Good morning.

I'm Douglas Blackstock, Chief Executive of QAA - the UK's independent quality body for higher education.

Thank you to our hosts for their invitation to address the Forum. Today, I'm going to discuss how UK universities and colleges deliver employable graduates.

About UK higher education

Before I get into the detail of that, I thought it might be helpful to give a quick overview of UK higher education and my organisation, QAA - for those of you not familiar with our system.

QAA is the UK's independent, expert, higher education quality assurance agency. Founded in 1997, QAA's headquarters are in Gloucester, in the west of England, with three other offices in London, Scotland and Wales. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education, wherever it is delivered around the world.

Some of the characteristics of the UK higher education sector are:

- mass levels of participation, with high student retention
- a world-leading research base
- a diverse range of providers - universities, colleges, alternative (independent) providers
- recognition worldwide for high quality and standards.

Approximately 2.28 million higher education students studied in the UK in 2015-16, of which 1.75 million were undergraduates and 532,000 postgraduates. Where were they from? Around 1.8 million from the UK, 127,000 from the European Union and 311,000 from outside the EU (source: HESA).

In addition, there are UK transnational education (TNE) students - those studying outside the UK with UK providers. TNE now represents the main area of growth in UK higher education in terms of student numbers. Over 80% of UK universities are engaged in some form of TNE, either through distance learning, partnerships or branch campus arrangements. And TNE student numbers now exceed the number of international students in the UK by around 60%.
There were 701,010 TNE (offshore) students in 2015-16, of which:

- 74,965 were studying within the EU
- 626,045 outside the EU
- the largest numbers of UK TNE students were in Malaysia, China, Singapore and Pakistan
- and the UAE had 17,090 UK TNE students.

**Employability**

Turning to the main subject of my session, what do we mean when we talk about student employability?

'A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'

Professor Mantz Yorke, 2004

Student employability - and the steps taken by providers to improve the employability of their students and graduates - are important policy areas in the UK. This is fuelled in part by the impact of higher fees on students’ expectations of quality and value for money.

The main source of data for UK graduate employment and earnings following higher education has been the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey (survey six months after graduation).

The DLHE data for 2015-16 (source: HESA, June 2017) showed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leavers in work</td>
<td>67% (1% down on 2014-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers in study</td>
<td>15% (highest point in last 5 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>5% (decreasing from 7% in 2011-12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median salary</td>
<td>£21,000 (female)/ £22,000 male</td>
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We continue to develop UK datasets on graduate employment and earnings. The DLHE is being replaced by a new Graduate Outcomes Survey, which will bring a more consistent national approach to collection of data and coding of job roles. The first data set is due to be published January 2020.

Since autumn 2016, the government has also begun to publish experimental Longitudinal Education Outcomes data, which for the first time links higher education and tax data together to chart the transition of graduates from higher education into the workplace. Some of the main differences between the DLHE and the LEO are:

- the DLHE gives outcomes six months after graduation, whereas the LEO provides data one, three and five years after graduation
- the DLHE is a survey based on graduates' reported outcomes, and not all graduates respond - the LEO is based on government tax data for all graduates working or claiming benefits in the UK
- the DLHE's employment measure is based on a graduate's status on a single day - the LEO is based on their employment over a six month period

Three sets of LEO data have been published so far. In the most recent (July 2017), it showed £25,100 to £31,300 median earnings for graduates of half UK providers, five years after graduation (others were at lower or higher ranges). This compares with £20,800 median salary for all 24-29 year olds in work in the UK.
Findings from QAA reviews

QAA’s reviews of higher education providers have found:

- they generally work well with employers
- they have consistently shown a strategic commitment to (and investment in) students’ employability.

In 2015-16, QAA identified over 260 examples of good practice through its Higher Education Reviews in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Around a third of these related to developing students’ employability, relationships with employers and the world of work. Employability was a specific theme of Higher Education Review from 2013-16, underlining its importance on the policy agenda, and QAA also publishes a series of good practice case studies on a wide range of topics, including employability.

Case study: the Royal School of Needlework

The Royal School of Needlework is a specialist provider that has established an international reputation for excellence in hand embroidery. The School received a commendation for the quality of its student learning opportunities in its QAA review in June 2016. QAA noted ‘the extensive involvement of employers and students in programme design and development.’ Students develop their creative practice through a unit-based curriculum, engaging with leading-edge practitioners, and working on live projects and schedules. The School’s Studio is a commercial space creating private commissioned works for external clients at an international level. Second-year degree students study on projects with external collaborators. Clients are involved in the evaluation and feedback process, and a number of them have offered students and graduates internships or employment.

Subject Benchmark Statements

QAA also works with the sector to develop and publish Subject Benchmark Statements, as part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education - the definitive reference point for managing standards and quality in UK higher education. There are around 85 statements, which set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They cover bachelor, masters and health professional awards, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. They are intended to help those involved in programme design, delivery and review, and to support innovation. When the statements are developed or updated, QAA brings together expert advisory groups representing: the different types of higher education provider offering the subject; the four nations of the UK; employers of graduates in the subject; and students.

QAA TNE review in the United Arab Emirates

In 2013-14, QAA undertook a review of UK TNE in the United Arab Emirates. QAA worked with UAE partner, KHDA, in the preparations for and the conduct of the TNE review visit, and KHDA was also involved in the briefing of the review team and observed a number of review visits. As I'm talking about employability today, I thought you would be interested to hear what our review team found:

- the team reported that arrangements to support careers development are particularly important in the UAE
- most UK providers explicitly embedded employability and careers in the curriculum, including topics such as leadership development and personal development planning
most providers put effort into developing local industry and employer links
and for many programmes, particularly those focused on business, the network
of alumni that derived from participation in the programmes was also a vital
selling point.

Enterprise and entrepreneurship

QAA has also worked with representatives from the enterprise education community,
to create guidance for UK providers to help students develop entrepreneurial skills that
will be an asset to them in their future careers.

What do we mean by enterprise and entrepreneurship?

Enterprise education aims to produce graduates with the mindset and skills to come up
with original ideas in response to identified needs and shortfalls, and the ability to act on
them. In short, having an idea and making it happen.

Entrepreneurship education focuses on the development and application of an enterprising
mindset and skills in the specific contexts of setting up a new venture, developing and
growing an existing business, or designing an entrepreneurial organisation.

Guidance on enterprise and entrepreneurship

In 2012, QAA published guidance on enterprise and entrepreneurship that has helped to
raise the profile of this subject in higher education. Providers have told QAA that they use
the guidance to shape their curricula, design and validate programmes, and secure strategic
and management buy-in for enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives. The guidance has
also been influential with policy makers in the UK and internationally, including use by:

- the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- and the European Commission in a mapping exercise to develop an
entrepreneurship competency framework (EntreComp).

In October 2016, the Chairs of the UK’s Council for Science and Technology wrote to the
UK’s Prime Minister with a number of recommendations to strengthen entrepreneurship
education to boost growth, jobs and productivity. In her response, the Prime Minister
suggested part of this work could be to review the impact of QAA’s 2012 guidance and
build on it. We are taking this forward, working with an external advisory group and the
updated guidance will be launched in January 2018.

Case study: University of Sheffield

QAA’s 2012 guidance on enterprise and entrepreneurship helped the university to develop a
strategy for enterprise education and embed enterprise across the curriculum. The aim of
the university’s Enterprise Education Strategy was for every student to have the opportunity
to develop enterprise capabilities within their course. The university created an Enterprise
Academy, the first model of its kind in the UK. It provides curriculum development support
for academic colleagues, training and development, events and funding opportunities.
The Academy has had real impact: in 2015-16, it supported 172 academic colleagues,
leading to 46 instances of curriculum development across the institution, impacting on at
least 1500 new students.
Higher and degree apprenticeships

The UK government has committed to deliver 3 million quality apprenticeships by 2020. To support this, it launched the Institute for Apprenticeships in April 2017, with the purpose of ensuring all apprenticeships are high quality and deliver the skills that employers need. In terms of degree apprenticeships, Universities UK estimates significant expected growth (from a report in March 2017):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Degree Apprenticeships Starting</th>
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<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>2,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>4,850</td>
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QAA is part of the Institute for Apprenticeship's Quality Alliance, to develop the quality framework for higher and degree apprenticeships.

National Centre for Universities and Business

And finally, I wanted to mention the work of the National Centre for Universities and Business in the UK. Created in 2013, it develops, supports and promotes collaboration between UK universities and businesses. Its aim is to find practical ways of harnessing the talent being developed in universities and the UK's strength in ground-breaking research and development, for economic benefit. Its Leadership Council is made up of senior UK business leaders and university vice-chancellors.

The Centre's work includes:

- development of national digital platforms for innovation and graduate talent development
- research and analysis
- talent development and innovation programmes
- taskforces focusing on key economic issues.

Challenges for the future

I'll leave you by posing a few thoughts on challenges for us in continuing to produce high quality graduates for the future:

- working with businesses to ensure graduates continue to meet the needs of the fast-changing workplace
- having robust data on student and graduate outcomes
- developing new and transferable graduate skills, to enable graduates to continue to adapt throughout their working lives
- continuing to embed opportunities for innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurship in the curriculum
- ensuring high quality placements, apprenticeships and other employability opportunities for students
- and 'Global Graduates' - building global outlook and intercultural experiences into the curriculum to ensure graduates are well placed to take advantage of opportunities around the world, in the global marketplace.

Thank you
Suggestions for further reading

- Viewpoint: how universities and employers can work together to improve graduate outcomes: evidence from QAA reviews (QAA, April 2017)
- International Insights - An insight on QAA's work strengthening cross-border cooperation in quality assurance for the benefit of UK higher education (QAA, September 2017)
- Review of UK Transnational Education in United Arab Emirates: overview (QAA, June 2014)
- Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: guidance for UK higher education providers (QAA, September 2012)