

Wellbeing during the student employability journey; *A case study of how a peer to peer initiative at BU resulted in greater self awareness, confidence and reflection*

Vianna Renaud, Placement Development Advisor
Faculty of Media and Communication
Bournemouth University
ASET Trustee, Fellow HEA and Doctoral Student

History and Background

- **From a practitioner lens...**

- Mismatch of expectations
 - Students on their own evaluation of their skills regarding realistic placement opportunities
 - University/staff expectations about students, their personal and professional skills, ie. Digital poverty, academically strong students and but not strong within the workplace, vice versa
- Paralysis by options
 - Do not know what they want to do
 - Stress with academic requirements and will choose another time to think about it
 - Paid versus unpaid placements
- Unsure about the Placement Process
 - Not aware of resources available on campus and off campus
 - The timeframe – first year versus second year
 - Importance of social media and profiles
- Lack of Experience
 - First office / industry experience for most students
 - Awareness around professional behaviour
- Uncertainty / Anxiety for the transition
 - Uncertainty of how to manage the transition between being a student to employee; social network, will they fit in, how will they manage
 - Emotional attachment to university life and the home environment

History and Background

- **From the institutional perspective...**
 - Lack of student engagement
 - What exactly does this look like? Are we all operating with the same definition?
 - Financial pressures
 - Priority of investment
 - Student recruitment, our institutional USPs, and competition
 - Academic versus Professional Support Staff aims, objectives and drivers
 - Who knows best?
 - Increase of students with additional needs or needing additional support
 - What does this look like on the ground?
 - The impact of the leagues tables
 - NSS and the Student Experience, league tables and resulting knee jerk reactions
 - Graduate outcomes
 - How can we define success? Who decides?
 - Staff Anxiety and Concerns
 - Upskilling with technology and industry trends
 - Job security and ongoing change/restructure
 - Doing more with less
 - Reduction in staff resourcing and the impact on teams
 - With Covid the impact of technology and support

Aim and Objectives of the Project

- Match first year students with final year students who completed a mandatory sandwich placement to form a one to one employability coaching/mentoring relationship.
 - Literature has confirmed that peer to peer learning creates impact.
 - Links to the institutional BU2025 Strategy Plan around student engagement, employability and graduate outcomes.
- Students chosen from the Department of Corporate and Marketing Communications
 - Final year participants – all BA PR students
 - First year participants – all on common academic framework, to decide academic pathway in May of the first year
- Short intervention given student academic schedules and pressures
 - Short, sweet and powerful
- The theoretical framework includes:
 - Vygotsky and the Zones of Proximal Development
 - Kolb and Experiential Learning
 - Whitmore and the GROW Model of Coaching
- In line with sector guidance from ASET, AGCAS, Student Minds, amongst others..

Project

- Co-creation with all student participants with feedback from academic, professional staff, senior management staff with Programme Leader support
- 14 students = 7 pairs, 5 completed the project
- Optimal timescale of November – March / Number of sessions - min 4, dependent on the pair
- Delivery of Sessions – Their choice
 - Digital methods including student portal or Face to Face contact
- Coaching and Mentoring = M-Coach and M-Coachee as
 - Usage of the GROW Model to align with the central Student Services approach
- Session guidelines highlighting both internal and external support resources combined with the M-Coach's personal journey, reflection, etc.
- Evaluation through surveys following each session, interviews and follow up discussions at the end of the project in May, a 3 month catch up in September, and a 1 year catch up the following September

Initial Ideas

- First year students will be more....
 - Confident in self and greater self awareness
 - Motivated to undertake work experience during the first summer.
 - Aware of the placement search process.
 - Confident in how to manage their own employability, comfortable in using the GROW Model of Coaching.
 - Active in using the university career and placement support services.
 - Connected to the Faculty and University therefore feeling a stronger sense of 'belonging'.
- Final years will be more....
 - Confident in their graduate role search.
 - Reflective of their own placement experience with the ability to articulate their experience.
 - Keen to share their experience on social media to help in securing a graduate job.
 - Connected to the Faculty and University therefore feeling a stronger sense of 'belonging' and part of the brand.
 - Confirmed advocates of the GROW Model of Coaching.
 - Keen to coach and mentor peers again in the future.

Initial Findings

- First year students will be more....
 - Confident in self and greater self awareness **YES**
 - Motivated to undertake work experience during the first summer. **SOME**
 - Aware of the placement search process. **YES**
 - Confident in how to manage their own employability, **YES** comfortable in using the GROW Model of Coaching. **NO**
 - Active in using the university career and placement support services. **SOME**
 - Connected to the Faculty and University therefore feeling a stronger sense of belonging. **NO**
- Final years will be more....
 - Confident in their graduate role search. **NO**
 - Reflective of their own placement experience with the ability to articulate their experience. **YES**
 - Keen to share their experience on social media to help in securing a graduate job. **NO**
 - Connected to the Faculty and University therefore feeling a stronger sense of belonging. **NO**
 - Confirmed advocates of the GROW Model of Coaching. **SOME**
 - Keen to coach and mentor peers again in the future. **YES**

One Year Onwards.....

From the M-Coachees, now out on Placement Year....

- Still considered to be one of the most useful interactions during first year
- 'Proud' to have started their employability journey during the first year as they feel like they were ahead of their peers and better prepared for the second year placement search
- Have stayed in touch with their M-Coach and feel like they can reach out to them
- Greater sense of confidence and awareness of the workplace
- Showed greater initiative at the placement search, as well as greater resilience with rejection.

From the M-Coaches, now graduates and one year out in industry

- Unexpected result, 'friendship' and a 'connectedness' to their M-Coachee, feeling 'proud' of their development
- Greater amount of reflection upon their own student journey than expected
- One was promoted earlier than expected specifically for his 'coaching and mentoring skills'
- All considered investigating opportunities to bring their M-Coachee into their company for work experience
- All were involved with university alumni activities
- This activity should be part of any future institutional Employability Strategy

All participants unanimously agreed that this needs to be implemented into the curriculum.

***As we are now in the time of Covid, it was felt by the participants that this would be of even greater benefit to students, particularly as employers are wanting placement students who are familiar with Teams, Zoom and able to work remotely.

Feedback from the students...

First Year – M-Coachee...

‘I am so thankful I participated on this project; I feel so much more prepared for my future and I know that without this, I wouldn’t be leaving next week to do an international work experience.’

‘This has helped me re-think my first year as even though my marks won’t count, I have learned from my M-Coach that I still need to put in the effort so that I can show good results on my assignments to future employers.’

‘I am so grateful I could speak to a final year student about their placement experience. It is rare that we are all together so this was a perfect opportunity to speak to one and pick up hints and tips.’

Final Year – M-Coach...

‘This has really given me a chance to reflect upon my own placement experience; I am more confident in my job search.’

‘I’ve learned that I can actually support my juniors, which has been a pleasant surprise which has increase my confidence. I would definitely coach and mentor someone again in the future.’

‘I have enjoyed working with a first year student more than I thought; hard but good to remember that I was there once!’

Feedback from staff...

Academic Programme Leader...

‘This has been a great initiative and I want to see this run again next year. This should be offered to every student at BU.’

‘Given the big focus on graduates having soft skills including communication skills, this could be an easy way for final year students to gain first hand experience in supporting their younger peers.’

‘With Covid forcing us to go to Microsoft Teams and Zoom, the ‘digital knowledge’ in this practical application could greatly help our students prepare for their future placement experiences.’

Professional Staff Manager...

‘This could be a great way of supplementing the support we already give students without costing additional resources.’

‘We know that Peer Assisted Learning works in creating an impact; why not apply it in this way?’

‘With the current uncertainty within HE, particularly with Covid and how we support our students in this blended learning environment, this could be a system we implement to free up other resourcing.’

Contact

- Vianna Renaud
- Placement Development Advisor,
Faculty of Media and
Communication
- vrenaud@bournemouth.ac.uk
- [LinkedIn](#) – Vianna Renaud
- Twitter - @viannarenaud
- Email –
vrenaud@bournemouth.ac.uk

