

## 11. Meeting students where they are: Career Readiness in real-time, through the VLE

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### *The Background*

The pilot programme consisted of three sessions which were delivered with a group of 25 Year 2 BA(Hons) Childhood Studies students at the University of Huddersfield. The programme consisted of three 45-minute delivery sessions and were spread out across an academic year around an embedded placement module. The placement module requires all students in Year 2 to undertake 120 hours of placement related to their course/future career option; most placements are unpaid and students have to source these opportunities themselves. Each session utilised the Career Planning model (Stanbury & Aydogan, 2021) and involved interactive activities within the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). Each student was given a Career Readiness workbook at the start of the first session which included all the activities within the programme.



Figure 11.1: University of Huddersfield Career Planning Model

### *The Sessions*

#### **Session One: Exploring Career Readiness**

This session introduced the Career Planning model and contextualised each stage. A key part of this, and a fundamental concept of the model, was to ensure that the students understood that the aim was to address their own individual career readiness, and that it wasn't a competition. Explaining the use of the backwards and forwards arrows around each stage really highlighted that, depending on where they are in their education, career or even life can influence which stage they may be at in the Career Planning model. This helped them to develop an understanding that they might cycle through the different stages several times throughout their life, this model is not just relevant for students or recent graduates, but it is also true for those in established careers and it truly represents the moveable feast that a vast majority of people will experience throughout their working life.

After this introduction, the students were asked to access the VLE and to answer the Career Readiness Stage Survey by selecting the option that best matched their current stage of the career journey.

Once they had answered the survey they were then presented with their stage, including an explanation of what this may mean for them and directing them to further resources that would support them in fully engaging with this stage.

Once they had identified their stage, the students were split up and asked to move to sit at a table with other students in the same group as them. Asking the students to physically move was a powerful visual tool, not only for those delivering and observing the session to see where the majority of students were, but also for the students to see that they were not alone in their stage.

Once in their groups, the students were asked to reflect on their stage, to write down any questions this raised for them, and to identify what their next steps might be to try and answer those questions. They were encouraged to discuss this within their groups to help develop their lists of next steps.

Utilising the VLE in this way had several benefits. Firstly, we were able to track the responses in real time during the session, so we could see how many students had responded and what stages they were in. The majority of students were in the Explore or Decide stages during this session, which was in line with our own predictions prior to the students undertaking the survey. Secondly, there was a 100% response rate with this activity in session which was an excellent result in terms of student engagement.

### **Session Two: Career Readiness and Goal Setting**

This session took place two weeks after the first and focussed on the students' setting goals for their placements, based on their stage in the Career Planning model. The session began with a reflective element, recapping the model and stages and asking them to think about the questions and next steps they had identified in the previous session.

Keeping in mind their identified stage, they were asked to develop 3 key goals for their placement. In order to develop these goals, an adapted version of the GROW model (Whitmore, 2017) was utilised to assist them in developing meaningful and realistic goals and plans for how

they would achieve them. Most importantly this model encouraged them to reflect on obstacles or barriers that might prevent them from reaching their goals. Students were asked to discuss their goals in groups, and this discussion allowed them to not only utilise the perspectives and insights of their peers to develop their own goals but also to support their peers and assist them in identifying ways to achieve their goals.

This session had a key focus on reflection and resilience which are the core concepts underpinning the Career Planning Model.

### **Session Three: Career Readiness and reflecting on placement**

This session took place five months after the second and was designed to happen after the students had completed their placement hours. The first part of the session asked the students to look at the goals they had set for placement and to consider whether they had been achieved; if they had not been achieved, they were asked to identify why they thought this was the case.

After looking at their goals, the students were asked to go back to the Career Readiness Stage Survey within the VLE and select the option that best matched their stage of career journey after placement. Once again, they were asked to move and sit with students in the same stage as them. As a whole group, we discussed that placement was an opportunity to try something they might be interested in and to see if it was the right kind of fit for them. Some students were still in Explore, some who had been in Decide had moved to Explore, and some who had been in Explore had moved to Decide.

Students were then asked to complete three sentences:

1. One thing I learned about myself on placement is
2. The impact that placement has had on my Career Readiness is
3. One goal I want to achieve moving forward is

They were then asked to discuss these in their groups. For this session we had two student facilitators who led the discussion and encouraged the students to think about their goals moving forward and how they might support each other to achieve them.

The session finished with a poignant reminder that they can keep coming back to the techniques learned in the programme. Career Readiness is fluid, constantly changing and the same can be said for us as human beings. Our lives and circumstances change, and this often changes what we want/need in our careers. It is important to be constantly reflecting on our skills, experiences, values, and priorities and using this to set new goals for the long and short term. Sometimes we will hit a bump in the road, or things may not go to plan, being resilient and knowing what the plan B is will help to weather these situations in a productive and effective way.

### *The Results*

Due to utilising the VLE to undertake the Career Readiness Stage Survey it was possible to analyse the data and to track the students' responses from the first to the last session. The result of this was being able to see what had changed for the students in that time:

- 19 students remained in the same stage
- 3 students moved forward a stage
- 3 students moved backwards a stage

Being able to see these results was helpful in facilitating discussions with the students about their stages and about any changes they had experienced. The discussions taking place were incredibly positive, even for those students moving backwards a stage. They found placement to be an informative experience and felt that the Career Readiness programme had encouraged them to think more reflectively about what they wanted from their career. Enabling students to explore other opportunities and undertake more experiences to find the right fit for them is the ideal result of this programme.

### *The Feedback*

After the completion of the pilot programme the students were asked to provide feedback anonymously through Microsoft Forms. Three

questions were asked and a total of 8 responses were received.



Figure 11.2: Student feedback results – Q1: Did you find the Careers Readiness session useful?

This was a really positive result, with all respondents saying they felt the majority of sessions were useful.



Figure 11.3: Student feedback results – Q2: Please select any sessions you found useful

Another really positive result here, with the respondents seeing the sessions as increasingly useful. The two sessions that primarily focused on that core concept of reflection being voted as the most useful sessions really highlights how beneficial embedding this into career development learning can be.

<b>Please let us know any positive or negative feedback you have on the sessions so that we can improve them for future students</b>
Really enjoyed it however would have been nice to speak to some people in different profession but then again that's why we have the fairs so not sure it's a negative !
Having more than one member of staff in the session made the session more useful for me.
They are helpful as it gives me some time to think about my future away from uni work and life itself.
Maybe some course options that would be relevant to childhood studies students. Job titles that may be worth researching relevant to the course.
Discussion on career paths

Table 11.1: Student feedback quotes in response to Q3: Please let us know any positive or negative feedback you have on the sessions so that we can improve them for future students

There were some great suggestions here in how the programme could be developed further and it highlighted the positives of having facilitators there in the final session to ensure that the discussion was effective and remained on track. It also shows the potential to include further sessions with a focus on employer engagement and postgraduate study options which could be tailored to the interests of the students based on their goals.

### *References*

Stanbury, D., & Aydogan, C. (2021). *Planning Your Career*. University of Huddersfield. <https://students.hud.ac.uk/opportunities/careers/career-planning/>

Whitmore, Sir J. (2017). *Coaching for Performance - The principles and practice of coaching and leadership* (5th ed.). Hachette UK.

