



In this short guide, we share some insights from the early cohorts of the Practera Horizons programme to help you identify the cohorts who can most benefit from the programme.

Horizons is designed to support students from under-represented (UR) groups in the first years of undergraduate study who typically experience barriers to entering the workplace during or after their studies to gain their first experience of the workplace.

One of the core principles of Horizons is that experiential learning of work – as provided by the Horizons programme – contributes to career exploration and decision-making. When students develop their career readiness, they are more likely to understand how their degree contributes to their future lives, which can support retention in higher education, as well as leading to a better graduate employment outcome (Cobb, 2019). Career Readiness is most effectively and holistically captured using the Careers Registration process.

Many Horizons HEI partners are including the Horizons experience within new or existing programmes for students from UR groups, but some are using it as a standalone opportunity or as part of a wider career service offering.

[n.b. Some of the suggestions in this guide are based on the premise of a 3 year undergraduate degree. For four year undergraduate degrees, guidance regarding year 2 students can also be applied to year 3/penultimate year students.]

### **Why do we want to get involved in Horizons?**

The choice to participate in Horizons is likely to be motivated by one or more of these factors:

- Strategy – your institution has prioritised the attainment, continuation and progression of students from UR groups. Experiential learning of work contributes to the improvement of all of those.
- Data
  - Graduate Outcomes: your institution has identified a gap in the progression of students from UR groups into professional graduate employment. Experiential learning of work contributes to career readiness, and data proves that career readiness is a leading indicator of graduate employment, including at professional level.



- o Career Readiness: your institution has identified lower than desirable levels of Career Readiness (CR) in Y2/L5 and final year undergraduate students from UR groups, increasing the risk that they will not graduate into professional level employment.
- Access and Participation Plan – your institution wishes to develop a sustainable and scalable programme of support for students from UR groups that will provide immediate evidence of positive impact on Career Readiness and key transferable skills required in the workplace.

### **How do we identify the cohorts of students who would benefit most from Horizons?**

Given the complex intersectional profiles of students, it can be challenging to identify the cohorts who can most benefit from Horizons. Here are some parameters you might like to explore, particularly during your pilot phases of participation:

- Y1/L4 and Y2/L5 undergraduate
  - o Many students from UR groups who have come straight to university from pre-18 education will have had limited or no experience of the workplace, particularly of the professional graduate type, beyond any part-time work that they have or currently do. If you collect Career Readiness (CR) data through Careers Registration, you are likely to be able to identify those students from UR groups who have no existing work experience. The first two years of UG study are particularly important for gaining experience of the workplace in support of developing career ideas and work readiness before the pressures of the final year begin.
- Y2/L5 students from UR groups with lower Career Readiness, to support increased CR by the time they begin their final year UG (evidenced through Careers Registration data)
  - o While we might expect first year students to have low CR as they are at the start of their journey from education to work, it is more concerning when second year and final year students have low CR. Students are likely to be applying for graduate roles at the start of their final year of study, but those with low CR will probably defer that and may find it harder to get a graduate job after they complete their degree.
  - o Year 2 UG students with low CR are a highly suitable cohort for Horizons, because they need to be increasing their CR during their second year in

order to be more ready to apply for a graduate job at the start of their final year.

- Y3/L6 students from UR groups with low Career Readiness to support increased CR by the time they graduate
  - We know this is very concerning, and we also recognise that the timing is challenging for final year students who may be very focused on completing their degree well and final examinations and not wish to take on extra activities during the year.
  - Experiential learning of the workplace after final exams and immediately before leaving university therefore can reassure students that they have skills and attributes to offer employers, and give them meaningful experience to talk about and put on their CV as they start to explore the graduate job market. You may wish to run a specialised final year cohort to support students in a similar position in a more scalable way.
- Recent graduates from UR groups with no graduate job
  - If you already have a careers service provision or programme to support recent UR graduates who do not currently have a job, then Horizons would be an additional asset in that programme. You may already know who those graduates are, and can slot the programme in among your 1:1s, workshops and boot camps.
  - If you don't have a specialist graduate careers provision, you could use Horizons as a proactive step to engage recent graduates in periodic cohorts at the end of the year.
- Programmes or subjects with lower Graduate Outcomes (GO)
  - Career Services are often asked to identify and target support towards academic subjects and programmes whose graduates are under-employed or unemployed and whose Graduate Outcomes is below expectations or benchmarks. While GO data is lagging rather than predictive (Careers Registration data), it can provide an effective indicator of which cohorts of students from UR groups might benefit most from experiential learning of the workplace, particularly if they are studying a subject where that is not included in curriculum.
- Students in different UR groups by protected and other characteristics, and with intersectional combinations of characteristics, e.g.:
  - Students of diverse heritage (e.g. Black, Asian, Bangladeshi)
  - Neurodivergent students
  - Disabled students

- o Students with poor mental health
  - o Students from areas of deprivation
  - o Care experienced students
  - o Female students
  - o LGBT+ students
- Students with entry qualifications which may lead to differential outcomes, e.g. BTEC
  - o One early Horizons partner specifically targeted students with this entry profile because they knew that this cohort was experiencing differential outcomes. They integrated the Horizons experience into a wider programme for those students.
- Students who are time-poor:
  - o Commuting students
  - o Students with caring responsibilities
- Bursary and scholarship programmes
  - o If you are offering a bursary or scholarship programme for students from UR groups, you may have a cohort in mind. But you could also considering contacting students who applied but have not been successful for such schemes.
- Collaborating with academic departments
  - o Some academic departments will already be targeting additional programmes or support to students from under-represented groups and may welcome the opportunity to add experiential learning of the workplace to the offer.
- Student societies
  - o Many Students Unions have societies for different communities of students by protected characteristic (e.g. Black students, neurodivergent students) who may welcome the opportunity to provide a tangible experience to their members.
- Add-on benefits to other programmes
  - o Some partners are already coupling their Horizons programme into other programmes you are already running for students from under-represented groups, including those not specifically related to careers and employability. It is more effective to do this scalably and strategically, rather than to fill out gaps, and it will make a more compelling narrative for any evaluation of your widening access programme to be able to show coherence and structured engagement.

### How do we communicate the opportunity to our target cohorts?

If you are targeting a new cohort of students rather than through an existing programme, academic department or Students Union Society, you may like to try one or more of these approaches to making students aware of the opportunity. However you want to reach out to students – whether through established communities/programmes or on open application – Practera will provide marketing materials and links to student testimonials to support you.

Above all, we would always recommend sending a targeted email to groups of students and not using an open forum or open advertisement. Targeting eligible students makes it clear to those students that this programme is specifically for them, thus reducing the risk that they will rule themselves out of participation. It also saves you time sifting out respondents, and reduces the risk of being contacted by students who have higher career readiness and/or existing work experience and therefore won't benefit as much.

- Student Ambassadors and Peer Mentors
  - Many universities have Student Ambassador programmes that support admissions and open days, and Careers Services often have Student Ambassadors or Peer Mentors who help with engagement. Practera can provide briefing materials for your Ambassadors and Mentors to help them communicate effectively about the Horizons programme.
- Your Career Service Management System (CSMS)
  - Most UK university careers services use a CSMS as a digital gateway for students to access support and services, and to search for jobs and internships. The CSMS can be used to target communication directly to identified lists or cohorts of students and the Horizons programme can be promoted through the part of the System for jobs and internships.
- Pre-Registration content for Year 1 students
  - If you have an established scheme of Horizons participation for the upcoming academic year, you could promote Horizons to your target cohorts as part of your welcome and pre-registration content for new students.
- Recent graduates
  - If you are partnering with your Alumni Office on a communications plan for the Graduate Outcomes Survey you should have access to data that you

- can filter by characteristic, and then send targeted messaging to those graduates about the programme.
- o You could also partner with academic departments to add messaging to any GDPR-compliant communications they are sending out to recent graduates.
  - o If you are conducting an exit survey of your graduates, you can use the data to identify those without a job, and likewise you could deliver a survey through your Careers Service Management System to recent graduates to identify relevant candidates.

### **How do we fund our participation in the Horizons programme?**

For Horizons to have the sustained impact that is already demonstrated through the pilot participation, institutions need to be able to commit greater numbers each year. For example, participant numbers of 100 spread out over a whole year of Horizons cohorts will keep administration manageable for you while also providing substantial data for you to report on and demonstrate impact. Bringing together a structured approach to targetting students at key stages with a clear marketing strategy for the benefits to students should enable you increase your numbers beyond your initial pilot commitment.

This needs funding, however, so here are some suggestions about how you

- Access and Participation funding
  - o Universities allocate money to support widening access and participation in higher education, and many programmes also include support for current as well as prospective students from UR groups. Each participating institution in a Horizons cohort receives a report within 4 weeks of programme completion that records the data related to that cohort, including increases in career readiness and skill development and feedback from the employer client partners. This data is appropriate and effective for reporting purposes.
- Careers Service programmes
  - o Some careers services have resourcing to support programmes for UR students, and have used this to fund participation in Horizons.
- Employability strategy
  - o While many universities target any additional resourcing for employability strategies to in-curriculum delivery, it is possible to make a credible case for targetted interventions to support students who are at risk of not



progressing successfully into graduate employment. A sound case could be made within an employability strategy for working collaboratively with an academic department who has lower than target graduate outcomes on a specialised extra-curricular programme for students at risk of not progressing.

- HEIF funding
  - For eligible institutions, HEIF funding has been used to support participation in Horizons and other Practera programmes, because the project outputs for employers contribute to one of the dimensions of the HEIF framework, “supporting companies to innovate, compete, and scale”.
- Alumni support
  - Alumni and Development Teams often source donations from alumni which are ideal for using to buy a small number of places on the Horizons programme. Again, the reporting Practera provides enables the donating alumni to see immediately the impact of their donation.