

Academic Unit of Psychology

Employability Strategy

Background

The graduate job market is incredibly challenging and fiercely competitive. Graduates in the current economic climate are expected by employers to have more than just academic qualifications. In recent years, a number of Government reports¹ have substantially increased the focus on employability within higher education for both British and International students. At the University of Southampton, we are committed to developing and enhancing the employability of our students so that they are able to stand out from the crowd.

Employability is a key feature of the University of Southampton's strategic plan (2010-2015). The University aspires to improve its students' preparation for employment, achieving improved employment outcomes relative to our comparators in the Russell Group. Increased opportunities for students to gain work experience, including volunteering and enterprise activities will be sought, and the growth in our student community will be carefully planned and balanced to ensure relevance to employer need. The University measures its performance in these areas by how it is reflected in national student surveys.

The Academic Unit of Psychology is extremely well placed in national league tables (for 2014 we are overall 13th in the Guardian, and 14th in the Times/Sunday Times). We are also well positioned in terms of our graduate prospects scores (Times/Sunday Times 2014 graduate prospects score = 61.5) and we compare well against many of our competitors. "The Graduate Market in 2013" study carried out by High Fliers Research shows that the University of Southampton is one of the top 20 UK Universities targeted by the largest number of top graduate employers. Latest data show that 93% of students who graduated in 2011-2012 from the Academic Unit of Psychology were either employed or undertaking further study within six months of leaving.

Psychology is one of the most popular subjects in higher education in the UK and is widely accepted as an excellent preparation for many careers. According to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2010) "15-20% of Psychology graduates usually enter further training to become a professional psychologist, with the majority applying their psychology skills in other career paths. Typically, a third of graduates who go into permanent employment as psychologists enter public services (such as the health service, education, the Civil Service, and the Armed Forces), and a third go into industry or commerce, e.g. market research and personnel management. Of the remainder, around one-tenth teach and research in schools, colleges and universities."

¹ Recent government reports and white papers by the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) include: The Browne Report 'securing a sustainable future for higher education' (2010), 'One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education' (2010), 'Students at the heart of the System' (2011), 'Supporting graduate employability: HEI practice in other countries' (2011), and 'The wider benefits of international higher education in the UK' (2013)

Defining employability

Employability is commonly defined as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2006). However, more recently there has been a shift in terminology to recognise that employability encompasses more than just skills, and this definition has been expanded to encompass professional and personal development within a more holistic and inclusive approach (Reddy, Lantz & Hulme, 2013). This expanded version defines employability as:

- a set of skills, understandings and attributes that are achieved over the course of a degree;
- being prepared to engage in an ongoing process of professional and personal career development;
- developing the ability to bring critical reasoning to bear, and applying these skills throughout and across the lifespan, not just within employment.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI; 2009) and the CBI with the National Union of Students (2011) collaborated with employers and Universities to identify nine key sets of attributes, skills and knowledge that graduates should aim to achieve. These comprise:

- **Self-management** - readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.
- **Teamworking** - respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/ persuading, contributing to discussions, and awareness of interdependence with others.
- **Business and customer awareness** - basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.
- **Problem solving** - analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.
- **Communication and literacy** - application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning.
- **Application of numeracy** - manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).
- **Application of IT** - basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.
- **Entrepreneurship/enterprise** - broadly, an ability to demonstrate an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking. An individual with these attributes can make a huge difference to any business.
- **Positive attitude** - a ‘can-do’ approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make these happen. This is the key foundation underpinning all the other attributes.

Our Strategy

The Academic Unit of Psychology aims to achieve the following goals in relation to the employability of its undergraduate and postgraduate students:

1. To continue to develop new approaches and opportunities to embed employability skills and skills awareness within the curriculum (e.g. through work-based learning activities and real-world examples), course design process (e.g. within module profiles), and induction programmes to ensure a minimum level of access and engagement for all students. This will continue to be underpinned by a range of additional bolt-on opportunities that are selected according to students' interests and personal development needs.
2. All employability-enhancing elements delivered to students should be translated into the language of achievements valued by employers to ensure that students are explicitly made aware of the employability related learning outcomes of their experiences.
3. To encourage and motivate students to take primary responsibility early on in their degree for developing their employability skills and reflecting on what they have learnt and how it relates to their plans for careers, employment, intellectual ability, and personal development. Reflective practice is necessary for skills, understandings and attributes to be recognised, put into practice, and articulated to potential employers.
4. To increase the involvement and awareness of academic staff within Psychology so there is clear engagement in the development and enthusiastic delivery of employability skills within the curriculum, and to acknowledge the wider scope of influence that academic staff may have on developing and advocating employability outside of the curriculum (i.e. through their roles as personal tutors, supervisors, and providers of ad hoc support to students about career paths, employment, and personal development).
5. To continue to maintain and build upon existing close links with the University of Southampton Career Destinations service, to maximise and tailor the provision of active support from the Career Destinations service to best meet the needs of Psychology students.
6. To continue to develop and promote use of the Efolio Psychology Employability and Personal Development Plan (PDP) supporting practical preparation for employment through the provision of structured help and guidance in how best to articulate students achievements, skills, understandings and attributes, and how they will be of benefit to potential employers in CVs, cover letters, application forms, and interviews.
7. To increase the opportunities provided for students to gain work experience, including volunteering and enterprise activities, participate in mentoring programmes, and engage with the role that employability plays in decisions over the course of their degree.
8. To raise awareness of student satisfaction and graduate employment destinations surveys – so that students can benefit from the information generated by these surveys, and also to increase motivation to contribute to these surveys for the benefit of future students. These comprise:
 - NSS (National Student Survey – for Undergraduates)
 - PTES (Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey)
 - PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey)
 - DHLE (Destination of Leavers from Higher Education – for all graduates)

- Destination of Psychology Graduates from the University of Southampton survey (for all graduates)
9. To increase our alumni and employer networks so that gaps in skills, understanding and attributes can be identified, and mutually beneficial employability related activities can be encouraged and exploited where suitable.
 10. To review the student experience in relation to employability by obtaining regular feedback from students (as partners) on their satisfaction with employability related activities and support provided, and by using relevant frameworks and models for employability².
 11. To promote and further develop opportunities to help students to compete in a global market through the development of global perspectives, such as learning about psychology in the global context, encouraging study abroad, language learning and sensitivity to cultural differences.

² such as the employability framework (Cole and Tibby, 2013), the SOAR process (Kumar, 2007), CareerEDGE (Dacre Pool & Sewell 2007), USEM (Knight & Yorke, 2004), or DOTS (Law & Watts 1977)