



Reimagining Career Services in Hong Kong and Macao Universities:

Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future for Higher Education

2025



Executive Summary

This whitepaper examines career coaching and career centre administration in universities across Hong Kong and Macao, outlining key trends, challenges and opportunities. Many institutions continue to depend on outdated models, operate with limited resources and prioritise activities over outcomes. Generation Z students, as well as those from Hong Kong, Macao, and Chinese Mainland, have distinct expectations that require more tailored approaches.

Graduate underemployment and administrative inefficiencies highlight the need for transformation. These challenges extend beyond Hong Kong and Macao, highlighting a global imperative for universities to modernise career services and respond to the evolving needs of the workforce. We propose a set of strategic recommendations to strengthen career services, align outcomes with workforce demands and ensure universities remain vital pathways to future success.

Introduction

The global economy is undergoing rapid transformation, placing new demands on higher education. Universities in Hong Kong and Macao are under increasing pressure to enhance graduate employability and demonstrate clear impact in career development. Career services have shifted from being peripheral to becoming a core element of the student experience, influencing both institutional reputation and graduate success.

This whitepaper examines and benchmarks current practices in career coaching and administration, highlighting prevailing models, exposing systemic gaps and offering a framework to guide improvement, innovation and collaboration with industry. The analysis draws on both qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data to capture a comprehensive picture of the current landscape.

A key finding is the scale of staffing constraints that limit the effectiveness of career support. On average, career staff account for only 0.083% of the total campus population, equivalent to one staff member for every 1,205 students. Distribution varies widely between institutions, underscoring the challenges of delivering effective, individualised support at scale.

Emerging Trends and The State of Crisis

2025+ Trends: Shaping the Future of Career Development

The landscape of career development is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by evolving student demographics, technological advancements and shifting global economic realities. Understanding these trends is crucial for universities in Hong Kong and Macao to remain relevant and effective in preparing their students for the future workforce.

Chief among these demographic shifts is the increasing proportion of students from Chinese Mainland. Within some of Hong Kong's and Macao's most prominent universities, students from the mainland now constitute as much as 30% of the total student population. This trend is also gaining momentum elsewhere, and some institutions that only began recruiting from Chinese Mainland four years ago now consider it a strategic focus, reflecting a region-wide educational realignment.

To complement the survey and data analysis, we present direct perspectives from universities in the region, highlighting how career centres plan to address challenges such as student engagement, technology adoption, and employer relations.

1. Targeted Support for Specific Student Cohorts

A university from Hong Kong and another from Macao both underscore a priority on enhancing student engagement and employer relationships, with a particular focus on specific student demographics.

"Our priority is student engagement and employer relationships, with a particular focus on Chinese Mainland students. The university began recruiting Mainland students four years ago and actively supports them in exploring career planning after graduation, whether locally or in the Mainland."

2. Enhancing Alumni Engagement and Integrating Technology

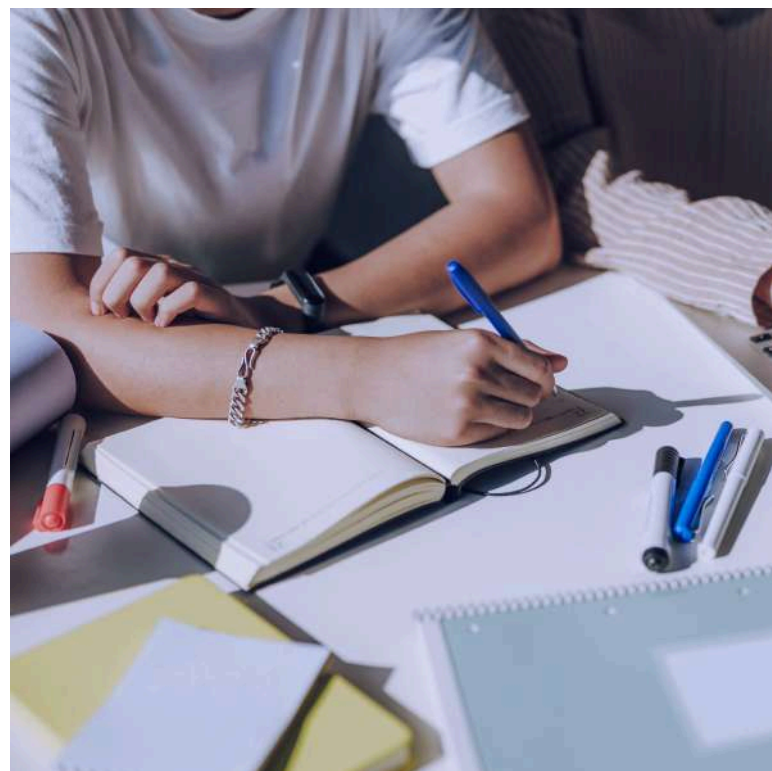
Another university from Hong Kong is focusing on increasing alumni involvement and fundamentally restructuring its service delivery through the greater use of AI and technology.

"Increasing alumni engagement has become a central focus, with plans to create more opportunities for alumni to return and interact with students, complementing the existing alumni office. Going forward, service delivery will be restructured, with greater utilisation of AI and technology in career services. A more comprehensive career course within the curriculum is also planned, following the examples of other universities in the region."

3. Adapting to AI and Job Market Demands

In response to the changing job market, a university from Macao is centring its strategy on equipping students with practical AI skills and leveraging strong industry connections.

"Our response to the changing job market centres on three major trends. First, the proliferation of AI has influenced graduate students, prompting the career team to teach them practical AI skills. Strong industry connections are leveraged to bring students back to the regional job market, strengthening employability through established relationships with companies."





The Generation Z (Gen Z) Mindset and Behavior

Generation Z has become a dominant force in higher education and the workforce, bringing distinct expectations. They look for purpose-driven careers, continuous learning, mentorship and upskilling opportunities, especially in the AI era. Flexibility and work-life balance are essential, alongside clear guidance and structured feedback to support career decisions. For universities, this means rethinking career services to emphasise values-driven opportunities, build adaptable skill sets and provide transparent career pathways that align with the needs of a new generation.

The Growing Influence of Hong Kong and Macao Students

Universities in Hong Kong and Macao are facing changing student expectations, with undergraduates and postgraduates placing greater emphasis on career readiness. Students now seek practical guidance, stronger industry exposure, and clearer pathways into employment, pushing career services to deliver measurable outcomes and timely support. At some universities, about 30% of undergraduates come from Chinese Mainland, adding diversity while highlighting the need for tailored guidance that also addresses the specific contexts and aspirations of local students.

Meeting these challenges calls for career services that are better aligned with local labour markets, more responsive to cultural nuances, and closely integrated with digital platforms familiar to students. Providing clear guidance, equipping students with relevant skills, and implementing proactive engagement strategies will be critical to help both undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts make informed career decisions and transition successfully into the workforce.

The State of Crisis Urgency for Transformation in Career Services

The current global economic climate and shifting workforce demands place university career services at a critical juncture. Without decisive change, graduates risk being underprepared and underemployed while career centres remain weighed down by inefficiency. According to the New York Fed's Q1 2025 survey of recent college graduates, the underemployment rate among new graduates is approximately 41.2%. This reflects a clear disconnect between higher education outcomes and labour market needs, underscoring the urgent demand for stronger career guidance and preparation.

The challenge is further compounded by heavy administrative burdens, which limit the capacity of career centres to engage effectively with students. Student engagement has emerged as the most pressing issue across all participating institutions, with much staff time diverted to manual and repetitive tasks such as email, data entry and data collection, reducing opportunities for meaningful guidance and support.

These dual pressures of underemployment and limited student engagement create a state of crisis that calls for urgent transformation. Traditional approaches are no longer sufficient in a world shaped by rapid technological change and evolving student expectations. Universities must adopt innovative solutions and new technologies to strengthen career services, enhance student engagement and close the gap between education and employment.

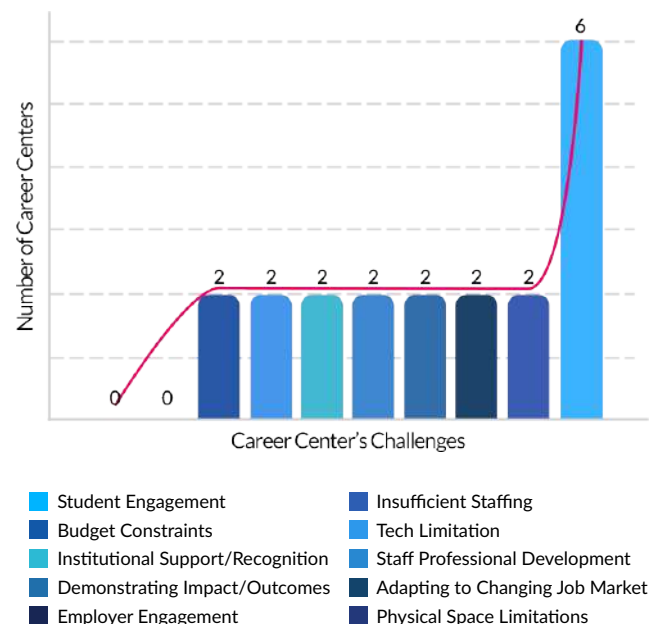


Image 1. Top Challenge Faced by Career Centres: Student Engagement

Key Findings:

The Current State of University Career Services

1. The Organisational Blueprint: Structure, Staffing, and Resources

The overall average staff-to-student ratio across all samples is a challenging 1:1,200. This pressure on resources is set to increase, as for the majority of these institutions, ratios are steadily growing while hiring plans are often limited to adding one new headcount only every three to five years.

These resource constraints are reflected in the significant differences in how career services are structured, staffed, and resourced within the region's top universities in Hong Kong and Macao. For instance, a Hong Kong university with a decentralised model operates its Business Faculty career centre under Academic Affairs, where a team of six staff members supports 5,000 students.

In contrast, a Macao-based institution facing a heavy student-to-staff ratio has its Career Development Centre reporting to Student Affairs, with only five full-time staff serving more than 15,000 students. To address this, career development is embedded in its Residential College system, where trained academic staff deliver foundational sessions to first-year undergraduates.

Meanwhile, a self-financing institution in Hong Kong with a lean team of three full-time staff to support 2,500 students, working closely with academic departments to design annual career plans. A different model was observed at a university in Macao with under 2,000 students, which emphasises a collaborative and multi-stakeholder approach. Its Student Affairs Office (SAO), consisting of a core team of 8 staff members, works closely with faculty members to deliver integrated career guidance and mentorship. By contrast, another university in Hong Kong employs a team of seventeen staff members to serve a student population of more than 27,000, while a different institution in the city has a team of four serving 4,800 students, and another demonstrates a highly supportive model with one staff member for just 250 students.

Budgets and resources vary widely across the region. Some centres operate with more than HK \$1 million annually, while others have less than HK \$5,000 per staff member. A university from Macao, which serves under 2,000 students, manage its career services on a total budget of under HK \$500,000. Other examples from Hong Kong highlight this disparity, with one institution operating on less than HK \$500,000 annually, while another commands a substantial budget of between HK \$2,000,000 and HK \$5,000,000. Based on the distribution across these budget

ranges, the estimated average annual operating budget is approximately less than HK \$500,000. Across institutions, annual allocations per staff range from a few thousand to tens of thousands of Hong Kong dollars, highlighting stark disparities in capacity to deliver services. These contrasts illustrate how institutional mission, scale and resources shape the organisational blueprints of career

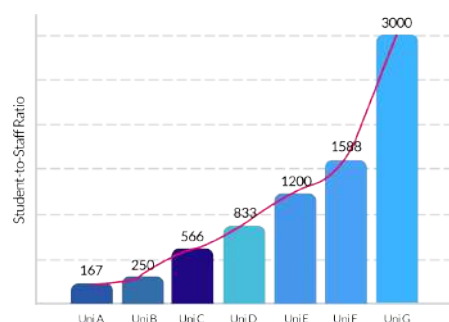


Image 2. Average Student:Career Staff ratio is 1:1,200

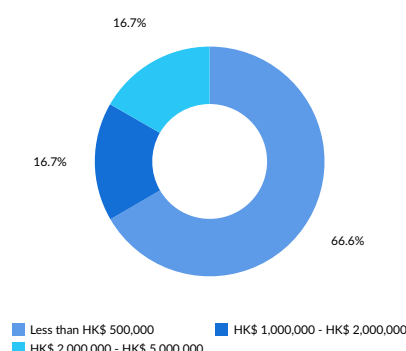


Image 3. Average operating budget is less than HK\$ 500,000

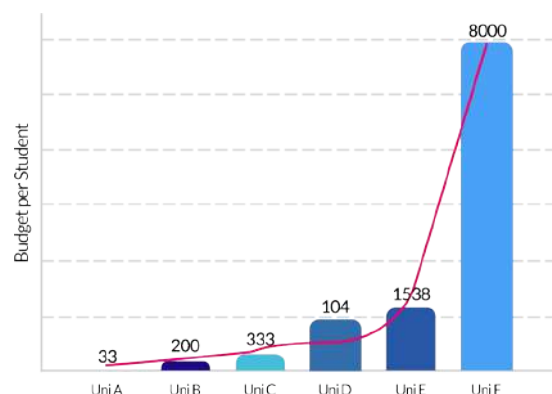


Image 4. Budget to student body ratio

2. The Human Capital: Professional Development and Expertise of Coaches

Human capital is a critical factor in ensuring the effective delivery of career support, and the universities surveyed demonstrate varying levels of professional investment. This is often achieved through staff obtaining professional certifications such as the National Career Development Association (NCDA), which includes credentials like the Career Development Advisor (CDA) and Certified Career Services Provider (CCSP), as well as the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) and Asia Pacific Career Development Association (APCDA).

This commitment to professional investment is exemplified by one university in Macao, where a strong institutional initiative ensures all team members involved in career planning are professionally qualified. The staff primarily hold NCDA and GCDF certifications. In addition to these initial qualifications, the university is committed to continuous professional development by providing annual refresher workshops to ensure its team's skills remain up to date.

However, this strong investment in staff quality at some institutions stands in contrast to the broader regional challenge of staffing quantity. There is significant variation in staffing levels at university career centres across Hong Kong and Macao. This figure spans an extreme range, from lean teams with a ratio of 1:167 to severely stretched teams where a single staff member serves 3,000 students. Despite these differences in scale, a common theme is the extensive overlap of roles, with staff routinely handling diverse functions ranging from career coaching and employer relations to operations and technology management

This commitment to excellence is further demonstrated by the institution's extensive and structured onboarding programme for new staff, which utilises a 'buddy system' that pairs new hires with experienced colleagues to facilitate efficient and quick adaptation to the work environment and their responsibilities. In addition, regular meetings are staff efficiently gain a clear understanding of their roles and operational context. This systematic approach to staff development ensures that high standards are instilled from the outset, allowing new team members to quickly align with the centre's culture and operational best practices, thereby maintaining a consistent quality of service

Two universities from Hong Kong maintain relatively strong teams, with between 1-25% of staff holding professional certifications, indicating an initial commitment to professional development within their career services. Anticipating significant growth in student numbers, these institutions are aware of the need to strengthen their capacity further. A university from Macao and two universities from Hong Kong set a regional benchmark in this area, with an exceptionally high certification rate of between 76-100% among their career staff, despite limited funding for professional development.

Why Professional Certification Matters
Professional certification ensures career coaches are equipped to deliver high-quality guidance. Organisations such as the Life Development Institute (LDI) support staff through training, certification, and best practice frameworks, enabling more effective student coaching, stronger engagement, and improved career outcomes.

Case Study: HKCT Institute of Higher Education (HKCT)



Building a Foundation of Expertise in Career Services

A defining characteristic of a high-performing career centre is a deep-seated commitment to the professionalisation of its staff. HKCT Institute of Higher Education (HKCT) exemplifies this through an exceptionally high rate of professional certification, with between 76-100% of its career services team holding such credentials. This emphasis on formal qualifications ensures that staff are equipped with current industry knowledge and are well-versed in emerging trends. Furthermore, it fosters a collaborative internal culture where certified staff actively share their learnings with peers, elevating the entire team's capacity to provide high-quality, informed support to students.

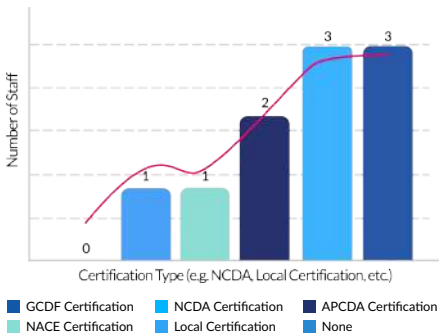


Image 5. Common Professional Certifications Among Career Centre Staff: NCDA and Local Certifications

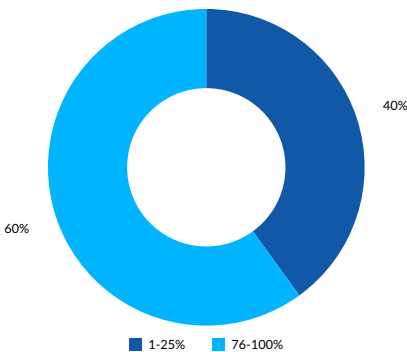


Image 6. 60% of career centres have 76-100% of staff certified, while 40% have only 1-25% certified



3. Service Delivery and Student Engagement: Bridging the Intention-Action Gap

The modes of service delivery and student engagement vary widely across institutions, as career centres face the dual challenges of engaging Generation Z students and navigating their increasingly packed academic curriculums. These challenges contribute to a clear gap between services offered and actual participation, which is confirmed by survey data. At 66.7% of institutions, only 25-50% of undergraduates use career services before graduating. This highlights the persistent “intention-action gap” and the need for more systematic strategies to sustain engagement.

A university from Hong Kong provides tailored programmes and employer engagement for Business students but struggles to reach certain cohorts, particularly those in demanding 1-1.5 year MBA programmes, due to their short stays and heavy workloads. A university from Macao integrates career development into student life through Residential Colleges and GCDF-trained academic staff, supplementing engagement with activities like “Tea with Professors.”

Case Study: University of Macau



An Integrated Service Delivery Model

A significant challenge for centralised career centres is ensuring their services are both visible and relevant from the very beginning of a student's journey. University of Macau has addressed this by embedding career support directly into the student life ecosystem. The university has invested in training its Residential College staff where all first-year undergraduates are required to stay, to become GCDF-certified career coaches. This strategic move embeds foundational career planning and development into the core first-year experience, making it an integral part of university life rather than a separate, optional service. By doing so, the institution effectively decentralises support and integrates it into the students' daily environment, fostering early engagement and a campus-wide culture of career-readiness.

This integrated approach extends to catering for diverse student aspirations that go beyond immediate employment. The university runs a “Tea with Professors” programme, a year-round initiative specifically designed to advise students on pursuing further studies. These sessions are conducted in small, intimate group settings, allowing students to gain direct insights from academic staff with experience in postgraduate admissions. By leveraging its own academic talent, the institution provides specialised guidance for a crucial student segment whose needs may not be fully met by traditional, employment-focused services. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a sophisticated model where career development becomes a shared, cross-departmental responsibility.

Another university from Hong Kong uses a multi-channel approach, offering coaching, workshops and employer relations activities tailored to disciplines, resulting in moderate but steady engagement with over half of undergraduates participating. Another university from Macao relies on high-visibility events such as Career Fairs and Greater Bay Area tours, measuring engagement through attendance rather than coaching appointments. Support for international students is also provided through guidance towards global opportunities.

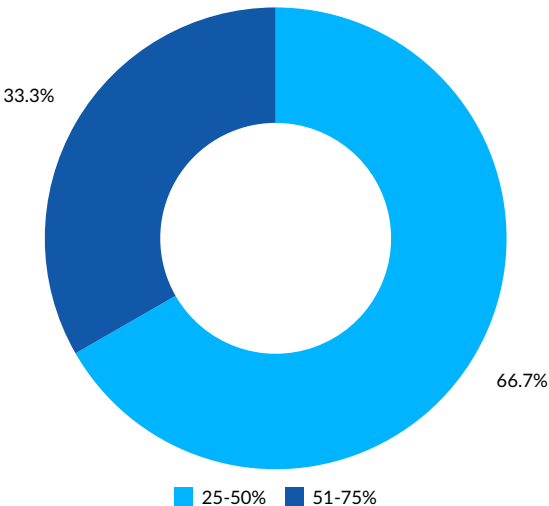


Image 7. 66.7% of career centres report that only 25-50% of undergraduates use career services before graduation, while 33.3% see slightly higher use at 51-75%

4. The Technology Deficit: Systems, Data, and Digitalisation

Survey data highlights that 57.1% of universities currently do not use a comprehensive career management platform, yet the same proportion plan to implement new systems within two years, with a focus on **AI features for CV review and mock interviews**. This finding is part of a broader landscape where technology remains a critical but unevenly addressed dimension of career services across Hong Kong and Macao.

Universities in Hong Kong and Macao are increasingly using technology to bolster their career services. Our analysis shows that tech adoption is strongest in fundamental areas. Almost all institutions have a digital **Career Opportunities Portal**, with tools such as **Resume Review**, **Mock Interview**, and **Virtual Career Fair** platforms. Robust **Coaching and Case Management system** and **Mentorship Program Management** are also in place. Beyond these basics, some universities are implementing more specialised tools. For example, a university in Hong Kong uses **Data Analytics and Reporting** to assess service effectiveness, and a public university in Macao has an **Internship and Industry Projects Management** portal.

This unevenness is often characterised by a hybrid approach, where institutions supplement their core in-house platforms with specialised third-party tools. A case in point is the University of Macau, which utilises its own website for organising career fairs whilst also providing students with a dedicated **self-assessment tool**, *vocationalcompass.com*, which is developed by a faculty member of the university, to support their career exploration.

Many universities adopt career management platforms from vendors outside the Asia-Pacific region. The university utilises an Australian-based platform, reflecting its awareness and early adoption of technology's importance in career services.

Building on this foundation, the university's strategy is now focused on continuous adaptation to new technology to enhance student engagement and improve service impact. Key priorities include integrating more localised features such as Cantonese and Mandarin support and WeChat integration, alongside enhancing data tracking to better follow the post-graduation career journeys of students.

A university from Macao still favours offline services but recognises limitations in student-opportunity matching and the lack of AI-enabled tools such as automated CV review and mock interviews. Meanwhile, a university in Hong Kong has yet to adopt a dedicated career platform but invests in training staff to use AI tools for productivity and seeks broader digital solutions. Another university from Macao remains traditional, relying on manual and face-to-face engagement, though it is conscious of the need to improve alumni employment data collection.

How AI Can Close the Gap

AI-driven solutions can help close this gap by reducing administrative workload, improving student-opportunity matching and enabling career staff to focus on personalised coaching and employer engagement. Platforms such as Kinobi AI illustrate how centralising opportunities and automating workflows can streamline processes, creating more seamless experience for students, staff and employers.



Image 8. Tech adoption in universities with Kinobi's Career Services Management System

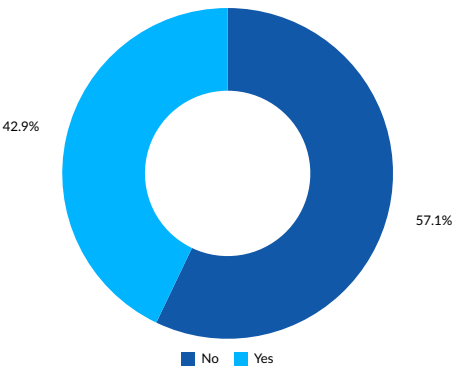


Image 9. 42.9% of career centres use comprehensive career management platforms, while 57.1% do not

Social Media Use in University Career Centres in Hong Kong

The way university career centres use social media shows a clear preference for everyday networks. Facebook is the most widely used platform, with 42.9% of career centres using it to connect with students, followed by Instagram at 28.6%. What's notable is that LinkedIn, the main platform for professional networking, is only used by 14.3% of centres. This suggests a major missed chance to give students direct links to job-specific information, alumni contacts, and companies in a more professional setting.

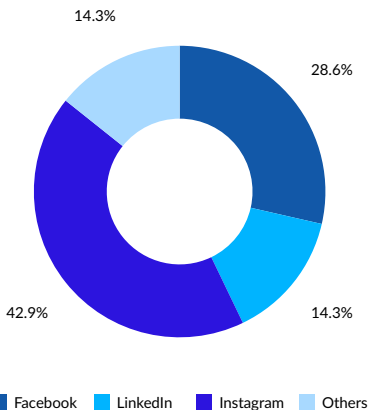


Image 10. Social media used by universities career centre

Sharpened Recommendations and Strategic Imperatives

1 Shift from Activity to Outcome Metrics

Challenge: Many career centres continue to track activity rather than impact, which limits their ability to demonstrate real value.

Recommendation: Implement robust outcome-based metrics: graduate employment rates, quality of employment, internship conversion, and long-term career progression. This clarifies value, secures support, and refines services.

2 Adopt AI-Enabled Career Systems Within 3 Years

Challenge: Technology limitations and manual processes continue to consume valuable staff time, diverting resources away from direct student engagement and strategic employer relations.

Recommendation: Prioritise AI-enabled career management systems to automate tasks, provide personalised guidance (AI coaching, resume reviews), facilitate matching, and offer data analytics. A phased, three-year implementation ensures seamless integration and staff upskilling.

3 Proactive, Tailored Support for Diverse Student Populations

Challenge: Engaging diverse students, especially undergraduates, is difficult due to short programmes, heavy workloads, and cultural differences.

Recommendation: Develop proactive and culturally sensitive engagement strategies that include online resources, integrated career planning such as the Residential College programmes at a university in Macau, and WeChat integration. Tailored programmes for students that address local job markets and Greater Bay Area opportunities are also crucial.

4 Professionalise Staff and Foster Continuous Development

Challenge: Continuous professional development and formal training are needed for career centre staff.

Recommendation: Invest in comprehensive professional development, such as NCDA (e.g., CDA/CCSP) or GCDF certification, structured new hire training, and a culture of continuous learning. Equip staff with advanced coaching, data literacy, and new career technologies.

5 Strengthen Employer Relations and Industry Integration

Challenge: Building strong and strategic industry relationships for relevant student opportunities is challenging.

Recommendation: Develop a proactive employer engagement model: cultivate deep industry relationships, facilitate industry-specific programmes, and streamline employer-student connections. Leverage technology for relationship management and outcome tracking.



Conclusion

Career centres at universities across Hong Kong and Macao are led by committed professionals, yet they now find themselves at a critical juncture. Confronted with the unique expectations of Generation Z alongside structural challenges such as uneven staff-to-student ratios, technological limitations, and persistently low student engagement, their current operating models are proving insufficient. A clear disconnect between services offered and actual outcomes, reflected in high levels of graduate underemployment, underscores the urgency of strategic reform.

The path forward requires more than incremental improvement, it demands fundamental change. This means shifting from activity-based reporting to outcome-driven metrics, adopting AI-enabled career systems to enhance efficiency and personalisation, professionalising staff to strengthen the quality of guidance, and developing tailored strategies to better engage diverse student groups. Together, these steps form a practical roadmap for long-term transformation.

By pursuing this agenda, universities can reframe their career centres from supportive units into strategic pillars of institutional success. Doing so will not only empower graduates with the skills, insights, and opportunities they need for the future workforce but will also secure the relevance and competitiveness of higher education across Hong Kong and Macau in the years to come.



About the Publishers



Kinobi AI

Kinobi AI is an AI-powered career management and student success platform for higher education institutions that digitises career centre workflows, connects students with job and internship opportunities, and provides tools for career development like AI resume builder and mentorship programmes. The platform aims to improve student outcomes and campus success by reducing administrative workload for universities and providing students with the skills and resources needed for career readiness.



Hong Kong Life Planning Association (LPAHK)

The Hong Kong Life Planning Association (LPAHK), Hong Kong's first and only non-profit-making organisation dedicated to the practical application of life planning and career development education. It was founded by a cadre of visionary individuals passionate about educational advancement and youth development. Acknowledged by the government, diverse public and private foundations, funders, and over 600 schools alongside service and partner entities, we proffer professional, multifaceted services and programmes for youth and schools, inspiring young people to "cognise, achieve, and contribute," whilst cultivating inter-sectoral synergy to enrich formal education.



Life Development Institute

Life Development Institute, Hong Kong's first and only professional organisation and recognised charity for life and career development training and ecosystem expansion, embodies the ethos "Design my way, Develop my career, Devote my life." Partnership with NCDA and multinational institutions to deliver credential courses, trainings and continuing education, we gather international experts and practitioners to offer practical opportunities and services. Through accredited programmes, sectoral support, career counselling, and awareness promotion, we aspire to realise talent maximation, fostering fulfilling lives and sustainable communities.



Asia Pacific Career Development Association (APCDA)

Asia Pacific Career Development Association (APCDA) is a regional forum for sharing career development ideas and practices, fostering collaboration among practitioners, inspiring research-driven services, and advocating for inclusive workforce policies across the Asia Pacific and beyond.