

**#WeAreInternational**  
**Grants scheme 2022–24**  
**Pilot project**

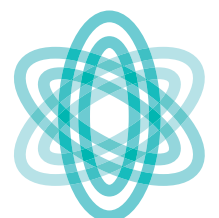
# **International talent symposium:** a regional approach to employer and student engagement

University of Stirling

**Emily Sandwell**, International Careers Consultant, Careers Service, University of Stirling  
**Jo Speed**, Joint Head of Careers/Business Engagement Manager (Employability), Student Skills and Employability, University of Stirling  
**Temitope Shittu**, International Event Intern, University of Stirling

**UK Council  
for International  
Student Affairs**

**UKCISA**



**#WeAre  
International**

## Acknowledgements

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UKCISA is a membership organisation that works to support international students and the institutions, students' unions and organisations who work closely with them.

The #WeAreInternational Grants scheme focuses on integrating the principles of the **#WeAreInternational Student Charter** in higher and further education institutions in the UK, to deliver a world-class international student experience, from pre-arrival to post-graduation.



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## 1. Aim of the project

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International students represent a pool of talented individuals who can support the workforce and help grow the regional and wider Scottish economy. With the introduction of the graduate route visa in 2021, it has never been easier to recruit international graduates. However, the local business community is underinformed of the visa options, resulting in a reluctance to pursue this. The University of Stirling International Talent Symposium aims to develop professional relations between international students and local businesses in the Forth Valley region.

For students, the Symposium acts as a pathway to a successful career in Scotland. It focuses on overcoming barriers and building business connections they need to thrive, whilst gaining a comprehensive understanding of the Forth Valley region's job market and developing the cultural insights and skills essential for success in the Scottish workplace.

For employers, it offers a unique opportunity to gain insights into the wealth of international talent available on their doorstep and the unique skills, experiences and perspectives our diverse student body brings. Whether interested in part-time employees, short-term interns or an international graduate on the two-year graduate route visa, the Symposium aims to maximise the value of international talent to support business needs.

## 2. Outcomes

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### International Students

Eighty-six students attended the main panel/networking event, with twenty-nine attending preparation workshops prior to this.

### Employers

Seventeen guests from large companies and local business networks attended the main event. Three local small businesses attended an employer roadshow workshop prior to this.

### Staff

Fifteen university staff from different services and faculties attended the main event, including the Deputy Principal, University of Stirling and Deputy Director, Universities Scotland.

### Resources

Workshops were recorded and video content created for use after the pilot for students and employers. Qualitative and quantitative feedback was collected, highlighting that the project has been very effective in raising awareness of the skills and cultural diversity of our students, the Scottish labour market and international graduate visa routes.

### 3. About the University of Stirling

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Since its founding in 1967, the University of Stirling has welcomed students from around the world, fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment and ensuring the international student experience is enriched with employability initiatives allowing students to be ready to compete in the global labour market. Over 12,000 students currently study at the institution, 30% from overseas.

Collaborative initiatives with the local region are an essential part of the University's ethos and the University is proud to be a central partner of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal. The aim of the Deal is to establish the region as a world-class, dynamic and enterprising destination, complementing the University's ambition to be recognised globally as an institution that can make a positive difference to people, communities and partners.

### 4. Project delivery

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The project progressed within a well-defined timeline with a completion date set for March 2024. Key milestones were identified throughout the project, leading to the main event in February 2024. (**Appendix 1: Project timeline**)

#### Onboarding of key partners

Identification and onboarding of key partners from the Forth Valley business community (including STEP, Ceteris, Codebase, Clackmannanshire Council, FVCC/ SUIP and Stirling Council) played a pivotal role in the project's success. By engaging with these stakeholders, the project gained access to valuable expertise and networks. Furthermore, partner alumni and employers strengthened collaboration, drawing upon their insights and experiences to create meaningful case studies.

#### Event intern recruitment, selection and onboarding

A paid internship was created for an international student to value their perspective in this project's development and ensure the project was communicated effectively to our international student audience. Recruitment was carried out just before the start of the academic year to provide a part-time job opportunity whilst studying. (Appendix 8: International Event Intern)

#### Student voice

By partnering with the Students' Union, particularly the Union President who hosted a focus group, the project gained invaluable insights into student perspectives and preferences. An additional pulse survey conducted with Stirling Management School International Students provided crucial data regarding the demand for various career sessions, allowing the project to deliver a targeted and impactful programme.

## Development of International Symposium programme

Development of a comprehensive programme that catered for the needs and interests of all our student, employer and staff stakeholders was required.

Local business support was delivered initially as an employer roadshow: a two-hour breakfast seminar delivered in partnership with STEP. Open to local employers, it aimed to promote knowledge sharing aligned with the project aims. (Appendix 6: Employer Roadshow)



**Image 1: Photo of Employer Roadshow**

The student programme featured a series of four pre-symposium workshops, two weeks before the main event, designed to equip students with essential skills and insights, ensuring readiness to facilitate productive interactions with employers at the main event. (Appendix 5: Pre-symposium workshops)

### Details of Pre-Symposium Workshops

29 JAN 1:00PM	<b>Promote with Purpose: Building your Personal Brand</b> Learn how to build a personal brand as an International student that is irresistible to employers
29 JAN 3:00PM	<b>Networking with Purpose: Setting up your LinkedIn Account</b> create a LinkedIn profile that serves as a powerful professional tool to sell yourself
30 JAN 1:00PM	<b>Succeeding in the Scottish workplace: Essential insights on workplace expectations</b> Acquire practical insights to thrive in Scottish workplaces
30 JAN 2:30PM	<b>Navigating the Visa process in the UK: Transitioning from student to graduate</b> Discover visa options specifically designed for international graduates

**Image 2: Instagram Post of Pre-Symposium Workshops**

The main event was an afternoon of student-focused workshops, which some staff attended, designed to enhance the attendees' knowledge and understanding of the Scottish labour market, followed by an evening event for students, staff and employers. The one-hour afternoon workshops, delivered by guest speakers, provided valuable insights and practical knowledge.





**Image 3: Campus screen post of guest speakers including, Rosie Kennedy from Gradcore, Charlie Ball from Jisc and Claire Guy from GTI.**

The evening event commenced with a welcome by the Deputy Principal, setting the scene for the discussions ahead.



**Image 4: Photo of the main symposium event including guest speaker Neville Wylie, Director of Internationalisation at the University of Stirling.**

The keynote by Universities Scotland highlighted the landscape of international education in Scotland, providing a broad perspective on the subject. The highlight of the evening was the panel discussion featuring three international alumni on the graduate route and skilled worker visas and three employers sharing their invaluable insights and experiences. Students, employers and staff networked with each other during the drinks reception.



**Image 5: Photo of guest speaker Rosie Kennedy from Gradcore, Vicky Murphy from STEP and Jo Speed from University of Stirling networking with students at the symposium.**

## Marketing and communications development

The marketing strategy for the Symposium was led by the international student intern, collaborating closely with the university marketing team to ensure adherence to brand guidelines. Emphasising the importance of sustainability, the team prioritised minimising waste by digitalizing all event information including the event programme helping reduce the need for printed material. A clear social media strategy was developed, with a strict timeline to prevent students from feeling overwhelmed by other university messages. This approach ensured that promotional efforts remained focused and effective, maximising engagement and participation in the Symposium while maintaining consistency with broader university communications. (Appendix 2, 3 and 4: Social Media Content Strategy)

## Development of online resources

Recognising the need for ongoing employer and student support in a sustainable and accessible manner, developing online resources extended the reach of our programme beyond the event, ensuring continuing access to valuable information and resources. This included recorded student workshops and video case studies. (Appendix 7)

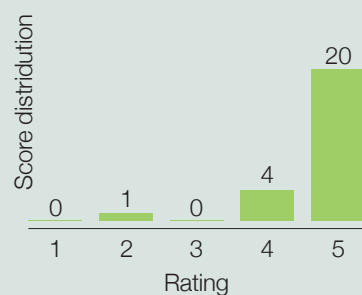
## 5. Evaluation

To evaluate the project's success, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Quantitative feedback was collected after workshops, using a feedback form with a Likert scale. Students were asked, "Has this session improved your knowledge, skills and understanding of this topic?" Twenty-five responses were collected, 96% of them highlighting a positive improvement.

**25** responses were collected

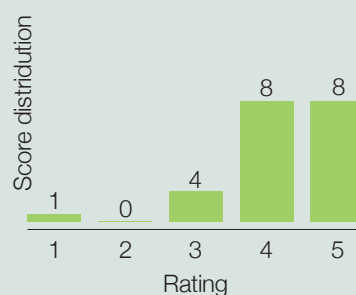
**96%** highlighted a positive improvement

**Figure 1**  
Has this session improved your knowledge, skills and understanding of this topic?



96% rated between '4-5' for the question

**Figure 2**  
How informative and empowering was the overall International Talent Symposium?



**Figure 3**  
Response per stakeholder

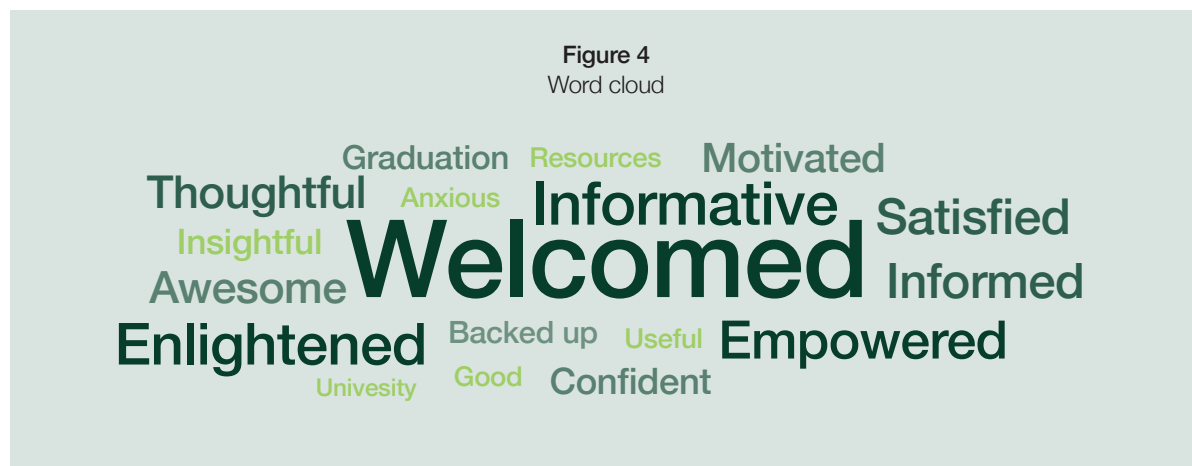


● Student 21  
● Guest 5  
● Staff 7



Thirty-three attendants provided feedback through a form circulated after the event.

Guests were asked “How informative and empowering was the overall International Talent Symposium?” 76% expressed high levels of satisfaction with the event content and its ability to empower them in their careers.



Qualitative feedback gathered through LinkedIn provided additional insights into the event’s impact and reception. Event attendees were invited to expand their networks via LinkedIn after the event and post about their experience and insights gained from the event.

Positive comments and engagement demonstrated that participants found value in the Symposium, highlighting its relevance in addressing their needs and interests:

**“Attracting, nurturing, and growing talent in the Scottish employment market is essential in the coming months and years. Well done to University of Stirling for hosting their International Talent Symposium last night, helping skilled graduates find their first roles in the Scottish employment market.”**

**Employer**

**“As an alumnus, it was truly fulfilling to reflect on my journey as an international student and share how the University played a pivotal role in shaping my success in Scotland.”**

**Alumnus**

**“So insightful. Learnt a lot. Thank you everyone.”**

**Student**

## 6. Challenges

The project encountered various challenges, including the announcements by the UK government to increase the **Skilled Worker route salary threshold** and review the Graduate route visa.

These announcements significantly influenced engagement with employers. Views ranged widely. Some expressed high anxiety about the uncertainty surrounding visas and the perceived risks this poses to small businesses. Vicky Murphy, Director of

HR at STEP shared her concern for small business owners stating “For many, the constant flux in visa regulations poses a significant risk, as they lack the resources and capacity to stay abreast of these updates. It’s crucial that policymakers understand the immense burden this places on entrepreneurs striving to contribute to our economy and benefit from international talent.” Other employers with skills gaps demonstrated a willingness to commit to recruiting international students and graduates, recognising the value they would bring to their organisations. This diversity of perspectives demonstrates the need for proactive engagement and support to address the concerns of all stakeholders involved.

The project also faced hurdles in student engagement despite efforts to understand student engagement with careers across the sector. “Student time and effort is needed to seek us out and spend time on career activities. This is challenged by other competing demands” as seen in AGCAS’s 2022 report: ***The opportunities and challenges of student engagement in careers and employability provision***. A review of previous trends in international student engagement with careers events was conducted, providing a benchmark for the current event and workshop sign-up. Places were offered on a first-come-first-served basis and opened to all international undergraduate and postgraduate students.

On average, about 50% of the students who register for an event or workshop actually attend. Despite extensive efforts through social media campaigns, academic announcements and support from the Students’ Union, some of the workshops did not meet the desired attendance level. A conversion rate of 60% or above of registrations attending would have been desirable.

## 7. Sustainability

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By integrating the symposium into the university calendar, awareness of international career support available to students was heightened ensuring ongoing engagement and participation. Moreover, the carefully curated programme of careers workshops now serves as a structured support system for international students providing them with invaluable resources and guidance.

Marketing materials, including banners, flyers and video content, were designed with sustainability in mind, allowing for their reuse and longevity.

The partnership with STEP has laid a foundation for the educational journey of local businesses. The offer of mentoring support to businesses considering international interns and graduates demonstrates a long-term commitment. Short online webinars recorded are also a valuable resource for employers, offering guidance on recruiting international students.

Future sustainability of the project is reinforced by the keen interest shown by the Scottish Economic Directorate from its inception. There is potential to expand the project Scotland-wide, exploring opportunities in different regions and considering similar initiatives on a broader scale.

## 8. Reflections

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Despite various challenges that hindered engagement, there was overwhelmingly positive feedback from all stakeholders involved. The project focused on the Forth Valley region, but had a significant ripple effect across the country, and guests attending the main event shared their insights into the Symposium's impact. Staff involvement from careers, international recruitment, faculties, immigration, marketing, and the Students' Union showcased the University as a united front, emphasising collaboration and commitment to supporting international students.

## 9. Recommendations for other UK institutions

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### Partnership with local businesses

Establish partnerships with local business incubation centres and support services. They provide valuable support to local businesses and offer a platform for engagement, fostering collaborative relationships between academia and industry. They enhance students' exposure to real-world challenges and opportunities, enriching their learning experience.

### Student voice

Incorporate the student perspective by recruiting an international student intern. They provide valuable insights into the needs, preferences and challenges faced by international students in navigating their career paths. By involving them directly in programme development, universities can ensure that their international career programmes are relevant, inclusive and responsive to student needs.

### Engagement with university partners

Develop strong partnerships with the Students' Union and faculties, to leverage their influence and resources. This will help increase student participation and ensure the programme remains aligned with international student priorities and concerns.

## 10. Appendix links

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Appendices can be found at the following link.

**University of Stirling Appendix ([padlet.org](https://padlet.org))**

Or by scanning the QR code



**UKCISA**

Woburn House  
20–24 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HQ  
ukcisa.org.uk  
@ukcisa

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