therefore a particularly good time for the Careers Services Task Group to work together with the Business Outreach Group to explore the potential for developing a broader based collaborative offer to business. Bearing in mind that Business Link penetration of the small business sector is currently around 12%, this could serve as one aspect of a marketing strategy for either individual service careers services or for regional recruitment services.

²¹ The Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration, HM Treasury, December 2003. www.lambertreview.org.uk

²² The Lambert Review and the graduate labour market (Spring 2004) www.prospects.ac.uk

East Midlands Incubation Network (EMIN)

This project involving the Universities of Derby, De Montfort, Leicester, Lincoln, Loughborough, and Nottingham Trent aims to provide effective support for incubation of new businesses in the region through strong regional networking, co-ordinated and supported by central services. The network will support a wide range of clients including pre-start and early stage businesses, incubator and business support practitioners, research groups, private sector business professionals and investors. Principal outcomes will be an increased number of business incubations, increased jobs, increased support for new businesses and increased venture capital secured. Also, it will increase the culture of collaboration between the partner universities. The decision to employ the first person in a business is often a difficult one for the person who started the company. Collaborative services could provide critical guidance at this stage.

East Midlands New Technology Institute

The purpose of the New Technology Institute (NTI), a consortium of 30 regional Higher and Further Education Institutes, is to meet the regional need for a greater supply of people with technician and higher level skills in ICT and other advanced technology. It targets SMEs in order to provide better advice and support on the effective adoption of new technology and innovative business practices through improved HE/FE links. It provides a portal through which individual businesses and business advisers can access comprehensive information on training, development, latest technologies, sources of financial support, advice, support and guidance. A pool of £600,000 has been specifically reserved to help smaller companies to capital fund equipment that advances the use of technology in business. Companies can apply for technical development grants of up to £5,000 to use against 50% of the cost of equipment. The NTI commissioned comprehensive Needs Analysis research into emda clusters so are aware of, and trying to meet, needs of different clusters.

The NTI is obviously focussed upon filling skills gaps via provision of training, whereas the Careers Services are concerned with meeting skills gaps through recruitment or possibly outsourcing to graduate freelancers or small start-up companies. There may not therefore be strong incentive for collaboration. However there may be opportunities for innovative joint packages such as optional recruitment of a skilled graduate to assist with integration of new technology into specific business settings. More likely may be collaboration over provision of continuing development of graduates in the workplace.

Getonwithgraduates www.getonwithgraduates.org.uk @£400K per year

Getonwithgraduates is a regional programme established by emda to increase graduate recruitment in SMEs, and in businesses unfamiliar with graduate recruitment. It provides a support service to help employers establish their needs and find an appropriate graduate, and offers continuing support to both the employer and the graduate during employment. Support includes advice on making the best use of the graduate within the business, as well as information about access to specific training.

A small group of locally based agents work directly with employers and graduates to provide the matching and employer support services. The scheme does not contribute to employment costs, graduates are paid a graduate salary directly by the employer for at least one year. This is a trial period for both employer and graduate, with the aim of developing a career and long-term employment. A regional manager is responsible for all aspects of the scheme, including the on line registration and enquiry service for employers and graduates. The scheme provides a freephone number that handles enquiries from both companies and graduates, and a web site. The programme has been running since September 2001 and has placed over 400 graduates into small businesses to date and a further 550 are envisaged by the end of March 2006.

Getonwithgraduates is already advertised extensively both by individual career services and through the Em-Grad Online website and closer links are being forged through collaboration on the Get Ahead research. The programme is keen to forge greater and more effective links with universities in the region.

G2B (Graduate Linkage Scheme) @£130K over 18 months

Currently being piloted in Lincolnshire, G2B is an *emda* funded project that aims to increase the high level skills application within SMEs and retain graduates in Lincolnshire and Rutland. It will provide a single access point for companies to find out about different graduate and undergraduate programmes including Student Force, Year in Industry, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, STEP, Graduates into Industry and Getonwithgraduates.

G2B was proposed following an ESF funded feasibility study completed in 2003 by Margot Clements (MC Associates). The study of Lincolnshire and Rutland identified little awareness and take-up of undergraduate programmes by businesses and students/graduates, and high numbers of graduates working in positions not requiring high level qualifications or skills. G2B is a pathfinder project which will provide a reference point for the expansion of the concept across the East Midlands. *emda's* Corporate Plan 2003-6 contains a commitment to link up undergraduate and graduate programmes as a means of increasing SME employment of graduates.

Student JobShops

There are Student Jobshops at Nottingham Trent University, Derby University, Loughborough University and University College Northampton. Help with finding part-time, term-time work is provided by the Centre for Career Development at Nottingham University. Leicester University and De Montfort University have branches of WorkBank Recruitment Consultancy, a commercial temping agency. Unlike the Yorkshire Jobshops there is not strong region-wide co-operation between the Jobshops although some are members of the Midlands region of the National Association of Student Employment Services.

Community and voluntary sector recruitment and temping agency

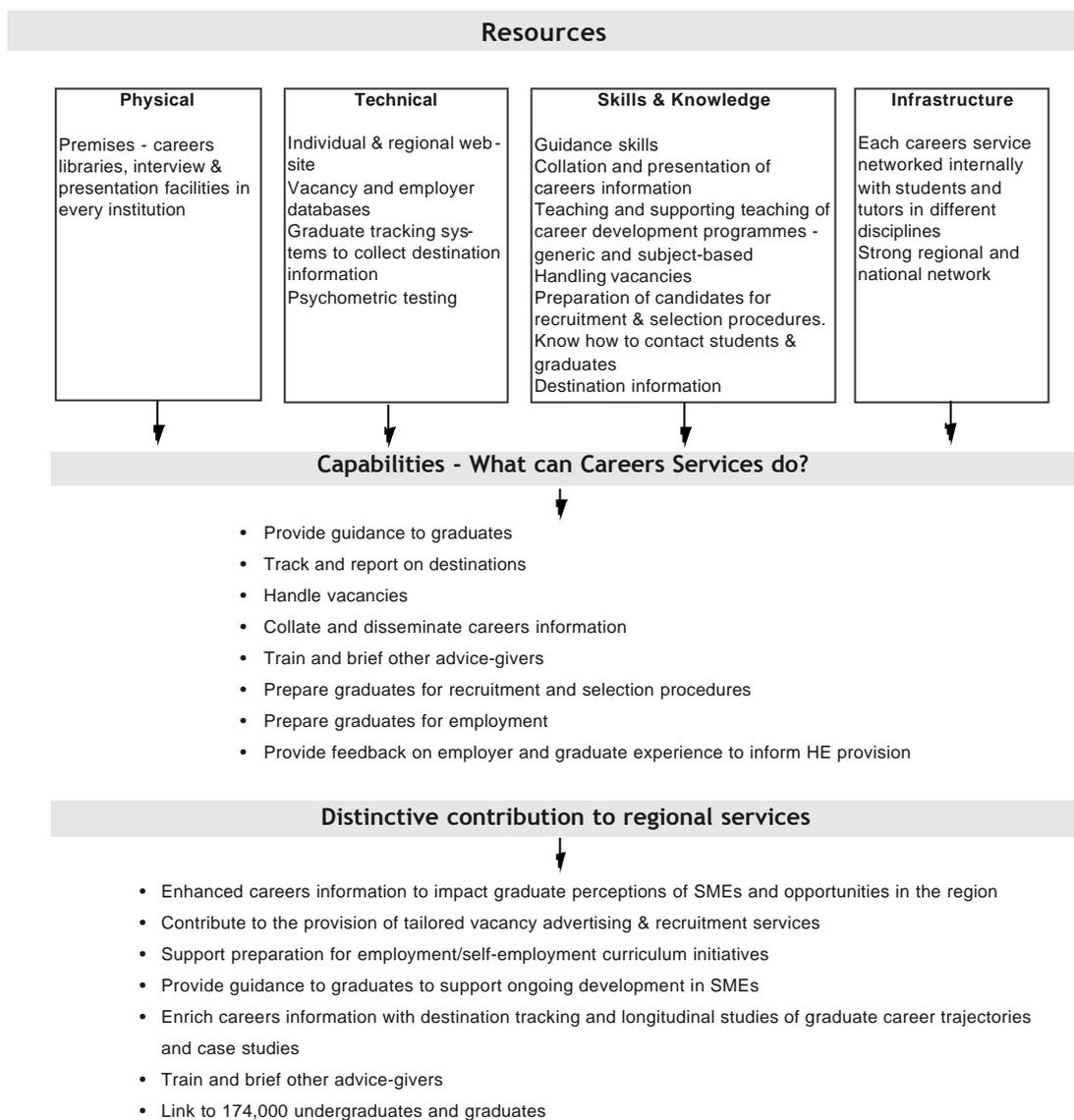
There are many similarities between small companies and small community and voluntary sector agencies, particularly those that tender to provide community services. A feasibility study is underway to assess the viability of establishing a specialist recruitment and temping agency to meet the needs of the community and voluntary sector involved in regeneration. A range of models is being explored including those that would address the provision of staff for meet short term contract needs. Subject to the outcomes of the current research, it would seem beneficial to both projects to explore the opportunities to liaise over development of graduate level recruitment mechanisms.

Regional professional / sector organisations

North West Student and Graduates Online (see above) is working on building partnerships with regional sector and professional organisations promoting specific sectors. There are a number of these in the East Midlands and links to and from a regional graduate careers site could be mutually beneficial. Examples of organisations that are concerned to target recruitment and training information to graduates include East Midlands Textiles Association (EMTEX), Food and Drink Forum and foodcampus.com and the Print, Media and Graphics Network, printsector.net.

Potential for Collaboration?

There seems no doubt that this is a particularly good time to explore potential for collaborative action to engage small companies and graduates. A number of the regional initiatives described above are at early stages of designing their strategies and the Lambert Review has encouraged 'joined-up' approaches. However, collaborative and partnership action is time-consuming and difficult to manage, requiring translation across different organisational cultures and careful nurturing and relationship building. Participants would need to be confident of the value of the resources and capabilities that different partners can contribute to collective action. The diagram below illustrates the distinctive contribution HE careers services could make to the development of regional services.



Added value

Developing regional services through partnership action provides the opportunity for enhanced collection and dissemination of local labour market information, including promotion of high level opportunities.

A number of the sectors examined in this study emphasised the need to market themselves more effectively to attract good quality candidates for opportunities. Misperception of public, parents, young people and graduates was identified in the clothing & textile sector, engineering, voluntary and community sectors. The imperative to correct outdated images and information via advice-givers in schools, FE & HE was stressed as well as the need to encourage the skills of older graduates, career-changers and a generally diverse range of applicants.

Equally important is the need to address the perception that graduate level opportunities do not exist outside London and the South-East. Research conducted for the West Midlands graduate initiative, Graduate Advantage, found that whilst students had been very happy studying in and around the UK's second city, they (mistakenly) did not perceive it as a place they could pursue lucrative and fulfilling graduate careers. Emda has recently commissioned research into Employment Choices of East Midlands Graduates²³ and it would not be surprising to find similar misconceptions concerning the prevalence of graduate opportunities in this region. The North West addressed this issue with the development of www.careersnorthwest.com, an information and advice service targeted at young people, graduates and adults and providing sector-based fact sheets and briefs on major regeneration projects impacting on opportunities in the region. The hope is that this will give advice-givers, including careers advisers and IAG networks, the back-up information required to give an accurate picture of local opportunities.

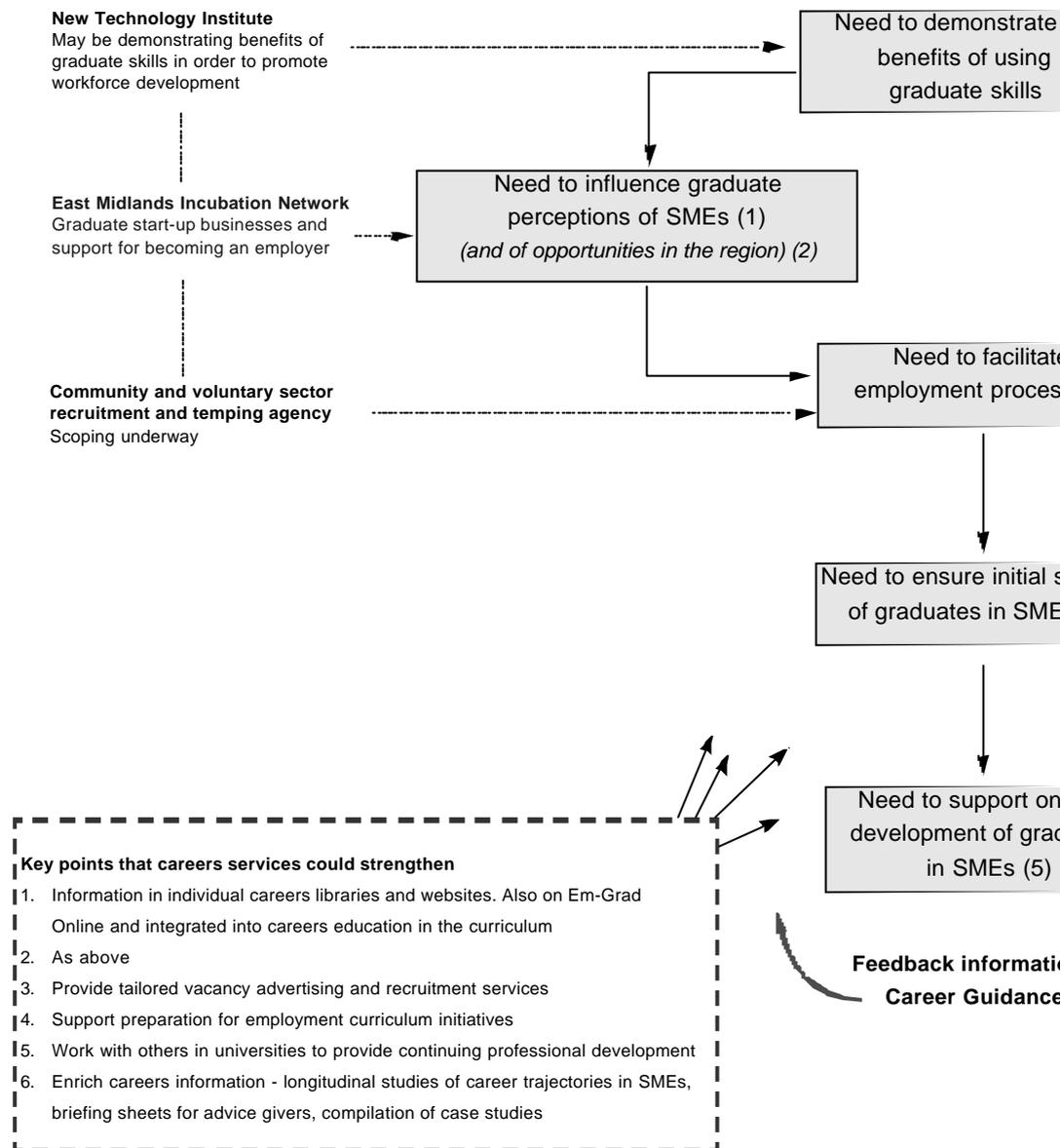
At present the East Midlands has a unique opportunity to strengthen local labour market information and support the collaboration of agencies to 'grow our own graduates'. The Excellence Challenge and Aimhigher Partnerships are currently working on county strategies to raise aspirations of young people and enhance progression to higher education. Critical to their success is the provision of evidence of opportunities worth working for, and they are concerned to feed that information into their activities with schools and colleges. Capturing and disseminating case-studies and information concerning opportunities in local smaller companies may encourage more young people into further study and simultaneously influence those of their family, friends and associates that are running small businesses. Given the number of small businesses, in the final analysis most are family or very local affairs, and will recruit through local networking. Appropriate partnership actions might include encouraging local people to become graduates through conventional or work-based routes including Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation degrees.

The Excellence Challenge - Aimhigher Partnerships are currently writing plans to develop tracking of young people and for capturing local job opportunities in association with Connexions Services. It is an extremely opportune time for advice givers in different sectors to be working together to provide consistent and reliable information on local progression routes from school to college or university and into local jobs.

Mapping potential

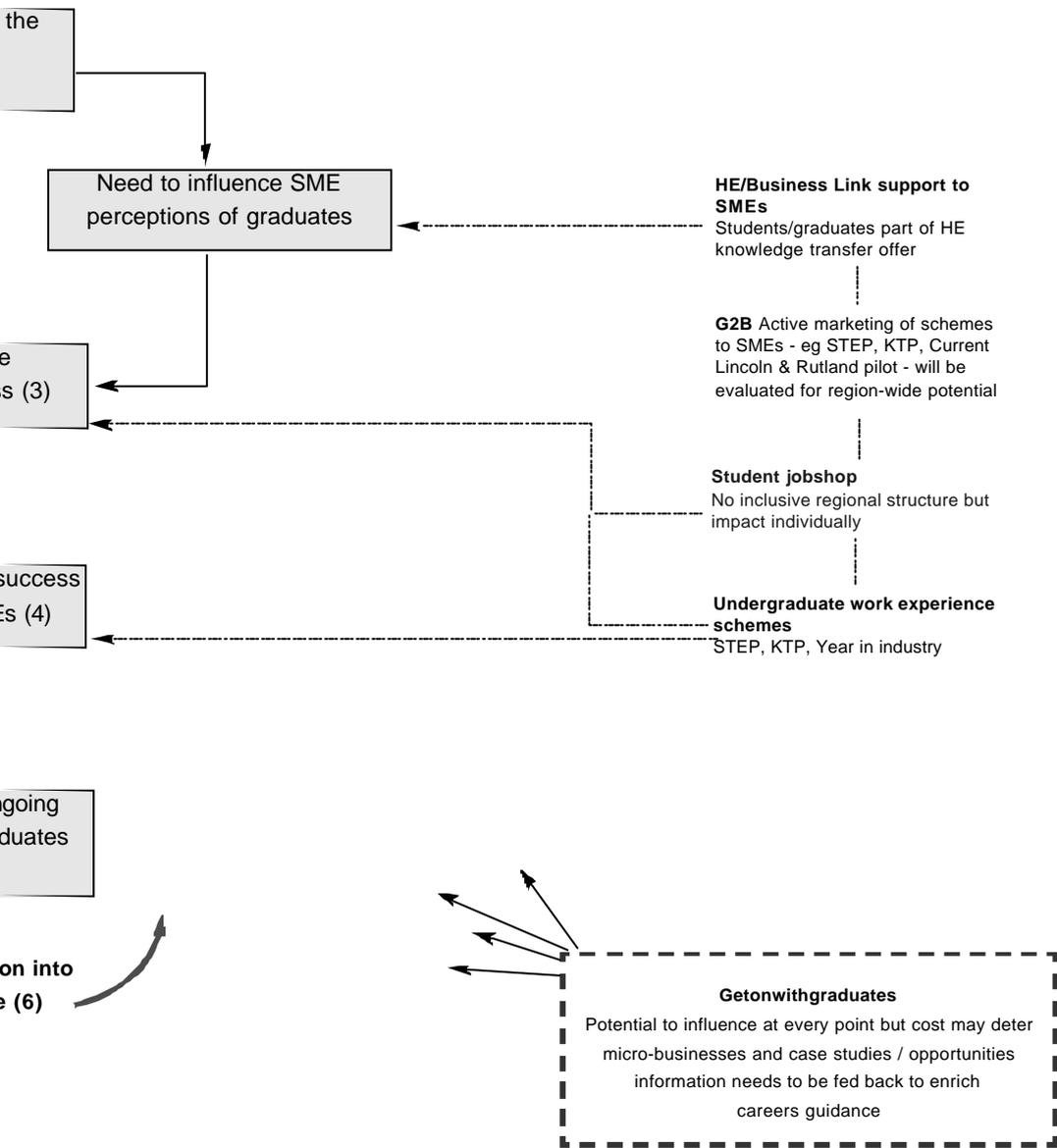
Mapping potential for collaboration to create the market for graduate skills in smaller (SMEs)

Hanage, Johnson and Mullein in *Employing Graduates for Growth* argue that there is no single answer to the challenge of 'creating a market for graduate skills in SMEs.' This model will be used as a basis for discussion of the contributions different organisations / initiatives might make.



companies.

of increasing the uptake of graduates by SMEs. What is needed is a 'jigsaw of interlocking programmes and make.



Adapted from Hanage, Johnson & Mullein
Employing Graduates for Growth, Durham University
Business School

Options for consideration

All of the careers services are working with others in their institution and locality to strengthen their links with local and small employers. Outlined below are a number of options for collaborative regional services. The commentaries accompanying them are those of the researcher alone and based upon wide-ranging discussions during the course of the project. They are offered for consideration by the HE Careers Services and others, as a starting point for exploration of regional action to supply high level skills to SMEs.

1. Parallel website to Em-Grad Online for potential employers seeking high level skills

- Free advertisement of vacancies online
- Vacancy alert for students/graduates seeking opportunities. Marketing of facility to generate vacancies additional to those alerted to careers services individually. Pooling only of immediate vacancies in the East Midlands region

Costs - £60K website and systems development, annual maintenance including cost of inputting from individual services £20K. Marketing £20-40K

Commentary - The Get Ahead research began with the assumption that there should be a parallel website to Em-Grad Online for employers to advertise vacancies. This could probably be achieved regionally without the need for careers services to collaborate with other organisations. It can be virtually fully automated and is quite easy to achieve if it focuses upon collation of advertisements from elsewhere, and each careers service inputs appropriate vacancies locally into a central database. This also provides the opportunity to collate information into a regional directory of small company employers. There are a number of potentially suitable software packages, although experience elsewhere suggests that some customising or further development is usually necessary. Alternatively, it might be possible to add components onto one of the career services' existing vacancy handling or employer database systems, or custom design a new complementary regional system from scratch. As a parallel website this would provide a central, visible place for vacancies within the region and could link to other appropriate sites promoting the region and to the sites of regional sector or professional organisations. The examples of similar services in other regions suggested average monthly live vacancies of between 150-200. All stressed the need to strongly market the service to employers. They are also experiencing low take-up of online facilities for employers to input vacancies themselves - although this seems popular with recruitment agencies. As a solution it assumes the existence of employers with opportunities requiring a place to advertise, so alone it contributes little to address generating demand for high level skills. There is a danger that if there are too few good quality vacancies it may be counter-productive as a promotional tool for the region.

2. Regional temping & recruitment services for smaller companies

- Regional gateway to access placement schemes, facilities of individual career services and student jobshops
- Commercial style temping agency providing cheap recruitment, immediate placement and pay-roll services

Costs - £150K set-up, £3-400K annual running with aim to achieve self-sustaining income from a range of sources within five years.

Commentary - This is a more challenging concept and one that would require collaboration of a range of partners. This could include forging a partnership with a suitably experienced commercial agency. The model for creating demand for graduate skills highlighted a specific area of weakness in facilitating

employment, which only Getonwithgraduates currently goes some way to address. Strong indications are that opportunities can be created if small companies can access high level skills quickly, when workloads or prospective tenders suggest, and with the minimum of paperwork. This suggests recruitment services with the agility of temping services.

HE career services can provide access to undergraduates and graduates but may need to work with others to complete the recruitment process. Providing a cheap service at a 'critical moment', and one that doesn't carry all the heavy tones of 'graduate recruitment' and 'engagement with universities', does however, provide a channel for discussion and follow-up to promote the range of other services and schemes. It could provide the front end to a raft of interlocking programmes and schemes that address other key points in the model.

3. Regional graduate labour market information

- Longitudinal studies of graduate career trajectories in SMEs
- Cluster and sector information including opportunities arising out of regional initiatives
- Website/briefings for young people, adults, graduates and advice-givers

Costs - £50K set-up, 100K annually

Commentary - The careers services collect detailed graduate destination information annually. With an over 80% return rate and the richness of detail required for the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education survey, this could provide a significant source of information on regional trends and opportunities. A number of the careers services already conduct longitudinal studies. The model has identified the need to continually monitor, track and feedback information on graduate experiences and opportunities in the region. A small dedicated research team could work with the careers services and with regional partners to provide this. This doesn't provide practical services to assist smaller companies to recruit graduates, but it could help to present a more realistic and up to date picture of graduate employment opportunities and career trajectories. Currently, graduate careers information is dominated by the glossy brochures and presentations of larger companies, distorting expectations and fuelling perceptions of smaller companies as being less attractive. It is critically important to raising aspirations and retaining graduates in the region to provide a more informed picture to both students and those advising them.

4. Regional professional development services for graduates in small companies

- Generic and sector based professional development programmes
- Career coaching and guidance to graduates

Cost - £100K annually but potential to generate income from range of partners and private sector.

Commentary - The model has identified the need to support ongoing development of graduates in small companies, or indeed as small companies, and the provision in the region is unco-ordinated.

Collaboration between the business support agencies, the HE Business Outreach, the New Technology Institute and the careers services could develop a portfolio of services to address graduates needs and those of small companies. Regional networks could be utilised to provide mentoring, work-shadowing, peer support, action-learning sets etc. Many of these already exist but could be linked together and packaged as the East Midlands Graduate Development Programme. Aggressive marketing could position this as a very attractive alternative to graduates seeking longer-term career development prospects.

This links directly with providing for ongoing workforce development and developing the market for post-graduate and continuing professional development products from the region's FE and HE institutions. Many graduates are already studying part time to enhance their career development and in order to retain those already committed to the region, it is necessary to provide opportunities for learning, growth, change and diversification at different stages. The HEIST reports to the New Technology Institute highlighted need for a 'public or collective' training system in SMEs. Providing means of helping small companies to develop themselves or their graduate employees in ways that are directly applicable to the 'bottom line' is challenging. However, regional action to promote cluster development and creation of internal business to business markets could help to identify opportunities to do so.

There is also potential to link incubation services, encouraging and supporting more graduates to begin their own businesses. The insights provided by the Creative Industries suggests that it is important to extend business support services to those graduates who will operate as freelancers but may not perceive themselves as 'starting or running a business'.

5. Providing 2-4 above under a strong single regional brand with multiple access points

- a front-end high profile regional gateway to access placement schemes, facilities of individual career services and student jobshops
- a commercial style temping agency providing cheap recruitment, immediate placement and pay-roll services
- collection and dissemination graduate labour market and careers information
- shaping and promoting a framework for the East Midlands Graduate Development Programme including support for graduate entrepreneurs

Costs - 5 years pump-priming with stepped reduction of funding from £450K in year 1 to £100K in year 5. Some amalgamation of existing funding provided for separate schemes. Potential to generate income from commercial and subscription services.

Commentary - This can appear as the next logical, if radical step, to movements already taking place, such as the Graduate Linkage Pilot (G2B - see above) and emda's commitment in its Corporate Plan to bring together its undergraduate and graduate schemes under a single brand, 'Getonwithgraduates'. The challenge is providing for the inclusive architecture that will effectively exploit the resources and capabilities of a range of partners. This implies more than two-way links between different websites and signposting systems, but collaborative engagement in constructing a dynamic model of interlocking services, activities and programmes.

Conclusion: critical success factors

The purpose of this report is to stimulate discussion. It is hoped that others engaging with higher level skills issues, graduates and small companies, will explore the various models and suggest others arising from their knowledge and experience. In this way it is hoped that it will provide a means of identifying and discussing potential for creative links or collaborative action, utilising the wide-ranging resources and capabilities of different partners within the region.

What is clear is that supplying high level skills to smaller companies is not just a matter of providing mechanisms that can match graduates to potential employers or vice versa. There is a need to generate a mutual attraction and nurture the confidence of both parties in their future together. A number of factors appear critical to success.

Up to date, regional careers information and guidance to:

- help change outdated perceptions about work in some sectors and of prospects with smaller companies
- give advisers in all sectors regionally detailed labour market information and provide 'joined up' guidance to students, parents and employers on career development pathways from school, to college or university, and into local jobs
- provide case studies of graduate career development in smaller companies
- balance the glossy brochures and presentations from larger companies
- highlight opportunities in the region including those arising out of cluster development, regeneration and other initiatives

Practical, flexible, graduate recruitment mechanisms to supply high level skills and:

- provide ways companies can access skills at the moment they need to and in appropriate ways
- highlight opportunities to students and graduates
- provide cost effective advertising, recruitment and selection processes
- assist with daunting bureaucracy, employment and contract legislation
- enhance equal opportunities and diversity practices

Ongoing development of graduates in small companies to:

- support company and graduate and ensure initial and continuing success
- maximise the value a graduate can add and help to 'grow' graduate level opportunities from inside the company
- develop the skills of graduates to carve out career pathways in sectors without established routes, including operating as freelancers and starting their own business
- enhance commitment and mutual benefit from increasing prosperity of the region
- capture case studies for careers information and guidance

Greater collaboration of those working with business in different ways to:

- present students and graduates as part of the region's HE knowledge transfer portfolio
- disseminate information and case studies to challenge outdated perceptions of graduates
- provide a 'jigsaw of interlocking programmes and activities' that provide opportunities for small businesses, students and graduates to get to know and value each other

The challenge to the East Midlands is to address the low skills equilibrium that influences aspirations and attainment in its schools, hinders the competitiveness of small companies, and encourages graduates to leave for opportunities elsewhere. Linking regional actions to improve progression to higher education (Aimhigher) and to improve Business-University collaboration (Lambert Review) could go some way to providing critical push-pull factors. University careers services are ideally placed to work with others to make the links.

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