

DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT

Employer Partnership Programme

REPORT

Diversity
of
thought

Employer Partnership
Programme



University of
East London

career
zone

INTRODUCING...

THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

The University of East London is a long-standing anchor institution, committed to providing education for the benefit of all, giving students from diverse backgrounds the skills and opportunities to thrive in the modern world. Under our pioneering Vision 2028 strategy we are on a journey to become a careers 1st University. We are undergoing a bold transformation by changing the face of education to match the ongoing fundamental shifts in working culture. We have collaborated with industry to re-develop, re-design, and validate our course portfolio, so the knowledge our students gain reflects the changing needs of industry and prepares our learners for sustainable careers of the future.

With students from 156 nationalities from across 140 countries, inclusivity is at the heart of our institution. We have been recognised as the most accessible university in the country to low-income groups, with almost a third of students (29%) eligible for free school meals at age 16. Overall, the university was ranked number 1 in the UK for addressing inequalities (2nd in the world) by the Times Higher Education Global Impact Ranking, 2020.

CAREERS & STUDENT ENTERPRISE TEAM

Our award winning, Careers & Student Enterprise team are at the forefront of our vision to become a Careers 1st University. Our diverse team is made up of professionals with expertise across a wide range of specialist areas including Careers, Volunteering, Employer Engagement, Mentoring, and Entrepreneurship. Through our innovative onsite Career Zone Spaces and our award-winning platform, we aim to support all students to realise their careers and entrepreneurial ambitions during their time as a student and beyond.

¹ Office for Students. (2023) Progression. Available at: Findings from the data - Office for Students (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

² Binnie, G. (2023) Higher Education Policy Institute, What are university careers services doing to bridge the outcomes gap between white and BAME graduates? Available at: What are university careers services doing to bridge the outcomes gap between white and BAME graduates? - HEPI (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

FOREWORD

Students from the lowest socio-economic background are 10.6% less likely to be in full time graduate outcome than their average counterpart¹ and students from BAME backgrounds are 8% less likely to be in full time graduate outcome.²

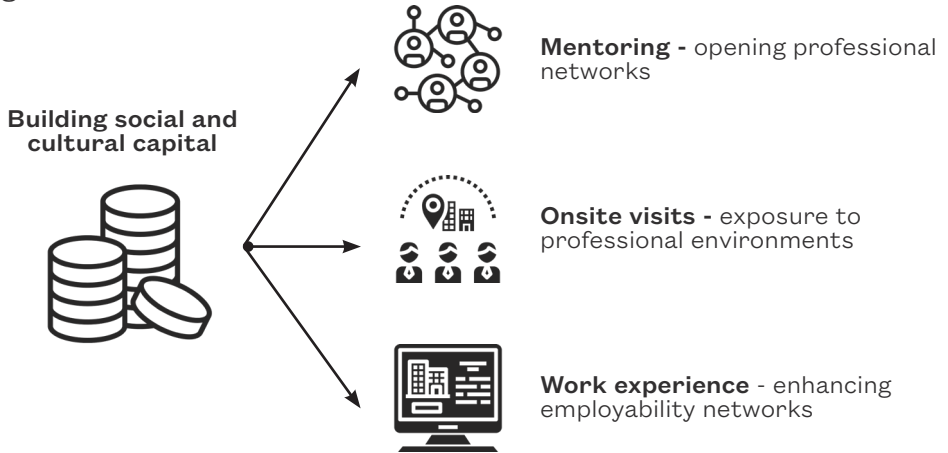
A rite of passage for university students across the UK is securing a coveted graduate internship or graduate job, and it is an aspiration many students share. However, with these schemes vastly oversubscribed and graduates applying for an average of 25³ roles, it is a competitive marketplace, with those from marginalised groups both less likely to apply and be successful in securing these opportunities.

In a study undertaken in 2020 it was established that less than 12% of University of East London graduates were working within Times Top 100 companies, something we were committed to change.

Our Diversity of Thought (DoT) Programme was conceptualised as a vehicle for driving aspiration and social mobility. Through consultation with students, staff, and industry we were able to identify the common challenges our students faced in accessing graduate level roles within aspirational companies. We identified that many of our graduates simply didn't even consider these organisations at all and for those that did apply, the competitive selection processes were alien and daunting. In response to this, the Diversity of Thought Programme was developed to directly address the key stages of the recruitment cycle where those from marginalised backgrounds would be less likely to be represented. In collaboration with our partners the programme is co-created, with pick and mix elements to ensure it is complementary to existing partner recruitment processes whilst also providing maximum impact in driving a step change in diversifying the talent pipeline.

³ Fennell, A. (2023) Graduate Statistics for the UK. Available at: UK Graduate Statistics & Employment Rates | 2023 Analysis (standout-cv.com), (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

Whilst each programme is bespoke, there are three core elements that make up all partner programmes and are intended to build social and cultural capital amongst our students and graduates.



Two years on from the first programme. we are proud to be working with **16 Diversity of Thought partners** and this report reflects on the experiences of our students, staff and partners, celebrating best practice and achievements. As we take a moment to reflect on the impact to date, we also look forward at our ambition to grow our partnerships and develop a consortium of partners, collectively developing and sharing best practice around attracting, recruiting and retaining diverse talent with an ambition to inspire a sector wide step change within early talent recruitment.



⁴ Brown, L (2019) Disadvantaged young people still face multiple barriers in graduate recruitment. Available at: 57952 (peoplemanagement.co.uk) (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

ATTRACTING DIVERSE TALENT

“ More than a third of individuals aged 18-25 said they were put off joining a business whose workforce was perceived to be made up of mainly middle and upper-class employees.⁴ ”

What became apparent was that many of our students didn't even consider aspirational Times Top 100 Companies in their career trajectory. Recent research undertaken in 2022 by Cibyl, which surveyed over 65,000 students from across 160 universities, showed that **UEL students were 26% less likely to aspire to secure a graduate scheme when compared to their wider student counterparts at other higher education institutions.**⁵

In direct response, an integral component of our Diversity of Thought programme is **Insight Days**, a unique opportunity to challenge student perceptions and give a 'day in life' experience. Providing an authentic perspective, students benefit from first-hand exploration and conversations with staff about different career paths and opportunities alongside the working culture and day to day running of the organisation.

One of our partners, **VMLY&R (WPP)** used the insight day to showcase opportunities from across the business including HR, Finance, Creative and Project Management. Shantel, a business management student said this experience allowed her to discover where she wanted to go in her career.

“ Through the programme I have been given a once in a lifetime opportunity which has offered me the platform I needed to start my career.

Shantel – Business Management Student – UEL ”

⁵ Cibyl, (2022) 'Cibyl Graduate Research UK 2022', Cibyl, pp.22. Available at: Cibyl: school, college and university student research (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

Dataminr have also recently hosted a group of students at their London Headquarters. The students benefited from inspiring keynotes from staff, an immersive tour of their offices and a deep dive into their advanced technology. Mina, a computer science student from Iran, reflected on the day:

Being introduced to the CEO of Dataminr was brilliant, I got to spend time living ‘a day in the life’ and realised the true value of what my culture and four spoken languages bring.

Mina – Computer Science Student – UEL

Mina has progressed on the programme and believes the Diversity of Thought Programme has opened the door to what she wants to do with her computer science degree and knows where she is going once her studies are over. Mina sees herself utilising all the skills she is gaining from the programme and envisions herself as a future female leader - something she never thought possible before the programme.



RECRUITING DIVERSE TALENT

Perhaps the most discussed barrier to diversifying the talent pipeline are the conscious and unconscious biases that exist within recruitment processes and CIPD research has shown this.

A mere 28% of employers train all interviewers on legal obligations and objective interview practice, less than a fifth make efforts to remove bias through testing the words of job adverts or checking that tests are valid, reliable and objective.⁶

Within the Diversity of Thought Programme our experienced careers team work in collaboration with partners and utilises positive action⁷ to identify 'diverse talent' from an associated school, sector, or specific subject area based on the competencies, values, and opportunities available. Students are invited to apply for the programme and our team work intensively with individuals to prepare them for the recruitment process ensuring they have a fair and equal chance of being successful. Francine, a sociology student, felt instantly inspired by what the programme had to offer and loved that the team helped her with her CV, interview techniques and communication before starting the programme. This preparation stage is a vital step in closing the social mobility gap and empowering students within the recruitment process. One of our team members reflected on the change:

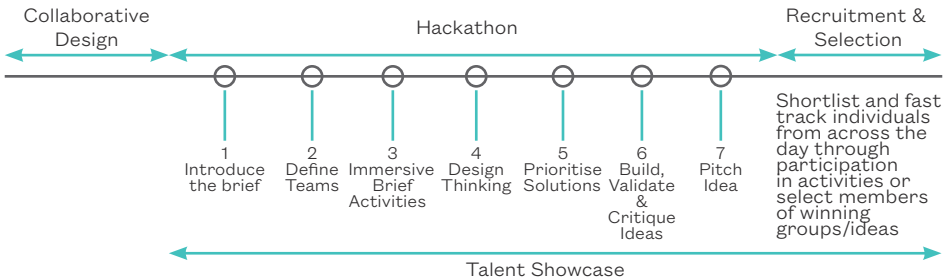
I have seen students transform and unlock strengths and interests that they never knew they had.

Hussein Hussein – Employer Engagement Officer – UEL

⁶ CIPD, (2022) Resourcing and Talent Planning Report, Available at: Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey | CIPD (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

⁷ Equality and Human Rights Commission, (2019) Positive Action, Available at: Positive action | Equality and Human Rights Commission (equalityhumanrights.com) (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

Alongside the preparation work we have developed a unique recruitment methodology ‘**Talent Hacks**’, which brings our ‘diverse thinkers’ to life through a bespoke ‘live’ experiential hackathon putting companies most significant challenges in our students’ hands. This is an opportunity for students from across a wide range of disciplines to showcase their talent, skills and values while gaining an authentic insight into working for a company and developing vital transferable employability skills which will follow them throughout their career. This end-to-end recruitment tool is an immersive opportunity for organisations to identify diverse early talent. Our dedicated delivery team bespoke design and deliver the Hack to match the competencies of our partner organisations.



Our partner, **Amazon Web Services** are experienced in technical Hackathons, however our ‘non-technical’ recruitment model saw them work with cross disciplinary students from computing, business, gaming, and fashion to develop solutions for local issues using cloud technology. Harry Goldie, Digital Skills Programme Manager, Amazon Web Services reflected:



The quality of the presentations was excellent and a true testament to the students’ determination. What was really impressive was the fact that some students had only just been introduced to cloud concepts that day yet were able to articulate how the cloud can make a positive impact. From this event, we were able to identify five students who we’ll be supporting on the programme.

Harry Goldie – Digital Skills Programme Manager – AWS



Students thrive during the process and enjoy the opportunity to work on live briefs, with a diverse range of peers and professionals and often completely forget they are being 'interviewed'. The 'winning' AWS team were offered an internship and Brandon, a Games Development Student said, that the opportunities and knowledge he gained he never thought possible if it were not for the programme. As he looks towards his final year of study, he will graduate with a strong CV, and invaluable contacts within AWS with possible opportunities in the future.



ONBOARDING DIVERSE TALENT

With graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from ethnic minority groups less likely to secure a graduate role with leading employers compared to their more privileged peers, work experience and internships play a key role in closing the social mobility gap.



59% of employers reporting that work experience is one of their most important factors when recruiting graduates⁸



Following the innovative attract and recruit stages of the programme students are clear about their career ambitions, passionate about the organisation, and confident and prepared for their internship. Siemens have benefited from six interns through the programme and have been so impressed that they have agreed to take on another cohort in the next round.

“The students we recruited through UEL’s internship scheme really impressed us. They were intelligent, enthusiastic, and highly professional in their approach. They delivered high quality work for us, and we have strongly encouraged several of them to apply for a full-time role with Siemens.”

– Simon Burgess, Senior Solution Developer – Siemens

WPP has seen a significant organisational benefit from onboarding interns within the programme. They recognise that by investing in diversity, talent can be untapped, culture can be added, and companies can create broader ideas once put into practice.

⁸ CBI, 2017, Helping the UK Thrive, Education & Skills Survey, viewed 31st May 2023, Business & Management, The British Library.

“Many companies have the desire to change, but it’s taking a long time, the Diversity of Thought Programme has been an advocate for making changes in the world of EDI. I’m proud to say that WPP and I are as passionate about making changes – they take time, but they are happening. The standard we’ve hired from the programme has been exceptional.”

- Michael Ludlow - Talent Acquisition Director - WPP

Francine, a sociology student, benefited from a month’s internship at WPP, which added more soft and hard skills to her CV. She has thrived through the programme and most importantly, she reflected that she never felt she was just a number or a statistic. She felt engaged, encouraged and part of a talented team at WPP which enabled her to flourish and showcase her natural talent and work ethic.

“I felt inspired and supported throughout the programme. I was given the tools I need ready for the real world in the workforce.”

- Francine - Sociology Student - UEL

ITV also shared the same sentiment as WPP speaking highly about the programme and talent and whilst ‘internships’ are ‘nothing new’, Robert reflected that as the programme’s benefits are shared, other organisations will likely follow suit.

“This programme has been able to bring further awareness into EDI. We are counting on making real changes for the next generation.”

- Robert Cole - Head of Group Technology - ITV



RETAINING DIVERSE TALENT



Role models can play a central role in shaping a young professional's career. They are especially important if you belong to an under-represented group for whom a lack of representation in the workplace can lead to feeling isolated and lacking in confidence.⁹



Central to every DoT Programme is **'Mentoring'**. These invaluable one-to-one relationships are arguably the most impactful component in raising aspirations and leveraging access to networks.

Shazia, a law student, originally from Pakistan was apprehensive about finishing her studies and going into the world of work. "I was concerned about my ethnic background and dyslexia" and as a result filling out job applications correctly and efficiently was a worry. Shazia was matched with two mentors during her time at MSG, Michael Lydakis, Counsel in Legal & Business Affairs and David Weiss, HR Employment and Compliance Officer. During these one-to-one mentoring sessions, both mentors provided Shazia support with reviewing and updating her CV along with useful interview tips for potential jobs. She left the programme with enhanced confidence, a job ready employability toolkit and LinkedIn contacts, she reflected, she never would have gained on her own.

"The Diversity of Thought Programme has been life changing. It's given me the confidence I needed, and I have made connections for life."

- Shazia - Law Student - UEL

⁹ Uviebinene, E. (2019) 'The Importance of role models in shaping a young professional' Financial Times 17 October, Available at: The importance of role models in shaping a young professional | Financial Times (ft.com) (Accessed: 31st May 2023).



Research undertaken in 2015 explored the link between relatable role models and aspiration citing **“the power of role models can be harnessed to increase role aspirations, motivation, reinforce their existing goals and facilitate the adoption of new goals.”**¹⁰ This could not be truer than it was for Brandon, a games development student who was on the Amazon programme. His mentor supported with the development of his CV and tailoring his content towards the gaming industry. He shared:

“Dipping into the world of Amazon has been amazing. The headquarters gave me a taste of working at Amazon and made me even more motivated.”

- Brandon - Computer Game Development Student - UEL

EDI was evident across the company culture and the diversity was refreshing with Brandon reflecting that if he hadn't done the programme, he would never have thought of working for Amazon. Brandon leaves the programme with precious connections, and enhanced confidence and motivation about his next career step.

¹⁰ Morgenroth, T. Ryan, M. & Peters, K (2015) 'The Motivational Theory of Role Modelling: How Role Models Influence Role Aspirants' Goals', Sage, Vol 19, Issue 4.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

Reflecting on the programme's achievements to date, it's apparent the core, shared components are responsible for addressing the social and cultural capital gaps which are often the underlying barriers to achieving graduate level employment. A recent Forbes article titled **'Diversity is a Fact; Inclusion is a Choice'** makes a clear distinction between the important role of both in truly addressing these gaps.



Diversity benefits no one unless we can unleash its power; simply putting diverse people together doesn't tap their creative potential. Inclusion does that. Inclusion releases talent and activates a cooperative system to harvest that talent. Becoming more diverse is just the first step in a two-step transformation.¹¹



¹¹ Clark, T. (2021) 'Diversity is A Fact, Inclusion is a Choice' Forbes, 17 March, Available at: Diversity Is A Fact, Inclusion Is A Choice (forbes.com) (Accessed: 31st May 2023).

Through exposure to workplace culture, one-to-one mentoring and leveraging the access to vital professional networks, we have been able to achieve and inspire a step change in supporting our students to access aspirational companies. To date, highlights include:



Inaugural partners have directly recruited students from the Diversity of Thought Talent Pool.



Students received mentoring through the programme from key influential staff within the partner organisations.



Growth in partners year on year with high rates of retention and satisfaction with existing partners.

media engineering
telecommunications
hospitality PR law

Onboarded partners from across a wide range of industries.



Partners and students would recommend the programme.

LOOKING FORWARD

Keen to build on the success and learning of the programme, we aspire to be a leading voice in challenging the way organisations attract, recruit and retain diverse graduate talent. Working closely with our diverse talent pipeline and partners, we hope to continue to drive a step change in reducing progression gaps and champion diversity and inclusion within the recruitment cycle. By 2028 we hope to continue to see year on year growth and work with 50 new partners during this tenure. We aspire to continue the notable rate of conversion and support 90% of our Diversity of Thought participants into graduate roles, within aspirational companies.

To achieve this, we need more pioneering early talent professionals and aspirational companies to join us in driving a successful diverse and inclusive early talent pipeline and we formally invite you to join us as Diversity of Thought Partners.



UEL is a special place and is like no other university. The ambition the university holds to make the changes with the DoT Programme is phenomenal. Siemens is proud to partner with UEL and will continue this programme in the future

- Simon Burgess - Control Officer and Mentor - Siemens



HOW TO WORK WITH US

1. Advertise opportunities

2. Work with our students

- Funded Internships Scheme
- Academic Placements
- Industry Projects
- Graduate Roles

3. Meet our students

- Career Zone Spaces
- Guest Lectures
- Insight Events
- Jobs Fairs
- Hackathons
- Recruitment Events

4. Support social mobility – give back

- Diversity of Thought Programme
- Mentoring
- Sponsorship
- Job Shadowing

5. Future proof your workforce

- Apprenticeships
- Continuous Professional Development
- Facilities Hire & Business Income

6. Accelerate your sustainability through research & innovation

- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Collaborative Research

BENEFITS TO YOUR ORGANISATION

1. Access to our talented, vibrant and diverse student and graduates.
2. Injection of new ideas, bold perspectives and fresh solutions into your business.
3. Advice and assistance from one of our expert Employer Engagement Officers throughout our partnership.
4. Flexibility to shape our collaboration to your specific needs.
5. A free audit of your current early talent programme to ensure it is open, inclusive and fair.
6. The satisfaction that you have improved the life chances of our students.

To discuss opportunities to get involved, please contact careerzone@uel.ac.uk

WITH THANKS TO OUR DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT PARTNERS

Amazon Web Services
Ankh Impact Ventures
Charity Works
Clifford Chance
Colas Rail
Dataminr
Dishoom
Horniman Museum & Gardens
IBM
ITV
Met Police
Siemens
Talker Tailor Troublemaker
The Maddison Square Garden Company
V&A
VMLY&R (WPP)

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