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# Good Practice Guide for HE Sector



## Acknowledgments

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# Good Practice Guide for HE Sector

## Introduction

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Welcome to the Good Practice Guide for the HE Sector, which is designed to help you to better support your students participating in virtual careers fairs. This Guide draws on the experiences and learning developed through working with students as partners in a [QAA-funded Collaborative Enhancement Project](#). The project created a toolkit to enable students from underrepresented backgrounds to develop the confidence and competencies needed for securing graduate level employment. It builds on existing collaboration between a consortium of seven universities<sup>1</sup>, resulting in Inclusive Futures Virtual Careers Fair, an annual event since 2019. Experience from past Inclusive Futures Virtual Careers Fair reinforced often students from underrepresented groups lack confidence/knowledge of how to leverage and maximise connections in these online employer events.

Based on the insights gained from the project, we have identified several tips to assist other higher education institutions in providing support to their students as they look to develop the necessary skills and attributes to succeed in online recruitment fairs. This Good Practice Guide for the HE Sector highlights some conceptual and practical advice to universities which we hope will better support you in reaching out to students from underrepresented groups and building their confidence and competencies.

## What are the challenges of our students participating in virtual careers fairs for graduate-level employment?

Virtual careers fairs can give students from underrepresented backgrounds access to employers that they might not otherwise meet, however, specific actions are required to help them make the most of these opportunities. For virtual fairs to truly deliver equality of opportunity, fairs cannot simply be “dragged and dropped” from on campus to virtual environments.

Virtual fairs are much more solitary events, and this can cause challenges for many underrepresented student groups particularly those lacking in confidence. After the first IFF, employer feedback showed disappointment at students not turning their cameras on, stating that this contributed towards flat conversations. Students from underrepresented groups are typically less likely to have private spaces at home, strong Wi-Fi and/or suitable equipment. To address this challenge in later iterations of the IFF, employers were briefed on how best to respond to potential situations and campus spaces were also booked for students to use

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusive Futures Consortium (Universities : Hertfordshire, Greenwich, Kingston, London Metropolitan, Roehampton, West London, Westminster)

When participants were surveyed after the 2021 fair, 96% of respondents stated that they had a positive time at the fair, but less than half of those made applications to the employers they met, and those that did made an average of only 2.1 applications. A high proportion of students were having a positive experience but not going on to create and submit any applications. Employers' corporate messaging on booths did not feel applicable to the student groups, often featuring a lack of representation and intention. Students fed back that the individuals they met were more representative and inclusive than the booths first suggested. In more recent iterations of the fair, we have guided employers to use more inclusive material; contributing towards higher conversion rates. An example of employer feedback; *"Virtual events can be intimidating, and we have worked with the fair organisers to tailor our messaging and create multiple ways for students to interact with us."*

## Structuring the support

Virtual events require a considerable amount of preparation and support pre-event. Prompting students to think about their surroundings and offering university space is particularly helpful for students who do not have appropriate space at home. Prompting students to ask for reasonable adjustments is particularly important for disabled students. Giving students easy to use prompts to complete simple research is likely to improve attendance, engagement and their in-fair experience. Simple reflection prompts asking students to think about what they are achieving and how to prepare elevator pitches can enable students to go into careers fairs feeling more confident.


[The Virtual Careers Fair Toolkit](#) contains bite-sized directions, easily accessible FAQs and a [Virtual Fairs Action Planner](#) that will help support students to collect the right information and turn it into great applications. Activity checklists, 'netiquette' reminders and question prompts are simple ways to empower students to gain the right information during fairs. Supplying students with a planner that links the prompt questions and gathered notes is also an effective way of transferring the excited buzz of a fair into tangible post-fair actions.

Highlighting the benefits of networking and giving practical resources to record details of new contacts is likely to have a positive impact on students who do not have large pre-existing networks. The final important element is practical tools for staying resilient, giving students the encouragement to make multiple applications and not de-select from the process in the early stages.

## How can the Toolkit and other guidance be embedded to support students in developing the skills to be successful in online recruitment fairs?

The Toolkit and other guidance can be embedded in several ways through collaboration between careers teams, Students' Unions and teaching staff

- Existing career development sessions can incorporate advice on navigating virtual career fairs, utilising the Virtual Careers Fair Toolkit to teach students best practices and provide guidance on making a positive impression on potential employers.
- If there is advance knowledge of the dates of Careers Fair, event participation can be integrated into timetables and in promotion of events through learning and teaching spaces. There is also an opportunity to work with course teams to design coursework assignments that support students developing skills to prepare for these events, how to engage with employers, and how to follow up afterward.
- Pre-fair webinars can walk students through the registration process, with staff available to identify suitable employers for students to contact.
- Working with students in developing and promoting publicity for virtual events, including using student peer-to-peer promotion, such as pop-up stands in the lead-up to events, as well as face-to-face activities to reinforce the importance of the event.
- Social media shout-outs, information stands, and posters with QR codes can help raise awareness, with targeted emails to students about relevant employers sent in advance.
- Giving students access to the platform and employer booths in advance enables them to schedule appointments beforehand, and a step-by-step overview can help students understand the event process better.
- Hosting workshops and webinars that cover networking strategies, online interview tips, and building a strong online profile can provide additional training and support
- Providing easy access to virtual career fair resources and encouraging participation through incentives can help students develop their networking skills and gain experience interacting with potential employers online.
- Universities can provide space for students to attend remote events whilst being on campus that is appropriate to being able to engage with employers.



**Thank you for reading the Good Practice  
Guide for HE Sector. We hope this guide will  
be a valuable resource for you in supporting  
your students and recent graduates.**