

#WeAreInternational
Grants scheme 2022–24
Pilot project

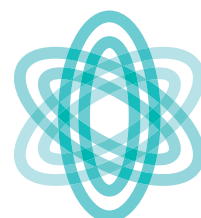
Enhancing the career prospects of international students through targeted pre- and post- enrolment opportunities

Swansea University

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**UK Council
for International
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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. Introduction

In response to an increasing demand from international students and recognising the challenges faced by this cohort, Swansea Employability Academy (SEA) (www.swansea.ac.uk/sea/) identified the need for a tailored support package aimed at facilitating the success of international students in the UK job market. The project objectives were:

- To address the knowledge gaps of international students at the time of enrolment as part of their conditional offer and induction.
- To develop bespoke career learning opportunities, subject to their discipline of study and their region of origin.
- To expand the range of work experience, jobs, year in industry, volunteering and mentoring opportunities available to them.
- To inform their career options and pathways and develop their confidence, sense of identity and commercial awareness.

Swansea University prioritises internationalisation, recognising the value diversity brings to education and career development. This project aimed to bridge informational gaps and to empower international students with a framework for professional growth and success in the UK labour market.

2. Summary of outcomes

This project facilitated international students' access to a suite of tailored support. This includes a pre-arrival International Students' Career Development Course (ISDC) designed to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate the UK job market before commencing their courses. Additionally, the team developed two guidebooks: 'Working in the UK – a guide for international students' and 'Employer Guide to Hiring International Students', fostering understanding between international students and local employers. The project led to impactful events such as part-time jobs fairs, international alumni panels and employer networking events, reinforcing the university's commitment to providing employability support to international students.

3. Main section

Led by SEA, the project involved strategic collaboration among various departments including the in-house faculty employability teams, the international office and the admissions team. Within SEA, the collaboration was further streamlined through partnership working between the two sub-teams: the Employment Zone team and the Careers Consultancy team.

Each sub-team assumed a designated lead role in specific project aspects, holding regular meetings to monitor progress and evaluate milestones throughout the project timeline (1 April 2023 to 29 March 2024). This approach resulted in the achievement of the following outcomes:

The development of the International Students' Career Development Course

The ISCDC was circulated via the pre-arrival communications team. Forty-nine students registered to date, in addition to those who completed the course in the pilot in semester one. Two hundred and seventy-six students were given access to the new ISCDC content and asked to complete an online interview practice with Shortlist.me. These were newly arrived international students on Foundation and Pre-Master's levels. Two hundred and thirty-one have successfully completed the units by the suggested deadline.

The team sent an evaluation form to each student:

- 94% rated the course good/excellent.
- 95% are more prepared after completing the course.
- 95% are better informed after completing the course.
- 96% would recommend it to a friend.

To develop the ISCDC, the Careers Consultancy team used the UKCISA Grant to fund an intern, Prakash Kurisinkal, who graduated from Swansea University in 2023 with MSc Biomedical Science. This experience included him carrying out research and filming video content for the new ISCDC. On completing his internship, Prakash said:

“It was amazing to expand on my UK experience. During this internship, I had the chance to work with staff and students and get a feel for the international workplace culture. I was able to learn about the UK recruitment process, and better understand how employers are looking for skills, education and someone who shares the organisation's values. I have really enjoyed my internship. I hope to use the skills and experience in future, as I prepare to become a healthcare scientist and eventually a career in academia.”

Since finishing his internship and graduating from Swansea University, Prakash has successfully gained a role in the NHS as a Blood Sciences Medical Laboratory Assistant.

Business networking event

In November 2023, the team arranged a collaborative initiative with The Business Hub, a local business networking group, to host an event on campus, inviting local employers. During this event, the team delivered presentations educating on the advantages of hiring international students and presenting the options for their organisations. The inclusion of talks by two international students sharing their UK experiences served as an excellent showcase of the potential within our international cohort. Following the presentations, a networking session provided an opportunity for students to speak to employers, and each employer received a copy of the guide to hiring international students. In addition to this, the team has actively participated in regular local networking events, utilising these opportunities to distribute the guide and engage with businesses on the recruitment of international students.

Without UKCISA #WeAreInternational Grant scheme, this event would not have been possible. To continue the success, the team will organise repeats of this event to keep employers informed about the opportunities and benefits of hiring international students.

Part-time jobs fairs

Recognising the heightened demand for part-time work within our international student cohort, driven by the cost-of-living crisis and familial responsibilities, the team facilitated a series of part-time jobs fairs. The first fair, held on 27 September 2023 at the Singleton Campus during Swansea University's Freshers Fair, attracted 505 students (predominantly international). The second fair took place during the same week at the Bay Campus (www.swansea.ac.uk/the-university/location/), drawing 535 students. The team replicated the fair in February 2024, catering to international students entering university through the January-entry route. Seven hundred and three students attended, to engage in conversations with local employers.

The positive impact of the part-time jobs fairs is reflected in the student feedback:

- “It was a great event which helped me a lot as I’m an international student.”
- “Great fair organised by Swansea. I was pleased with everything, and after the fair I’m more confident and clearer about what opportunities are best for me.”
- “The part-time jobs fair has provided me with the opportunity to meet some recruiters, and I am grateful for that.”

The fairs provided an avenue for students to explore such opportunities conveniently on campus. The support from UKCISA funding enabled the team to address the needs of international students effectively during key entry periods at the University.

International alumni panel

The team organised an international alumni panel at Swansea University with the aim of inspiring students by hearing from graduates who have found a role in the UK. The event comprised a workshop on CVs and application forms and a session on networking and professionalism. This was followed by a panel discussion featuring three international alumni currently employed at RSM, McKinsey & Co and the UK Health Security Agency. During the question and answer session, students sought advice on maintaining resilience during the job search process and optimising their university experience.

A student attendee commented on the event:

“I was on top of my energy throughout the event because of how relatable and helpful it was. Thank you and the SEA team for organising it.”

The UKCISA funding played a crucial role in facilitating opportunities for international students to gain insights from peers who had achieved success in securing employment within the UK.

Guides for international students and employers

Two guides, one for international students and one for local employers, were developed by the team to mirror each other, providing a shared language and reference point for both parties. The guides were written collaboratively by staff from SEA and reviewed by our intern, Prakash, and by other departments that work closely with international students to ensure relevance and accuracy.

‘**Working in the UK – a guide for international students**’ focuses on international students’ lived experiences of finding part-time and graduate work and aims to set expectations while answering common questions that career staff in the university are often asked. It includes a full breakdown of the two most popular post-study visa options and has a varied list of resources for students, with associated QR codes for students who need to find out more. The resources dovetail with our employability provision with a focus on empowering students to access the support they need, using partners including Student Circus, e-CareersGrad and Shortlist.me.

‘**Employer Guide to Hiring International Students**’ mirrors the visa information, reframed for a business audience, and includes a different, tailored set of resources and QR codes relevant to employers. The first section of the guide focuses on encouraging businesses to hire international students, highlighting the benefits of diversifying their workforce.

Both guides have received excellent feedback from students and employers and are now available from SEA in print, in PDF and embedded in our [website](#).

4. Challenges

The main challenge faced by the team was delivering the project alongside their existing workload, particularly during peak busy periods in the academic year. This required heightened pressure on the team to meet project deadlines. However, through a proactive approach, including regular meetings and a shared understanding of the project's importance for students, the team successfully executed all components outlined in the initial plan.

Additional challenges stemmed from the direct outcomes of employer events, which will be a consideration for the long term. The sustained effort will enable the team to assess the longitudinal impact of the initiatives, including employment of international students by local employers who engaged with our service.

5. Sustainability of the project

Following on from the project, the pre-sessional ISCDC, student guides and employer guides are in place for all international students (and employers). Following the success of the part-time jobs fairs, the educational events and the international alumni panel, these initiatives will become embedded in SEA's annual plan, to ensure continuation and to build momentum on the success of the first year of the project.

The immediate focus involves developing a system for measuring, recording and reporting on the project's uptake. Additionally, a content review will occur annually to guarantee the relevance of all materials produced. Through this process, the team will assess and update the content as necessary.

Reflections

6. Resource and time allocation

While our intern contributed significantly to the development of the ISCDC, he had to balance this with his academic studies. This impacted his availability to work on the project and resulted in activities going beyond the initial project timeline. Whilst the team did not compromise on quality, a longer timespan for development would have lessened the workload. It was insightful and valuable to have an international student work on the project as an intern, and the co-development resulted in having the student voice present across the project. The team considered and managed these challenges very well, and the output and insight provided were well worth the additional challenges.

7. Budget constraints

As the team moved through the project, it was clear that an increased budget would have meant that the ISCDC could have been made more interactive. Despite using the UKCISA funding to fund the intern, budget constraints limited the resources available for course development, implementation and promotion. This impacted the scope of this part of the project and required seeking additional marketing staff resourcing to meet all project requirements and provide full support to the intern.

8. Summary

The funding from UKCISA's #WeAreInternational Grant scheme served as a catalyst for creating an offer that the team would not have been able to develop within the given time limit and resource. This initiative not only allowed SEA to meet the needs of the students effectively but paved the way for sustaining and enhancing our offerings in the future.

There was overwhelming positive feedback from all elements, including the guides, the events and the ISCDC course content, and impact from the pilot, from both students and academics. The ISCDC is now being considered for new top-up courses for international students before arriving in the UK.

9. Appendix

ISCDC – www.swansea.ac.uk/international-students/career-support-/pre-enrolment-career-development-course-/?utm_source=Medical+School+pre-arrival+newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=international_cdc_23_24&utm_id=Jan+entry+2023%2F2024.

Video of Prakash promoting Swansea University's ISCDC development – <https://vimeo.com/914688705>.

International Student Careers Support webpages – <https://myuni.swansea.ac.uk/sea/international-students-support/>.

Recruit our talent webpages – [Employer's Guide to hiring international students – Swansea University](#).

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