

Birmingham City University – labour market analysis 2025

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This report examines graduates who left university in the 2022-2023 academic year and were surveyed at the end of 2024. For the sake of brevity, Birmingham City University will generally be abbreviated to BCU throughout.

The UK labour market endured a noticeable downturn in the second half of 2024 (which persisted until at least summer 2025, although at the time of writing data suggests that the market may be plateauing for the time being). This downturn appears to be from a combination of factors, but three very significant ones seem to be; a natural regression to the mean after an unusually strong post-COVID market; the impact of National Insurance and National Living Wage rises in the 2024 Budget (although the main effect of this was likely post-survey) and the very substantial disruption to early career recruitment caused by the introduction of generative AI to the process.

The Graduate Outcomes analysis is based on a population of 2455 UK domiciled Birmingham City University first degree graduates, and 815 taught postgraduates who graduated in 2022/23 and who responded to the survey. 2025 first degree graduates, and 725 taught postgraduates were known to be employed at the end of 2024, fifteen months after graduation.

57.8 per cent of graduates from the institution were originally from the West Midlands Combined Authority and 70.2 per cent from the wider West Midlands. In all, 34.9 per cent of all BCU graduates in this cohort were from Birmingham, 6.2 per cent from Sandwell, 4.4 per cent from Walsall, 4.3 per cent from Staffordshire and 3.7 per cent from Dudley.

More graduates from the West Midlands region went to BCU than to any other institution – 10.5 per cent of all first degree graduates in 2022/23 from the West Midlands got their degree from BCU (the next largest is Wolverhampton at 6.5 per cent). 15.9 per cent of all graduates originally from the West Midlands Combined Authority, and 22.2 per cent of all graduates originally from Birmingham went to the institution.

More graduates from Birmingham, Sandwell, Solihull and, further afield, Lichfield, attended BCU than any other institution, and only Wolverhampton University produced more graduates from Walsall, Dudley, Wolverhampton and South Staffordshire, whilst BCU came third to the local institutions of Coventry and Warwick in Coventry.

2025 BCU graduates were known to be employed after 15 months, but only 985 BCU first degree graduates have employment locations matched to local authority district, or 48.7 per cent of all employed BCU graduates. This means we can accurately map employment location down to the level of the WMCA for most employed graduates, but are underestimating graduate numbers employed in individual locations within the WMCA, particularly Birmingham. Over 40 per cent of the institution's first degree graduates are known to have entered work in Birmingham, and this is likely a significant underestimate of the true figure.

Only around one in six new graduates in the WMCA started work in SMEs in this time period; Birmingham City University's SME employment level is very similar to the overall average.

Overview

This document examines the data around the 2022-23 graduating cohort from Birmingham City University, and the labour market context in which they graduate. The purpose of this analysis is to examine local supply and demand to and from universities, how and where the institution fits into the local labour market, to establish how the institution's provision meets local skills demand and to look at how and why the local labour market in 2024 may have been difficult.

For the rest of the document, Birmingham City University will be referred to as 'the University' or 'BCU'.

The analysis uses Graduate Outcomes data to examine the outcomes of graduates. Other datasets used include Office of National Statistics data from the Annual Population Survey (APS) and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). ONS data sources are open source and publicly accessible; data references are offered so that analysts and staff can access them.

The Graduate Outcomes analysis is based on a population of 2455 UK domiciled Birmingham City University first degree graduates, and 815 taught postgraduates who graduated in 2022/23 and who responded to the survey. 2025 first degree graduates, and 725 taught postgraduates were known to be employed at the end of 2024, fifteen months after graduation.

Where graphs of occupations are made, the employment groups used are those Jisc uses in 'What Do Graduates Do?'¹, and is based on Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC)

¹ <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/what-do-graduates-do>

Where did Birmingham City University graduates originally come from?

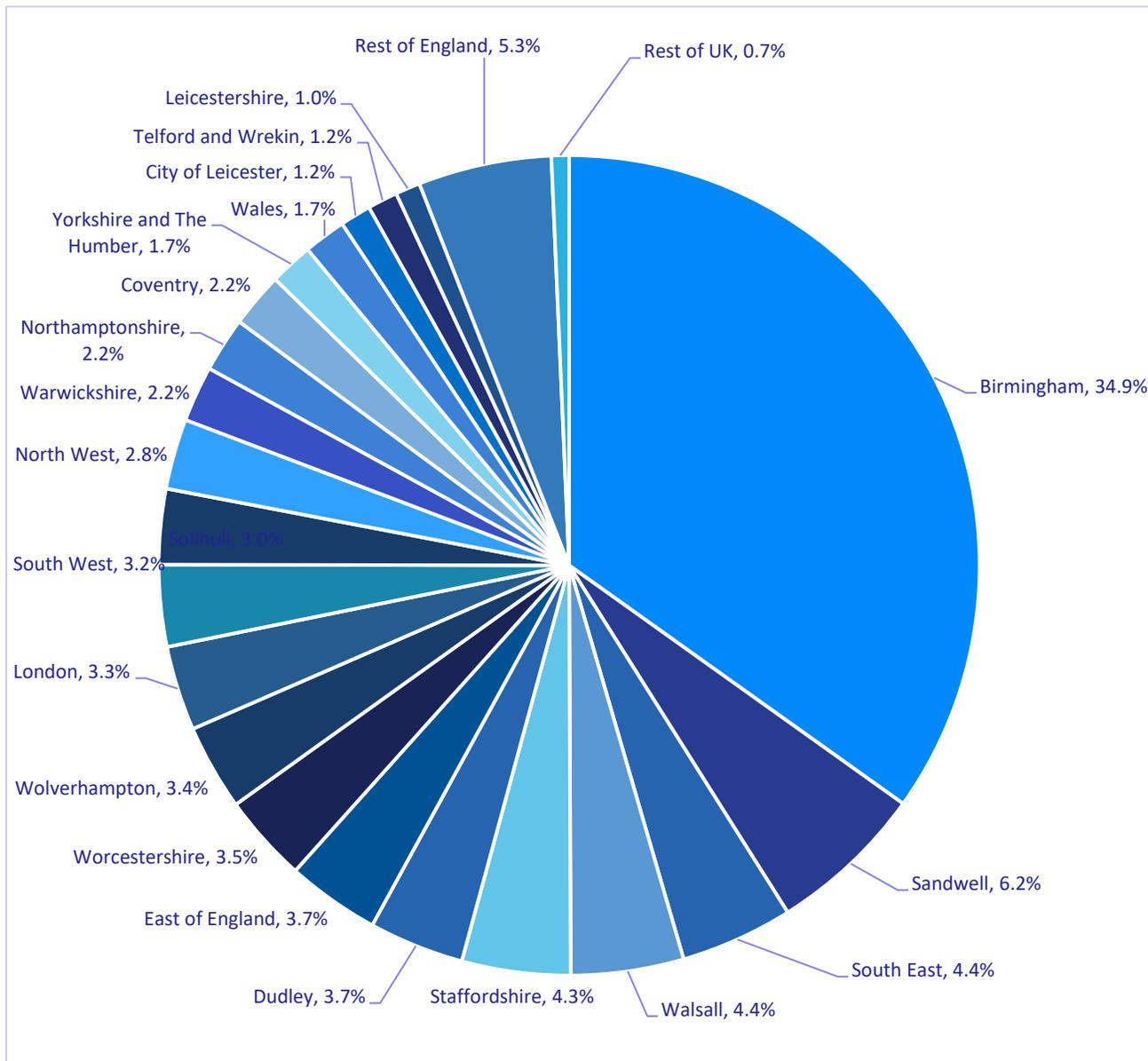


FIGURE 1: WHERE WERE BCU FIRST DEGREE GRADUATES ORIGINALLY FROM?

Most universities in the UK draw their students from relatively close to the institution and BCU is no exception. 57.8 per cent of graduates from the institution were originally from the West Midlands Combined Authority and 70.2 per cent from the wider West Midlands. In all, 34.9 per cent of all BCU graduates in this cohort were from Birmingham, 6.2 per cent from Sandwell, 4.4 per cent from Walsall, 4.3 per cent from Staffordshire and 3.7 per cent from Dudley.

Figures are not dissimilar for other levels of qualifications albeit with lower sample sizes. 33.2 per cent of BCU's PGT cohort and 32.1 per cent of other undergraduates were originally from Birmingham, much the most important recruitment market for the institution.

Original domicile	Proportion of first degree graduates from 2022-2023 who hailed from the area who went to BCU	Ranking of BCU for number of graduates from that LAD
Birmingham	22.2%	1
Sandwell	15.6%	1
Walsall	13.1%	2
Dudley	11.6%	2
Solihull	11.5%	1
Wolverhampton	10.3%	2
South Staffordshire	9.9%	2
Lichfield	9.0%	1
Coventry	6.5%	3

TABLE 1 – IMPORTANT LOCAL AUTHORITY DISTRICTS FROM WHICH BCU RECRUITS STUDENTS WHO BECOME EMPLOYED GRADUATES.

BCU is a large institution and more graduates from the West Midlands region went to BCU than to any other institution – 10.5 per cent of all first degree graduates in 2022/23 from the West Midlands got their degree from BCU (the next largest is Wolverhampton at 6.5 per cent). 15.9 per cent of all graduates originally from the West Midlands Combined Authority, and 22.2 per cent of all graduates originally from Birmingham went to the institution.

More graduates from Birmingham, Sandwell, Solihull and, further afield, Lichfield, attended BCU than any other institution, and only Wolverhampton University produced more graduates from Walsall, Dudley, Wolverhampton and South Staffordshire, whilst BCU came third to the local institutions of Coventry and Warwick in Coventry. This institution is by any measure a crucial part of the educational structure of the whole West Midlands and particularly to Birmingham and the areas near the city.

The labour market for BCU graduates.

2025 BCU graduates were known to be employed after 15 months. A relatively large proportion of BCU first degree graduates provided little or no information about their employment – 15.7 per cent of those in work provided no employment location (and the large majority of those didn't provide occupational information either). This means that 1675 BCU graduates had a known UK employment location after fifteen months. Of those, 1670 were working in the UK. Of this 1670, a full 41 per cent provided only partial postcode data which means that there are 410 graduates employed in the West Midlands who cannot be matched them with an employment location any more detailed than with the WMCA – the likelihood is that the large majority of these graduates are working in the city of Birmingham (a similar issue exists for data in other combined authorities, which has a particularly severe impact on data for the cities of Leeds and Manchester). Birmingham is, of course, the second largest graduate labour market in the UK, although as Manchester has a higher proportion of professional level jobs as part of the total workforce, the two labour markets are very closely matched.

In total, 985 BCU first degree graduates have employment locations matched to local authority district, or 48.7 per cent of all employed BCU graduates, but the issues with partial postcode data means the following section is likely to be quite accurate at unitary authority level (which means we have a good idea what proportion of the sample are working in the WMCA), but almost certainly significantly underestimates the proportion of graduates working in Birmingham proper – the numbers involved suggest that there could be twice as many BCU graduates working in Birmingham as is currently reported. An examination of the numbers for local institutions suggests that this is a widespread issue, but that BCU seems to be one of the more affected locally. Consequently, the full Graduate Outcomes dataset is likely to represent BCU's contribution to the whole WMCA labour market quite well, but underestimate the institution's supply to the Birmingham labour market. The institution *is*, nevertheless, the largest supplier of graduates to the city of Birmingham, but the institution's main competitors have a slightly lower level of partial work address reporting.

Only around one in six new graduates in the WMCA started work in SMEs in this time period; Birmingham City University's SME employment level is very similar to the overall average.

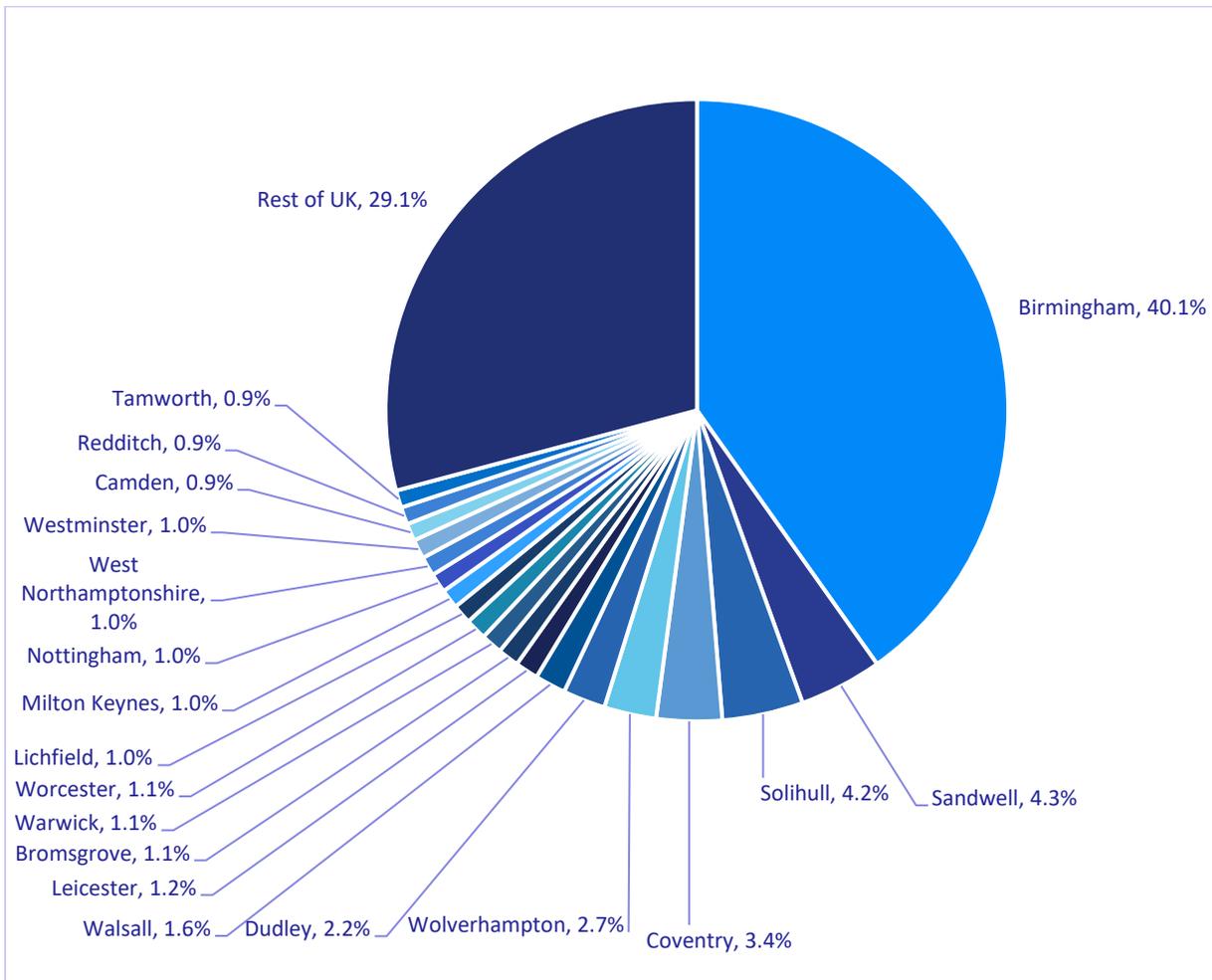


FIGURE 2: WHERE DID BCU FIRST DEGREE GRADUATES GO TO WORK?

Over 40 per cent of the institution's first degree graduates went to work in Birmingham, and as mentioned this is likely a significant underestimate. Birmingham is a uniquely strong graduate labour market in the Midlands, and BCU is comfortably the largest supplier of new graduates to the city. The most important labour markets outside the city are the rest of the WMCA, particularly in Solihull and Sandwell. In each of Birmingham, Solihull and Sandwell, more new graduates from each area attended BCU than any other institution, and BCU supplied more graduates than any other institution to each labour market.

The labour markets in which Birmingham City University operates

Birmingham (city proper)

Number of employees with RQF4+ in 2024: 265,200 – 55.4% of working population (APS)

Number of employees in SOCs 1 -3: 270,300 – 54% of workforce (APS)

Total workforce: 500,600 (479,000 with known qualifications) (APS)

Median salary for full time worker in 2025: £38,556 (ASHE)

APS professional workforce breakdown:

Occupational group	Number of employees at end of 2024
11: corporate managers and directors	23,800
12: other managers and proprietors	9,700
21: science, research, engineering and technology	38,100
22: health	40,400
23: teaching and educational professionals	32,500
24: business, media and public service	49,500
31: science, engineering and technology associate	6,200
32: health & social care assoc.	13,800
33: protective service occupations	5,600
34: culture, media and sports occupations	15,100
35: business & public service assoc.	35,600

(N/A does not mean there are no professional roles, it does mean there were not enough to register in the Annual Population Survey data)

TABLE 2 – PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE IN BIRMINGHAM IN 2024

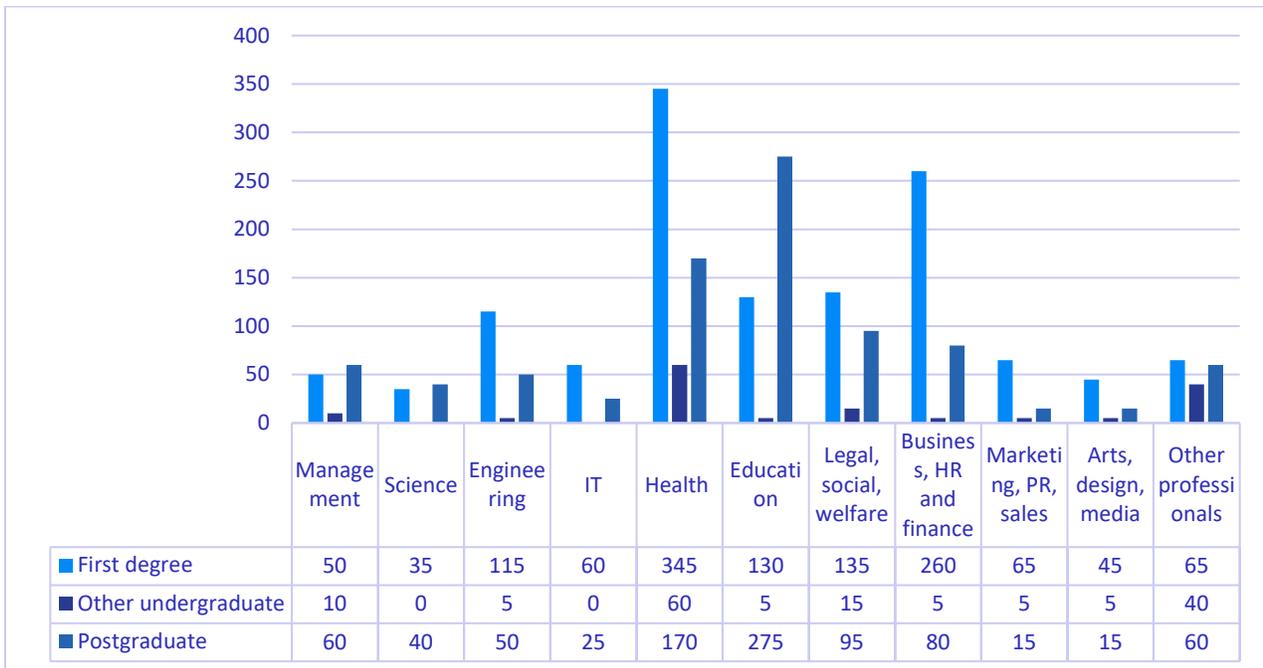


FIGURE 3: JOBS GRADUATES FROM 2022-23 WERE KNOWN TO BE DOING IN BIRMINGHAM AFTER 15 MONTHS

1845 first degree graduates were known to be working in Birmingham in graduate level employment 15 months after they graduated in the 2022-23 academic year. Given the response rate of Graduate Outcomes and the issues with location coding, it is likely that at least 3,500 graduate level jobs were available to new graduates for this cohort, with around 19 per cent of the total jobs market being health roles and another 14 per cent in business, HR and finance.

Birmingham's labour market is a little different to the other large urban graduate labour markets in England – London, Manchester and Leeds – with slightly more public sector and engineering, and smaller IT; marketing, PR and sales; and arts labour markets (although they are still substantial due to the sheer size of Birmingham). Like the other main graduate employment cities, Birmingham also has a large and thriving business services labour market, although it doesn't currently create as many new graduate opportunities as the slightly smaller health jobs market, which suffers more from occupational shortages.

Birmingham City University was the largest supplier of first degree graduates from 2022/23 to Birmingham, with 21.3 per cent of all new graduates known to have started work in the city coming from the institution (Birmingham University was second with 13.9 per cent) and the second largest supplier of taught postgraduates, with 17.5 per cent of all new PGT starters to Birmingham University's 23.5 per cent. **Aston University was third in both cases** with 11.1 per cent of new graduate starters and 7.7 per cent of new taught postgraduate starters.

Sandwell

Number of employees with RQF4+ in 2023: 50,000 –35% of working population (APS)

Number of employees in SOCs 1 -3: 49,700– 32.7% of workforce (APS)

Total workforce: 151,900 (142,900 with known qualifications) (APS)

Median salary for full time worker in 2025: £33,636 (ASHE)

APS professional workforce breakdown:

Occupational group	Number of employees at end of 2024
11: corporate managers and directors	6,100
12: other managers and proprietors	4,000
21: science, research, engineering and technology	9,100
22: health	4,200
23: teaching and educational professionals	5,500
24: business, media and public service	8,400
31: science, engineering and technology associate	n/a
32: health & social care assoc.	3,100
33: protective service occupations	2,300
34: culture, media and sports occupations	n/a
35: business & public service assoc.	7,000

(N/A does not mean there are no professional roles, it does mean there were not enough to register in the Annual Population Survey data)

TABLE 3 – PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE IN SANDWELL IN 2024

Sandwell is not a large labour market, and has a relatively low level of graduate level employment, with around a third of the workforce in professional level jobs. ‘Relatively small’ still translates to ‘around 50,000 graduate jobs’ though, and notably Sandwell’s small graduate labour market is quite slanted towards jobs in business and tech. That doesn’t really translate through to new graduate opportunities, however at the moment, with the main drivers of graduate entry being public sector jobs in health, education and social care, but it does suggest that the foundations for a stronger graduate jobs market may already be at least partly in place.

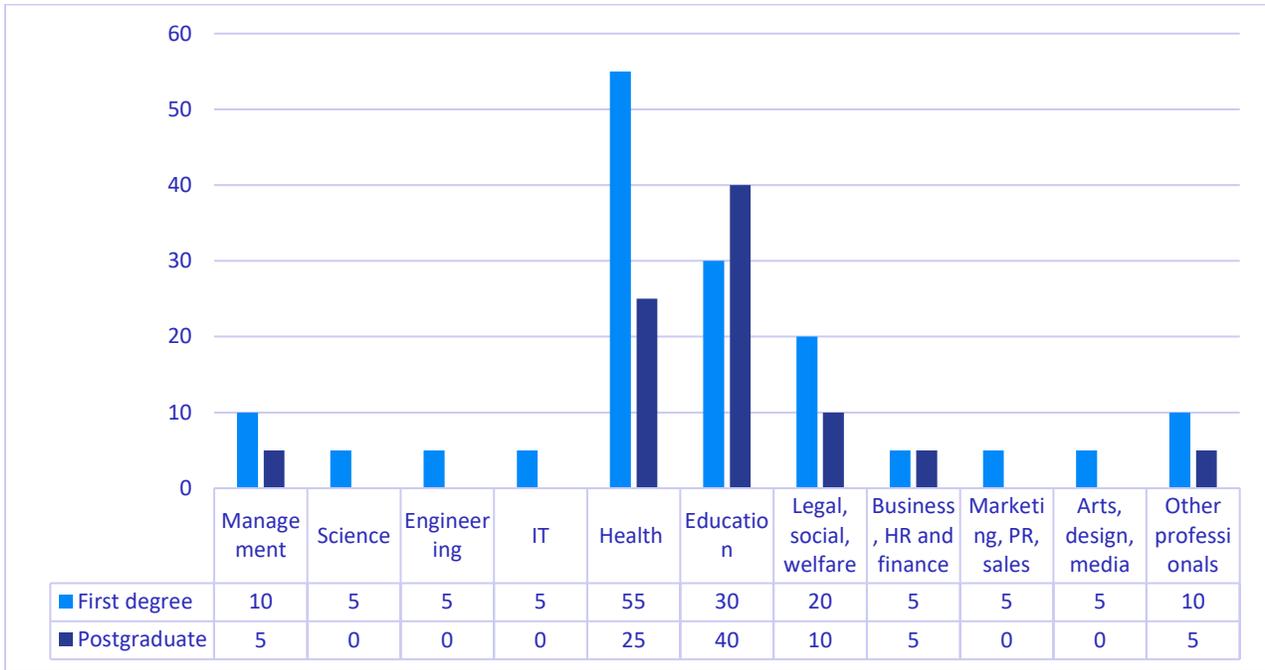


FIGURE 4: JOBS GRADUATES FROM 2022-23 WERE KNOWN TO BE DOING IN SANDWELL AFTER 15 MONTHS

The Sandwell graduate jobs market for new entrants was not strong in 2022/23, with around 160 graduates known to have gained professional level roles in the town. Response rates suggest that a rough rule would be around 300 jobs a year here for new graduates, mainly in the public sector. Teaching was the most common job, and GPs, nurses and housing officers also prominent. There were a wide range of roles available but very small numbers in each, making guidance a challenge.

Birmingham City University was the largest supplier of first degree graduates from 2022/23 to Sandwell, with 18.1 per cent of all new graduates known to have started work in Sandwell coming from the institution. Wolverhampton University was second with 13.4 per cent. Aston supplied 7.8 per cent of new first degree graduates and Birmingham University 5.2 per cent.

BCU was the second largest supplier of PGT to Sandwell, albeit to a very small local labour market, primarily of teachers and health professionals such as physiotherapists. BCU supplied 14.6 per cent of new PGT entrants to Sandwell, compared to Birmingham University’s 31.3 per cent. Aston supplied 2.8 per cent of new PGT entrants to Sandwell.

Solihull

Number of employees with RQF4+ in 2024: 48,900 – 50.6% of working population (APS)

Number of employees in SOCs 1 -3: 57,200 – 55.8% of workforce (APS)

Total workforce: 102,600 (96,600 with known qualifications) (APS)

Median salary in 2025: £42,587 (ASHE)

APS professional workforce breakdown:

Occupational group	Number of employees at end of 2024
11: corporate managers and directors	8,600
12: other managers and proprietors	3,300
21: science, research, engineering and technology	9,400
22: health	5,900
23: teaching and educational professionals	4,800
24: business, media and public service	9,400
31: science, engineering and technology associate	n/a
32: health & social care assoc.	900
33: protective service occupations	2,600
34: culture, media and sports occupations	1,100
35: business & public service assoc.	11,200

(N/A does not mean there are no professional roles, it does mean there were not enough to register in the Annual Population Survey data)

TABLE 4 – PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE IN SOLIHULL IN 2024

Solihull has a smaller labour market overall than Sandwell, but it has a much stronger professional services and tech focus and so has more graduate jobs. Nearly 56 per cent of the workforce in Solihull is in professional level employment, but only 51.6 per cent has HE level qualifications, which suggests that there may be opportunities there. Local salaries are also high according to ASHE data, although we would suggest caution as 2024 data suggested a figure much closer to Birmingham’s and there may be revisions to this figure. To be safe, we would treat Solihull’s local salaries as on a par with Birmingham’s but a little higher than the rest of the WMCA with weaker graduate labour markets.

Solihull’s stronger graduate labour market compared with the ostensibly larger Sandwell jobs market is also evident for 2022/23 graduates.

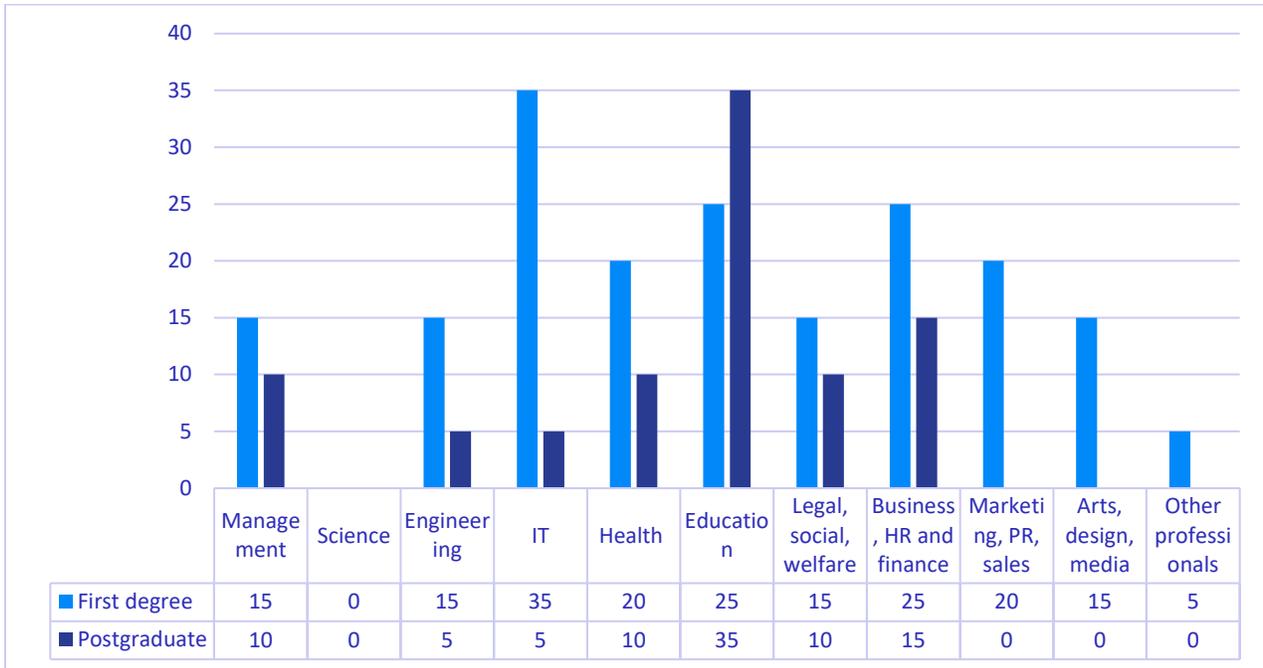


FIGURE 5: JOBS GRADUATES FROM 2022-23 WERE KNOWN TO BE DOING IN SOLIHULL AFTER 15 MONTHS

Around 260 first degree graduates and 110 PGT from 2022/23 were known to have found work in Solihull after 15 months. Again, response rates suggest the total pool of available jobs in a given year could be around twice that, meaning Solihull has a respectable labour market for new graduate starters and is worth some attention. What is particularly interesting is that the most common job for new graduates in Solihull in this cohort was not teaching or nursing, but software development and coding (with cyber and information security professionals, coded as separate roles, also significant) – and this in a generally weak year for IT for new graduates in the UK. Coding was also important at PG level but overshadowed, as expected, by teaching. HR, marketing and mechanical engineering jobs also appeared as more common options alongside the usual public sector jobs in health, education and social care. Solihull does not have a typical non-urban labour market.

Birmingham City University was the largest supplier of first degree graduates from 2022/23 to Solihull, with 15.9 per cent of all new graduates known to have started work in Solihull coming from the institution. Coventry University was second with 12.5 per cent. Birmingham University supplied 7.4 per cent and Aston 6.2 per cent.

BCU was the second largest supplier of PGT to Solihull, with PGT making up a larger than usual proportion of new HE leaver entrants, a sign of the relatively high skills level of the Solihull jobs market. BCU supplied 11.7 per cent of new PGT entrants to Solihull, compared to Birmingham University's 20.7 per cent. Aston supplied 6.4 per cent.

What do Birmingham City University graduates do?

This section examines the outcomes for Birmingham City University, by school, compared with graduates studying the same subject mix overall. Data tables are built by using the HECoS codes for subjects in each BCU school, and then comparing against the UK data for all those specific subjects only (not, for example, all arts subjects, just the very specific subjects BCU offered in 2022/23).

School of Arts

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	49.2%	46.4%	58.2%	52.0%
Part-time employment	24.7%	22.8%	20.0%	24.3%
Voluntary or unpaid work	1.0%	2.0%	0.8%	1.3%
Employment and further study	8.8%	9.6%	7.3%	7.9%
Further study	4.3%	5.3%	1.6%	2.6%
Unemployed	7.5%	7.3%	2.4%	4.3%
Other	4.5%	6.6%	9.7%	7.5%

TABLE 5 – WHAT DO BCU’S SCHOOL OF ARTS GRADUATES DO?

First degree graduates from this subject group at BCU have broadly similar outcomes to all institution’s graduates. BCU’s graduates are a little less likely to go into further study, and a little more likely to go into work, but outcomes are well aligned with the national average.

At postgraduate level, however, BCU does perform better than the national average, graduates having a superior employment rate and a much lower unemployment rate.

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	1.6%	3.3%	4.7%	4.2%
Science	0.4%	0.9%	3.1%	1.2%
Engineering	2.9%	1.5%	0.0%	1.2%
IT	4.1%	1.8%	4.7%	2.7%
Health	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	1.0%
Education	6.4%	7.7%	20.1%	13.0%
Legal, social, welfare	2.9%	2.1%	5.0%	3.3%
Business, HR and finance	6.9%	4.3%	2.4%	6.7%
Marketing, PR, sales	8.2%	12.0%	7.1%	13.3%
Arts, design, media	22.0%	21.4%	27.2%	24.5%
Other professionals	0.4%	1.1%	0.0%	1.1%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	8.6%	10.6%	7.1%	11.5%
Childcare, health, education occupations	3.6%	4.9%	4.7%	3.3%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	3.1%	3.0%	3.5%	1.7%
Retail, waiting and other customer service	22.7%	19.4%	10.3%	8.7%
Other occupations	6.1%	5.5%	0.0%	2.4%

TABLE 6 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS BCU’S SCHOOL OF ARTS

Occupational data is where we start to see the effects of the Birmingham labour market. Birmingham has a well developed arts labour market and so BCU graduates do better in accessing it than graduates in general. However, BCU graduates don’t seem to be going into creative roles in marketing, PR and sales – often a useful source of creative jobs, especially in cities – in the same numbers that graduates from other institutions do. Birmingham’s marketing and PR sector is not particularly well developed for a city of its size, but it is nevertheless substantial and there may be opportunities there. Also, notable that BCU graduates who don’t secure graduate level employment quickly are less likely to go into office jobs below graduate level, but tend to offer progression opportunities than the average and more likely to go into retail jobs that don’t always offer the same prospects. This is despite Birmingham having a large office sector. It may be that BCU graduates are very keen to get into arts and media roles but don’t always consider the full range of alternative options. This isn’t a hard and fast rule though – the School’s graduates can be found in IT, business support roles and even engineering. BCU’s PGT numbers are not large but again, graduates do relatively well in getting into arts roles, and also roles in education and have a diverse range of outcomes – BCU’s graduates enter jobs in marketing, IT

and even science. There does seem to be an elevated level of retail work for this group, though and that may be worth addressing.

Business School

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	54.5%	60.8%	72.7%	76.3%
Part-time employment	13.6%	9.3%	9.4%	5.8%
Voluntary or unpaid work	1.4%	0.8%	0.0%	0.7%
Employment and further study	10.7%	11.3%	6.9%	8.4%
Further study	3.1%	3.5%	2.2%	0.9%
Unemployed	10.3%	6.9%	4.4%	3.3%
Other	6.4%	7.3%	4.4%	4.6%

TABLE 7 – WHAT DO BCU’S BUSINESS SCHOOL GRADUATES DO?

Outcomes for BCU graduates are not generally as good as for graduates as a whole. In particular, BCU experiences an elevated unemployment rate. The numbers of graduates on each course make it difficult to look at specific courses and the larger cohort sizes for business and management and business show reasonably normal rates (perhaps a little high for business and management), but the relatively large accountancy course does have a high unemployment rate for this cohort. Masters performance is a little below the national average but the sample sizes involved means that it would not take many more full time employed individuals to move the needle here.

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	5.9%	9.1%	17.9%	26.0%
Science	0.0%	0.2%	0.9%	1.0%
Engineering	1.5%	2.2%	6.9%	4.0%
IT	0.0%	2.8%	4.1%	4.7%
Health	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	2.0%
Education	1.4%	2.1%	6.9%	5.1%
Legal, social, welfare	1.5%	1.5%	2.8%	1.8%
Business, HR and finance	21.9%	31.5%	33.1%	27.7%
Marketing, PR, sales	20.7%	15.7%	12.0%	13.2%
Arts, design, media	0.2%	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%
Other professionals	1.0%	1.7%	1.4%	2.3%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	21.1%	13.9%	5.5%	6.2%
Childcare, health, education occupations	1.3%	1.8%	1.4%	0.9%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	1.5%	1.5%	0.0%	0.6%
Retail, waiting and other customer service	12.5%	9.1%	5.0%	2.1%
Other occupations	7.5%	4.5%	1.4%	0.9%

TABLE 8 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS BCU’S BUSINESS SCHOOL

Results here are more nuanced. BCU’s graduates went into a wide range of roles but were notably less likely to enter management positions than graduates from elsewhere and more likely at first degree level to go into Birmingham’s marketing, PR and sales sector (with a good showing in advertising in particular in this cohort) and, at postgraduate level, into business, HR and finance roles. Some of this data is a little difficult to interpret; one striking feature is that of the 70 first degree graduates from this cohort *known* to be working in Birmingham as chartered or certified accountants 15 months after graduation, fewer than 5 were from BCU. But at the same time quite a few BCU graduates working as accountants gave partial postcode data that locates them *somewhere* in the WMCA. Even with that, BCU might be expected to produce more accountants locally, especially as although Birmingham University has the largest number of new accountants, they’re far from dominant. On the other hand, there are also clear successes to learn from. 62 per cent of all new project support officers in Birmingham from this cohort went to BCU, and albeit with a small cohort, BCU also produced the lion’s share of new retail managers.

School of Law and Social Sciences

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	56.6%	57.7%	60.5%	71.1%
Part-time employment	9.3%	9.6%	6.9%	8.4%
Voluntary or unpaid work	2.0%	1.2%	1.6%	0.7%
Employment and further study	9.7%	11.3%	13.1%	9.8%
Further study	4.5%	6.8%	4.6%	1.5%
Unemployed	9.9%	6.3%	6.9%	2.8%
Other	8.0%	7.0%	6.4%	5.7%

TABLE 9 – WHAT DO BCU’S SCHOOL OF LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCE GRADUATES DO?

The institution’s undergraduate course have similar employment rates to the sector as a whole but a lower rate of further study and a higher rate of unemployment. Unemployment rates vary substantially. Amongst the larger courses, criminology has about an average unemployment rate, policing very low, but early childhood studies and law (and to an extent primary teaching) have high unemployment rates. At postgraduate level the difference between local and national figures may be more of a factor of local conditions as BCU graduates are less likely to be in work and more likely to be unemployed or in further study. Almost all the PGT unemployed, however, were in primary teaching which again saw a sharp divide between a majority going straight into work and a minority who were out of work after 15 months – local school recruitment may be a factor, but this does need to be monitored if it is a recurring issue.

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	2.3%	2.5%	2.6%	2.7%
Science	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.3%
Engineering	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.8%
IT	0.5%	0.4%	0.6%	0.4%
Health	0.4%	0.5%	4.5%	5.7%
Education	23.2%	21.4%	55.3%	49.3%
Legal, social, welfare	19.2%	28.4%	20.8%	28.1%
Business, HR and finance	4.8%	5.1%	0.6%	3.0%
Marketing, PR, sales	1.2%	2.1%	0.6%	0.8%
Arts, design, media	0.6%	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%
Other professionals	6.5%	7.8%	4.5%	1.7%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	12.7%	9.7%	2.6%	2.7%
Childcare, health, education occupations	7.7%	7.0%	1.9%	2.0%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	1.1%	0.9%	0.3%	0.1%
Retail, waiting and other customer service	13.8%	9.6%	4.5%	1.2%
Other occupations	4.8%	2.8%	1.3%	0.4%

TABLE 10 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS BCU’S SCHOOL OF LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

BCU does well in educational employment here; although BCU’s primary education courses have elevated unemployment levels, BCU is nevertheless the largest supplier of primary teachers to Birmingham, ahead of Birmingham University and in this cohort supplying 28.6 per cent of all of Birmingham’s new primary teachers, with Newman a little way behind. In fact, it’s the largest supplier of primary teachers to the whole WMCA, and 22 per cent of all new primary school teachers across the whole combined authority attended the institution. There could be gains to be made in Birmingham, but the issue might be that actually the primary teaching jobs market was a little depressed in Birmingham in this cohort and there may also be opportunities for graduates outside the city. There actually seems to be a similar story in law. Birmingham doesn’t actually seem to currently have a particularly large legal labour market anyway and the number of new legal professionals recruited in the city in total was low. This came to 75 new graduates in law, 65 legal professionals, and 10 legal associate professionals, in total, although another 60 in total gave partial postcode data for the WMCA last year. As a comparison, Manchester, which also has partial postcode issues, had 130 new jobs in law last year. With a relatively large law course, the institution may have to consider looking outside the city for opportunities. Something different happened with the policing course; although graduates found work, it was largely not at

graduate level and policing recruitment in Birmingham was dominated in this cohort by Staffordshire University. That said, an unusual number of graduates of this course working as police officers returned partial postcode data and so although it wouldn't be enough to overturn Staffordshire's lead in recruitment in the city if they were all actually in Birmingham, it would make the contest much closer.

We have a similar issue in social work – BCU is a significant supplier to the WMCA labour market, on a par with Wolverhampton and a little behind Birmingham and Coventry, but it's not entirely clear where in the WMCA the graduates are working.

School of Architecture, Built Environment, Computing and Engineering

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	57.1%	63.9%	77.0%	73.2%
Part-time employment	9.1%	10.1%	10.1%	7.4%
Voluntary or unpaid work	1.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%
Employment and further study	11.8%	8.8%	6.7%	9.3%
Further study	5.2%	3.9%	1.5%	1.9%
Unemployed	10.3%	7.3%	0.8%	3.5%
Other	5.6%	5.3%	3.9%	4.1%

TABLE 11 – WHAT DO BCU'S SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, BUILT ENVIRONMENT, COMPUTING AND ENGINEERING DO?

BCU outcomes at first degree level are a little below the overall average. There are two major reasons. The first is that MEng qualifications, which have far better outcomes than BEng, are actually grouped in the first degree qualification category if they are not stand-alone Masters, and they are common at research-intensive institutions. The second is that the IT labour market was particularly difficult in this cohort, and BCU's overall outcomes are quite reliant on computing graduates. If we look in detail, BCU's programming graduates did well, particularly given the market and may even have outperformed the market as a whole, but it was a more difficult year for graduates on information security courses, who had an elevated unemployment rate. It may be worth examining if there are more interim options for graduates from these courses if they can't secure a security role immediately as their overall skills package should be in demand.

It was a different story at PGT level where BCU graduates comfortably outperformed the national average, with a particularly low unemployment rate. Nearly a quarter of all BCU's postgraduates at the school took architecture, which had excellent outcomes.

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	4.2%	3.6%	4.8%	5.4%
Science	1.3%	0.5%	1.6%	0.8%
Engineering	30.7%	36.7%	50.4%	38.2%
IT	23.4%	29.7%	17.1%	28.1%
Health	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%
Education	2.4%	1.3%	2.9%	2.4%
Legal, social, welfare	0.0%	0.6%	0.4%	1.4%
Business, HR and finance	6.0%	4.6%	5.7%	11.0%
Marketing, PR, sales	2.4%	1.6%	0.0%	1.9%
Arts, design, media	3.6%	3.8%	2.9%	2.2%
Other professionals	0.2%	1.4%	7.6%	2.0%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	5.2%	3.1%	1.9%	1.8%
Childcare, health, education occupations	1.9%	0.7%	1.0%	0.4%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	2.2%	2.0%	0.0%	0.8%
Retail, waiting and other customer service	7.2%	6.7%	3.8%	2.3%
Other occupations	8.7%	3.6%	0.0%	1.1%

TABLE 12 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS BCU’S SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, BUILT ENVIRONMENT, COMPUTING AND ENGINEERING

The balance of student numbers affects the way this data looks; at undergraduate level BCU has proportionally more IT graduates than the average and IT had a difficult year, and the Birmingham labour market looks to have had a particularly weak IT labour market – fewer than 100 graduates overall from this cohort from all institutions are known to have found work in the West Midlands as coders or programmers this time around, a very low number, and at best only half were in Birmingham. The comparatively smaller Solihull labour market seems to have held up better, but although BCU is the largest supplier of graduates to Solihull in general, in one of the area’s key strengths, IT, it is not recorded as supplying any new graduate coders last year. There looks to have been a mismatch between the aspirations of the cohort and the realities of the labour market and if Birmingham’s IT labour market weakness persists this group may need more support than originally anticipated to be able to take advantage of good opportunities outside the city proper. Engineering courses largely did well,

though. Birmingham as a city has a better engineering labour market than similar sized cities and the course mix looks well suited to the local labour market.

School of Life and Health Sciences

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	54.5%	51.3%	62.5%	62.5%
Part-time employment	11.7%	12.2%	13.8%	14.0%
Voluntary or unpaid work	0.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.9%
Employment and further study	11.2%	12.6%	11.8%	12.5%
Further study	7.5%	9.2%	3.3%	2.3%
Unemployed	8.6%	5.9%	2.6%	2.0%
Other	5.8%	7.1%	5.9%	5.9%

TABLE 13 – WHAT DO BCU’S SCHOOL OF LIFE AND HEALTH SCIENCE GRADUATES DO?

BCU graduates were more likely to be in full time work than the average, but less likely to be in further study and more likely to be unemployed. BCU has a large psychology course and outcomes for psychology are not quite as favourable as graduates as a whole, with a notably elevated unemployment rate, and this is the main contributor to these figures. There is not a large labour market for psychologists as such, but psychology graduates possess a wide range of skills that employers appreciate and so they tend to a wide range of non-psychology options to choose from if they are aware of those options. The local labour market for first degree graduates in biomedical sciences was also not very strong in Birmingham and what roles that were available for this cohort tended not to go to BCU first degree graduates. Like psychologists, though, they do have a range of useful skills that are valuable outside their immediate specialism.

Graduates on specialist courses like diagnostic imaging and speech therapy had excellent outcomes; both occupations are in shortage, and the labour market tends to be limited more by the ability of local NHS trusts to fund recruitment rather than the real significant demand for these roles. This is the case for many, if not all, specialist healthcare professionals, but it does mean that recruitment may be vulnerable to issues outside the institution’s control. In 2025 many trusts have faced recruitment freezes due to budget constraints so this needs to be monitored in the future – the data suggests that under normal circumstances local employers are keen to employ BCU graduates in these disciplines.

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	1.4%	3.1%	5.8%	5.1%
Science	2.7%	4.7%	0.8%	3.0%
Engineering	1.7%	1.5%	0.0%	0.9%
IT	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.8%
Health	37.4%	27.3%	50.4%	52.7%
Education	6.6%	6.5%	11.6%	6.2%
Legal, social, welfare	6.6%	7.6%	10.7%	10.5%
Business, HR and finance	3.1%	5.1%	4.1%	4.8%
Marketing, PR, sales	0.6%	2.9%	0.8%	1.4%
Arts, design, media	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
Other professionals	3.8%	5.1%	2.5%	4.5%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	9.0%	7.9%	4.1%	2.9%
Childcare, health, education occupations	13.0%	13.1%	7.4%	4.6%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	1.5%	1.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Retail, waiting and other customer service	9.4%	9.9%	1.7%	1.3%
Other occupations	3.3%	3.0%	0.0%	0.6%

TABLE 14 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS BCU’S SCHOOL OF LIFE AND HEALTH SCIENCES

BCU’s health graduates do well in the labour market – in particular the large majority of new speech therapists and radiographers – both vital shortage occupations – in the WMCA graduated from BCU and it is no exaggeration to say that the local NHS is reliant on BCU to supply skilled professionals in these roles. As mentioned before there may not be a great many psychologist roles available locally (and many of those available require postgraduate study). This might be discouraging some psychology graduates who may not realise that they have a lot of other options. A very good example is that BCU was the WMCA’s largest supplier of new housing officers (an impactful graduate level role) in this cohort – and most of the BCU graduates who became housing offices had studied psychology. Support for students unsure of their options outside the immediately vocational may be a good way to demonstrate the value of their qualifications in related areas.

School of Nursing and Midwifery

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	67.8%	69.1%	68.8%	67.3%
Part-time employment	13.0%	10.2%	17.2%	13.9%
Voluntary or unpaid work	1.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%
Employment and further study	8.4%	7.8%	3.1%	9.8%
Further study	0.9%	2.5%	0.0%	0.7%
Unemployed	0.9%	2.3%	1.6%	0.5%
Other	7.9%	7.8%	9.4%	7.4%

TABLE 15 – WHAT DO BCU’S SCHOOL OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY GRADUATES DO?

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	1.3%	0.6%	0.0%	2.7%
Science	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.5%
Engineering	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
IT	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Health	94.8%	89.4%	100.0%	89.9%
Education	0.4%	0.8%	0.0%	2.4%
Legal, social, welfare	1.1%	0.6%	0.0%	1.7%
Business, HR and finance	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.6%
Marketing, PR, sales	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%
Arts, design, media	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Other professionals	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.7%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.3%
Childcare, health, education occupations	1.1%	1.8%	0.0%	0.6%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%

Retail, waiting and other customer service	0.3%	1.5%	0.0%	0.1%
Other occupations	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 16 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS BCU’S SCHOOL OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY

The outcomes for the School are excellent, almost all graduates progress into appropriate employment and BCU is easily the most important supplier of nurses of all kinds to the local NHS. 43 per cent of all new nurses across all specialisms in the WMCA from 2022/23 had attended BCU. The next most important supplier was Wolverhampton, with 23 per cent. The ranking is reversed for midwives – Wolverhampton supplied 37.1 per cent of new midwives in the WMCA from this cohort, and BCU 30.6 per cent.

Because BCU’s nursing contingent is so large and so successful, however, it means the university’s overall performance statistics are affected in an outsized way by the success of the School. If there’s a dip in local recruitment, that will have a profound effect on overall performance, and the School’s excellent performance may disguise other areas of weakness in the labour market.

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Activity after 15 months for 2022/23 graduates	BCU first degree	All institutions first degree	BCU PGT	All institution PGT
Full-time employment	42.0%	42.5%	60.4%	45.1%
Part-time employment	30.7%	31.0%	22.7%	39.1%
Voluntary or unpaid work	9.3%	1.8%	0.0%	0.7%
Employment and further study	18.0%	9.3%	17.0%	7.8%
Further study	0.0%	3.2%	0.0%	1.2%
Unemployed	0.0%	6.2%	0.0%	3.5%
Other	0.0%	6.0%	0.0%	2.6%

TABLE 17 – WHAT DO GRADUATES OF THE ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE DO?

Type of work	First degree BCU	First degree all institutions	PGT BCU	PGT all institutions
Management	2.0%	3.2%	5.7%	5.3%
Science	0.0%	0.6%	1.9%	0.1%
Engineering	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.9%
IT	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	1.5%

Health	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	1.3%
Education	28.3%	10.7%	22.7%	16.2%
Legal, social, welfare	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	3.0%
Business, HR and finance	2.0%	3.0%	5.7%	3.6%
Marketing, PR, sales	3.4%	3.8%	1.9%	3.7%
Arts, design, media	21.5%	26.4%	39.6%	33.2%
Other professionals	0.0%	0.7%	5.7%	1.0%
Clerical, secretarial, administrative	16.1%	10.7%	5.7%	11.5%
Childcare, health, education occupations	2.0%	7.6%	5.7%	5.6%
Skilled trades, crafts and other vocational occupations	4.9%	4.5%	0.0%	2.3%
Retail, waiting and other customer service	13.7%	20.3%	0.0%	8.6%
Other occupations	6.3%	6.1%	5.7%	2.3%

TABLE 18 – TYPES OF WORK FOR GRADUATES WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MIX AS THE ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE

Numbers for BCU are not large here as these are specialist and niche graduates. But outcomes for the Conservatoire are very good, and most graduates progress quickly into relevant employment. BCU's high level of education employment is because of a number of graduates entering roles as peripatetic teachers. Notably, 48 per cent of BCU's cohort reported some form of self-employment, and 87.3 per cent of that self-employment was at professional level. Around one in eight of those reporting professional level self-employment had also reported a *main activity* that was employment below professional level, meaning that the way Graduate Outcomes represents employment outcomes underestimates this cohort's true level of professional level employment and this is something to consider.

Institutions supplying to the WMCA graduate labour market – and where there are gaps in local provision

18.2 per cent of undergraduate qualifiers from 2022-23, working in professional level roles in the WMCA after 15 months had attended BCU. BCU supplied the majority of new speech therapists; radiographers; architects; registered community nurses and registered children's nurses to the WMCA in that period, more than a third of all new project support officers; registered mental health nurses; general registered nurses; and CAD/architectural technicians, and more than a quarter of all new IT support technicians; arts officers; quantity surveyors; photographers and AV technicians; midwives; chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and consultants; events managers; legal associate professionals; registered specialist nurses and graphic designers.

BCU supplied less than 10 per cent of the following roles for which there was appreciable recruitment in the WMCA across this time period – some of these roles will obviously be ones the institution doesn't obviously cover, but the institution might be able to compete in some of the others; careers advisors and guidance officers; HE teaching professionals; data analysts; software developers and programmers; lab technicians; QA professionals; therapists; chartered and certified accountants; civil engineers; business and finance project managers (note the institution does very well in project *officers*); SEN teachers; estimators and assessors; paramedics; sports coaches; probation officers; mechanical engineers; sales executives; medical technicians; physiotherapists; psychotherapists; management consultants; biochemists and biomedical scientists; financial analysts; tax professionals; clinical psychologists and actuaries, economists and statisticians.

At first degree level in Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull, the institution's main competitors are Wolverhampton, Birmingham University and in the rest of the WMCA, Coventry and even Warwick, with Aston and Newman in local competition in specific areas. At taught postgraduate level Birmingham University is the main competitor.

Table 19 summarises the major suppliers of new HE entrants to the WMCA labour market by institution. The margin of error on BCU's figures here is probably around 1 percentage point – it is sensitive to factors such as exactly which qualification levels are used, whether partial postcode data for employment is applied and if full known UK addresses are used. This data uses all UG and PGT levels, and uses all addresses for domicile and work that can be assigned to a UK unitary authority or region.

HE provider	Undergraduates	PGT
Birmingham City University	18.2%	13.4%
The University of Birmingham	9.3%	18.3%
The University of Wolverhampton	8.2%	8.2%
Coventry University	7.9%	9.0%
Aston University	7.0%	4.4%
Staffordshire University	5.7%	1.6%
University of Warwick	3.0%	3.6%
University of Worcester	2.7%	2.0%
Nottingham Trent University	2.3%	0.7%
Newman University	2.1%	2.3%
University College Birmingham	2.1%	1.4%

TABLE 19 – PROPORTION OF NEW ENTRANTS TO THE WMCA PROFESSIONAL LEVEL LABOUR MARKET SUPPLIED BY MAJOR INSTITUTIONS FROM THE 2022/23 GRADUATING COHORT

Table 20 examines similar data but for those graduates who submitted full postcode data placing them as employed in the city of Birmingham. BCU supplied 24.2 per cent of all new undergraduate entrants to professional level jobs from the 2022/23 who were known to be working in Birmingham after 15 months, nearly double the number of the University of Birmingham, the next largest supplier. The margin of error here is larger for the WMCA data as different institutions are more impacted than others by partial postcode data and it's quite possible that with full postcode data BCU supplied at least a quarter of all undergraduate entrants to the Birmingham labour market who entered professional level employment from this cohort.

HE provider	Undergraduates	PGT
Birmingham City University	24.3%	18.0%
The University of Birmingham	13.0%	22.9%
Aston University	9.8%	6.8%
Coventry University	5.2%	5.1%
Staffordshire University	4.9%	1.5%
University of Wolverhampton	3.7%	3.5%
University College Birmingham	2.6%	2.0%
University of Warwick	2.4%	2.3%
De Montfort	2.0%	2.0%
University of Nottingham	2.0%	0.9%
Newman University	1.8%	2.4%

TABLE 20 – PROPORTION OF NEW ENTRANTS TO THE BIRMINGHAM PROFESSIONAL LEVEL LABOUR MARKET SUPPLIED BY MAJOR INSTITUTIONS FROM THE 2022/23 GRADUATING COHORT

Conclusions

Birmingham City University is a crucial local anchor institution and the most important supplier of graduates not just to Birmingham – one of the UK's largest graduate labour markets – but to the whole West Midlands Combined Authority.

Although Birmingham is the institution's most important labour market, it's also the biggest supplier to Sandwell and to the locally important, high skill labour market of Solihull and exerts influence further afield into South Staffordshire where it is the key supplier to the relatively affluent Lichfield and Tamworth labour markets as well, and this perhaps holds a hint to how the institution can perhaps extend its influence (another nearby labour market, Wyre Forest, centred on Kidderminster, would be a much more difficult target due to local college links with the University of Worcester, and indeed Worcester dominates the Wyre Forest graduate labour market).

Where the institution has a strongly vocational offer, it usually does very well, most notably with excellent performance in the School of Nursing and Midwifery even by the high employability standards of those subjects, but also for the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. It's also notable that BCU's computing graduates outperformed the national average even in a difficult year for IT in the UK in general and in Birmingham in particular, but whilst they did well in Birmingham, they did less well in the Solihull labour market, which is quite strong for IT. This also shows that the institution's strengths outside Birmingham, which may be important to overall performance, are patchy and not always institution wide.

Likewise, the strongly vocational nature of the PGT offer means PGT outcomes are often above the national average, meaning the institution can compete quite effectively with research-intensive competitors at Birmingham University. But where labour markets are difficult or relatively small, there are signs some BCU graduates do not find it easy to find alternative roles outside their direct vocational areas or immediate geography. This is perhaps most notable for graduates from the School of Life and Health Sciences who sometimes seem to be finding it hard to access other options even when they might be available, and it also applies to arts graduates who may have the potential to access more creative roles in business than they do currently – although this is with the caveat that Birmingham's creative arts and business sector seems a little underdeveloped compared with, for example, Manchester or Bristol. Where there are local sectoral weaknesses, though, as the key supplier of local skilled labour, the institution may have a role in helping Birmingham's creative and marketing sectors, to give some examples, to develop.

The institution's overall metrics are reliant on the excellent performance of the School of Nursing and Midwifery, though, and a downturn in that particular jobs market, even of a relatively small nature, would have a profound impact on the institution's overall position in rankings if other subjects are not able to access a larger share of local opportunities, particularly outside Birmingham itself.

STRENGTHS

- Local anchor
- Birmingham
- Local cost of living
- Nursing
- Local opportunities
- PGT outcomes good
- Insulated from AI impact

OPPORTUNITIES

- SME engagement
- Adaptable graduates
- Hybrid working
- Unfilled local niches
- Solihull and South Staffs



WEAKNESSES

- Local competition
- Birmingham's SMEs
- Pockets of underemployment
- Graduates struggling to adapt
- IT sector having difficult time

THREATS

- Metrics
- Rapid labour market change
- Local competition
- Recession
- Reduced public spending

Strengths

BCU is the most important supplier of graduates to the whole West Midlands Combined Authority and is a crucial anchor institution. In particular it's a vital supplier to the local NHS, not just of nurses but of hard-to-acquire health professionals in radiography and speech therapy.

Birmingham is a nationally strong labour market with a diverse local employment base, which is particularly strong in engineering and business services

The locations that BCU students and graduates come from and work in suggest that the institution is perceived by them as an important part of the local fabrics and that the institution is strongly identified with the city and region.

The institution is well placed to contribute to local 'levelling up' agendas and skills plans

BCU nursing graduates do particularly well and many courses both within the School of Nursing and Midwifery and outside supply to occupations that are particularly hard to fill. They are well matched to local demands.

Birmingham has long-standing occupational shortages and recruitment difficulties, and many areas of the institution's provision seem suited to help address those issues.

BCU postgraduate provision is largely well suited to local needs, particularly in health and tech and is sufficiently effective to be able to compete directly with the well-resourced and research-intensive Birmingham University.

Local cost of living is currently relatively low, especially for a city the size of Birmingham which means that graduate disposable incomes can benefit as a result and the institution and city could be attractive to an increasingly cost-sensitive student body.

AI is not presently likely to be a huge threat to BCU graduate jobs and if it does become more of a threat to jobs in the UK (which could happen in the future), BCU's health-oriented strengths will insulate the institution from the impact.

Weaknesses

The West Midlands has a great deal of HE provision, and a number of smaller, locally effective competitor institutions are also nearby. Although BCU is the most important supplier of graduates to the region, it means it is also competing directly with every WMCA institution, even very well-resourced ones like Birmingham and Warwick.

Employment outcomes from some business and tech courses are not always good. Graduates from these subjects have skills that are of value to employers but may need particular support to access opportunities. This group is likely to have support needs particularly for those looking for jobs outside Birmingham, where some local labour markets, particularly Solihull, can have opportunities available.

West Midlands CA SMEs did not seem to offer as many graduate jobs as some other cities or city regions in this time period and in particular the IT sector seems to have had an unusually low level of recruitment.

Some larger courses have quite high underemployment rates, and it may be that some students, particularly in accountancy, psychology and law, may have optimistic views of the number of local roles directly related to their subject. All of these graduates have qualities that are attractive to employers in other industries, but these areas may need additional support to understand what those opportunities are and how to access them.

Some local roles, particularly in law and biomedical sciences, are recruiting from outside the local area even though the institution is producing graduates in those disciplines.

The School of Nursing's excellent outcomes have a downside – if they falter, which they may if trusts cut recruiting – then the institution's overall standing may suffer as a result.

Opportunities

BCU is a crucial local anchor institution. An emphasis on this strength can serve as an important point of differentiation in contested labour and recruitment markets as well as reinforcing the importance of the institution to the local social and economic fabric.

There is room to grow engagement with local SMEs with well-targeted interventions. The data suggests that BCU engages reasonably well with local SMEs but may be able to use its own size and local connections to outcompete other local institutions for the SME market, particularly outside Birmingham.

BCU graduates tend to enter roles directly related to their degrees or roles outside professional level occupations. Many courses have wide applicability across the labour market and graduates could potentially fill roles related to their degrees. This may be eased by appropriate and well-targeted guidance or even by work experience opportunities.

The hybrid-working professional workforce may present a particular opportunity for Birmingham as a relatively low cost city to live and work in. The institution's intake could put the institution in a particularly strong place to facilitate this if it takes active steps to prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of hybrid working.

There seem to be some small local niches that are not well met by local provision, or where John Moores seems to be outcompeted by other institutions with similar offerings. The numbers involved mean that even some relatively small but well-targeted interventions may have a discernable impact on the institution's metrics. In some professions, notably probation officers; environmental professionals; estate agents; business sales; accounts managers; financial analysts and therapists, the majority of new entrants to the WMCA labour market took their degrees not just outside the WMCA, but outside the West Midlands entirely. The same also goes for some roles for which BCU might be expected to provide a significant proportion of local employees – solicitors and biomedical scientists in particular. There is potential for the institution to offer more good local candidates to local employers.

The SME sector and creative industries are important to both economic recovery and to the levelling-up agenda. BCU is particularly well placed to make a significant contribution to this effort.

The Solihull labour market is small but affluent and strong in tech and business services. BCU is already the dominant supplier of graduates but overall figures, suggesting that Solihull has more graduate roles than graduates, suggests that there may be opportunities for the institution there.

The institution is also strong in Staffordshire labour markets to the north east of the city, such as Tamworth and Lichfield, which are not large but also far from negligible. There may be a pool of roles and potential SME partners in those regions.

Threats

Potential performance measure based on Graduate Outcomes metrics may leave some of the institution's courses vulnerable.

The UK is facing a difficult economic period and although the data suggests that the graduate labour market is likely to weather it better than most, parts of the West Midlands have been historically quite vulnerable to downturns.

The labour market is changing rapidly, both in terms of composition and now in the way future graduates are likely to do their jobs. These changes are profound and can often happen rapidly. The institution needs to be constantly aware of the way the future workforce might change as it will influence student choice and graduate behaviour. The reputational risks of failing to prepare students for the real local workplace are considerable.

Local competitors are capable, and some are very agile. As the largest supplier of graduates in the region, BCU is a target for many of them.

The institution needs to develop and maintain strong, effective links with local SMEs to continue to make the best use of the position of being embedded in a relatively strong local labour market. Some potential (or actual) competitors are well-resourced, experienced, and knowledgeable and could prove formidable opposition. An example is the nearby labour market of Wyre Forest where, although BCU is relatively nearby, Worcester University has established local links that make it very difficult to compete with.

BCU is vulnerable to a downturn in NHS recruitment, although it will remain absolutely central to local NHS recruitment.

Although at present the threat of AI replacing graduate jobs en masse seems to be unlikely in the short term, it remains a distant possibility and we should monitor that possibility actively.

AI has had a significant and negative impact on recruitment in the short term, overwhelming employers with large application volumes, and graduates will need support to deal with that issue.

Recommendations

1. BCU occupies important niches both as a supplier of talent, and as an employer. The institution will do well to leverage both parts of that identity and to make the fullest possible contribution to the region's skills agenda and ongoing development.
2. There are several other local institutions that offer similar courses. BCU should ensure the unique selling points (USP) of its student body are well-established, well-known and highlighted whenever possible so that employers, particularly those who are new to the institution's graduates, have a good feel for the specific qualities that they bring.
3. The future for many (but not all) BCU graduates is likely to be hybrid working, and also to involve some level of use of large language models. Consider how that is likely to affect provision and support at the institution and the changes that will be required to effectively equip graduates to adapt. There is considerable potential reward for institutions that establish a reputation for providing employers with hybrid-ready and AI-capable graduates.
4. The local SME sector is particularly important throughout the region. Close SME links are not easy to develop and maintain but will pay off in employability terms, particularly for graduates in creative roles where the local SME sector is of particular importance.
5. Self-employment is an important part of the working experience for many BCU graduates, particularly those in the arts and from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Consider maintaining and expanding training and support in the skills required to support self-employment – they are also valuable in more conventional employment as well. On a related note, some graduates with professional level self-employment are reporting main activities that are coded at below professional level and ways to mitigate this might be worth considering.
6. There is a need to ensure that students and graduates understand the opportunities available and are confident to apply for roles outside their direct field. This applies particularly to graduates in subjects such as business and psychology, where we see a substantial number of graduates with skills useful to business, but who are not getting many jobs directly outside their field of study.
7. Solihull is a locally strong labour market with a workforce working primarily in professional jobs. At present, BCU is the largest institution there but there is potential to expand supply and secure more good jobs for your graduates, particularly in tech.
8. The workforces in South Staffordshire, particularly Tamworth and Lichfield are educated, professionally employed and aging. Don't overlook these regions when considering employment opportunities although the local labour market is a little different to Birmingham

9. The impact of AI on recruitment has been demoralising to candidates, especially those following often somewhat sensationalist media reporting on the issues. Students will need support to navigate a recruitment market where AI is ubiquitous and causing employers to struggle with issues of volume, selection and quality.
 10. There do appear to be some niche roles, related to courses BCU already offers, where local provision might not be sufficient to meet demand and well-targeted courses might meet local needs. Particular examples include probation, environmental roles and business sales.
 11. On a related note, there is almost certainly room to expand the institutions' existing, successful provision in health engineering and still expect graduates to find jobs in the current market. At present there is no sign of shortages in these areas being alleviated even by a UK recession.
 12. Improving the postcode data for employment returned by BCU graduates to the Graduate Outcomes survey would both improve data quality, but also almost certainly reinforce the crucial impact of the institution to the Birmingham labour market.
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