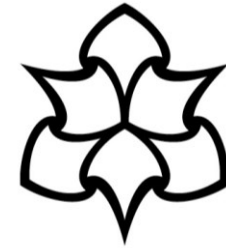**Employability and Coaching Interventions in Higher Education**

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The Employability Intervention

2 Year Employability Pilot

Approximately 1600 Students (800 per year)

Final Year students on two courses (Accounting and Finance and Business Management)

Aims of the Project

IMPROVE GRADUATE OUTCOMES

EXAMINE WAYS OF ENRICHING THE CURRICULUM

INCREASE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYABILITY-RELATED ACTIVITIES

IMPROVE STUDENTS' CHANCES OF GETTING A JOB IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING JOB MARKET

ANALYSE 'WHAT WORKS' IN RELATION TO EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER LEARNING TO SUPPORT POSITIVE OUTCOMES
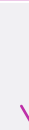
Two Year Pilot Consisted of:

- **Phase I**
- Students completed 4 coaching sessions
- Two 1 to 1 and two 1 to group
- **Phase II**
- Students completed 2 coaching sessons
- One 1 to 1 and one 1 to group
- Plus: an assessment centre simulation

Requirements for students Phase II:

Attend both coaching sessions

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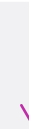
Attend AC simulation (not compulsory)

↓

Write a reflective essay

Phase II Methodology

- Data was collected from reflective essays and student interviews

- The first few interviews were done face to face

- The majority of interviews were done via Zoom due to lockdown

- We conducted a thematic analysis using Nivivo

Theoretical ideas that influenced our research about the intervention; straddling different worlds

- Literature from both career development and employability (Healy, Hammer, & McIlveen, 2020)

- Capitals theories (Tomlinson 2017; Brown 2019; Bathmaker et al 2016)

- Career adaptability (Savickas 2012)

- Career learning (e.g., Law 1999)

- Career planning and readiness (eg., Shury et al 2017; Cobb 2019)

- Career Coaching tools and techniques (Frigerio & Rix, 2021; Yates 2013)

Main Themes:

- Checked on themes from previous year and highlighted new themes.

- Confidence (psychological capital?)

- Goal Setting (coaching, planning and career readiness?)

- Future Focus (career adaptability?)

- Self-awareness (identity capital?)

- Career Options and Job Hunting (career learning –opportunity awareness)

Confidence

"… I have gained **… better coping mechanisms** for going into full time work, as well as ways to improve my **overall confidence** and anxious tendencies…"

"…I remember talking to one of the coaches…about how…I'm afraid of situations that I maybe can't control or where I feel incompetent in. And she was saying, well what would you do if a situation like that arise, and I was like going through the options and she was like, **so you do know what you would do**… And it made me realise, oh okay I have to **give myself a break** sometimes. … So I think yes, **building confidence** definitely is a key one."

"The sessions discussed aspects that will assist me going forward by attaining self-belief to be able to **conquer and achieve opportunities I believe I lack confidence in** and to be able to **reject fear of failure** with the online graduate assessments and interviews by working on weaknesses I have gathered and the feedback provided from the mock assessment centre."

Goal Setting

"The…program has helped me tremendously in preparing for life after university. Before having knowledge of this program, I knew what I wanted to do after university, however, the issue which arose was the **absence of a plan.** I had no clear guide on how I was to achieve my goal and the…**program provided me with this clarity**."

"During one session I confessed to leaving some matters till the end leaving me overwhelmed, so decided making **smaller daily goals** would help avoid that. I've also been looking into voluntary work to broaden my skills."

Future Focus

*"Discussed ways in which I could improve my CV and LinkedIn **profile which will help me in my future** when seeking a new job....
... We spoke about interview preparation and proper attire for the occasion and **what type of jobs we were most focused on working towards in the future**."*

*"... And then even just to have the people that you've spoken to... you know as potential, you know networking...follow them afterwards... **You never know what comes up in the future**. I think that's probably the best way... you know **to find positions in the future**."*

Self-awareness and Reflective Models

Yeah I think self-awareness does definitely and just being… **more self-aware of what you want to do after uni. Because up until third year you kind of don't really talk about it-**, *I don't know if that's just me being…ignorant to the fact that there are careers hubs…and I've just never used them. But yeah the self-awareness definitely and setting goals as well. I mean especially with COVID-19 happening.*

*…***it allowed me to take notice of my strengths and how to promote these skills as well as things I need to improve on*** and how to do that using various techniques such as* **GROW and SMART** *to help with my decision making and acting on my own initiative which I got from my one on one coaching…I feel confident going forward knowing all this information about my self and taking this into my future career.*

Career Options and Job Hunting

- Career Options were a much larger theme in phase I than phase II.

- This could be due to the change in content from phase I to phase II.

- Students in phase II had the benefit of an AC simulation which was not available in phase I.

- Phase II arguably had more emphasis on the recruitment and selection techniques used by employers due to the addition of the AC.

- Knowledge and confidence in these methods is important for students in fostering an ability to take charge of their graduate applications.

- Therefore, this intervention is highly appropriate given the stage they are at as few will already have a job offer.

Specific Impact

- *In interviews, students reported a various ways the programme had impacted on them, such as:*
  - - Motivating them to take action.
  - - Motivating in shifting mind-set.
  - - Increased confidence in approaching career planning and job hunting.
  - - Personal growth and realisation of what employers want.
  - - Changing/expanding what jobs to go for.
  - - Consideration of importance of career progression.
  - - Improvement in basic requirements of job hunting and graduate recruitment tools such as helping to ensure the CV is where it should be and how to prepare for psychometric tests.

Themes around Individual Coaching
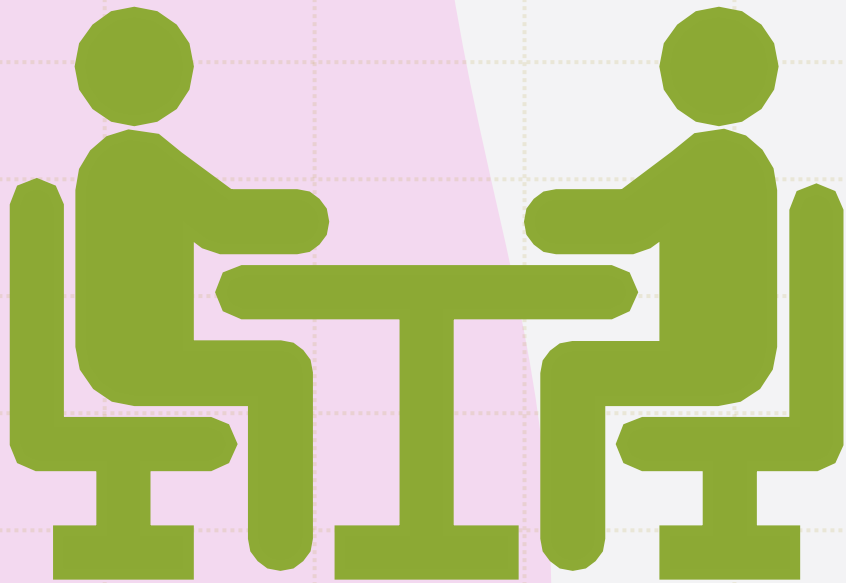
- Students really value the more personal approach of coaching.

- Virtually all students, when asked, said they would have liked more coaching.

- Some reported that the 1 to 1 coaching sessions were the most valuable part of the programme.

- Reassurance and support from the coach was highlighted as beneficial.

- The fact that the student did not know the coach was highlighted by one students as extremely valuable and enabled the student to open up about fears for the future.

- Feeling that coaches care.

- Students felt they gained tips and techniques that helped them.

Themes around Group Coaching

- Students also reflected upon the positive value gained from group coaching i.e. reassuring, inspirational and useful.

- Example positive comment from a student regarding group coaching:

- *"I think the group one was also very useful because I could hear feedback from the other student and compare with them as well, so to show that we're…**all in the same boat sort of thing**. So learn of their troubles and concerns their experiences helps to sort of put your stuff in perspective as well".*

- Some students reported that students in their group weren't very interested which diminished their experience. Other students not attending also diminished the experience.

Assessment Centre

- Students were mostly very positive about the AC.

- They appreciated the practical nature of it

- Some negative comments from those who do not think they will apply for a job that requires as AC.

- However, some saw it as the most useful part of programme.

- The immediate feedback from recruitment experts received is something students really valued.

Covid-19 (themes from interviews)

Skills and attributes identified in programme will be important in navigating pandemic, e.g., resilience, organisation skills.

A deeper consideration of own interests as part of programme will be useful in pivoting to the evolving situation (avoiding reactivity).

Uncertainty and plans disrupted are commonplace. Many students reflect upon how to adjust.

The implications for the future and the role of digital skills/capabilities.

Hope/optimism - a focus on completing studies provided a distraction and gives a tangible focus. Glad to soon be a graduate and credentials this brings in turbulent times.

Conclusion

Different benefits from varied activities. Overall stimulation of development of skills/behaviours/attributes that can be applied in future graduate careers, career planning and applications.

Coaching benefits students by supporting their learning, especially confidence and motivation.

AC increases awareness of recruitment and selection methods, building networks and effective behaviours.

Compulsory interventions embedded into the curriculum provide the best way to deliver benefits to students.

Finding ways to embed coaching and ACs into the curriculum are excellent ways to support students in developing their career learning.

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