



University
of Glasgow



Student-Peer Mock Interviewing

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Student-peer mock interviewing in the School of Psychology

This intervention sought to enable Psychology students to communicate evidence of their graduate attributes in a real-world scenario.

Context

School of Psychology

College of Science and Engineering

Level 2

Subject: Psychology

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Key features



Small group size (<25).

Focus on raising (and consolidating) general awareness.

The activity is a one-off hour-long standalone seminar/tutorial conducted wholly in class.

Paper materials and PowerPoint presentation used so no technological competency required.

Partial impact on syllabus redesign and some impact on staff's workload.

NOTE:

For this intervention to work for students, they need to be already aware of GAs. The cohort being covered in the case study had already experienced an awareness-raising session in a lab activity.

The activity can be redesigned for use online, but that moves away from peer-to-peer interaction.

Activity description



Rationale

The main reason was to make students aware of the challenges at interview and to make them more employable when they are faced with interviews for internships and graduate jobs. While most have already experienced interviews for casual work, they have not yet experienced motivational and competency questions which graduate employers use. Evidence from conversations with and feedback from HR managers across a range of recruiters reveals that students are often unable to demonstrate their evidence of graduate attributes being sought. They are also often not thinking about their motivations for applying and unable to answer questions as to why the position is of interest and relevance to them.

The reasons above require more from students than is possible in a one hour intervention. It is hoped that students will continue to reflect on the range of questions which can come up alongside their evidence of the attributes which employers are targeting.



Activity description



Implementation

The mock interviewing occurred in a one hour interactive session containing input around the range of question types which employers are currently using in their internship and graduate job interviews. The session also focused on other aspects of recruitment such as employers' use of job descriptions and person specifications and the relationship between them and choice of interview questions.

The one hour session was a follow-up activity leading on from a lab session the students had taken part in and which focused on their graduate attributes. Students came in to the interviewing session having already done some reflection on how their course, casual work and extracurricular activities had already given them some evidence across the graduate attributes matrix.

The materials given to students for the mock interviewing exercise included a Person Specification for an Assistant Psychologist role, a range of questions which could be asked and an interview recording and feedback form.

The location used for the session and exercise was a lecture theatre.

Students were asked to complete a feedback form prior to the start of the session and immediately after the session. Staff wanted to evaluate pre- to post-session changes in students' perceptions of their knowledge and confidence levels around employer requirements and being able to articulate their graduate attributes.



Reactions

Regarding staff, we felt the session and activity went well but it would have been better within a location which allowed for more flexibility as to how students were sitting during the exercise i.e. a flexible learning space.

Knowledge and confidence levels as recorded quantitatively by students all increased compared to their pre-session levels. Students were also asked to record qualitative responses around what they had enjoyed about the session and exercise.

Comments included:

- *The different types of questions one could be asked – allows for preparation!*
- *It is really good to have this knowledge and to be introduced to it.*
- *The information about common interview questions and how to prepare for them was very helpful. Also what not to do and the information about the Network.*
- *The group exercise that helped us apply the knowledge we gain in practice and see how successful we actually are in selling ourselves. And the handouts with specific person specification for psychology.*
- *The presentation of the Network, pointing out that you can ask the interviewers for feedback, the interaction/practice element, using STAR, interview advice and practice, specific for psychology, example of questions for interviews.*



Reactions - continued

Regarding aspects which students thought could be changed, comments included:

- *Publicise it more.*
- *Maybe give overview of options and whether interviews differ in the field.*
- *More examples of possible evidence for attributes would be helpful.*
- *Warn/give students time to prep for this practical element should they want to practice in the workshop.*
- *I expected some more Psychology-specific information about careers and specific requirements.*
- *No, I was satisfied with the range of things covered.*
- *Maybe some advice for LinkedIn accounts.*
- *Maybe giving more specific examples in the context of a job application within psychology and examples of jobs related to psychology.*
- *There is a new method that firms adopt: strength-based instead of competency-based that the session could cover.*



Analysis & evaluation

The activity achieved a high degree of engagement from all students present. This included student responses to questions at the start of the session such as “Have you ever been asked a question like that in an interview?”, “How would you answer that?” The range students were responding to varied from fairly routine questions to challenging question such as, “Do you have a weakness?”

The focus in this summary though is the mock interviewing part of the session and students really did engage with that. They were happy to swap roles within pairs and take up both the interviewer and candidate roles. One specific point worth mentioning though is that the procedure followed was for the interviewee to be allowed to decide which question(s) they wanted to be asked first, to do a quick reflection and then launch in to some answers. These were heard by the student interviewer, they could give some prompt questions if they wanted to, they recorded the responses and then gave their peers feedback on the quality of their answers: did they answer the questions well, was the shape of any competency answers correct (i.e. a focus on action) what was their body language e.g. posture, eye contact? So the procedure simulated a real interview but only up to a point.

This type of activity allows students to articulate their graduate attributes and to also become more aware of what an internship or graduate job interview actually consists of. It gives students the opportunity to do well and gain confidence and also to make errors in a supportive workshop setting, getting feedback which will be useful in the context of further reflection on their evidence and how to get it across.





Recommendations

Recently, 2017-2018, this activity was extended and embedded in a Careers seminar series as part of the MVLS Graduate Award for PGTs. The series enabled PGTs to move through every major stage in the selection and recruitment process with the last interactive session focusing on job interviews and assessment centres. One of the benefits of this approach is that students face the real world scenario of having to articulate their graduate attributes at several different stages, as they need to do in real life, with the main stages being at online application form and interview.

Care needs to be taken to coach students on how to give effective feedback to peers – how to be positive and how to get any points across along constructive criticism lines so that the exercise remains a confidence building one.

The activity also needs to relate to how employers relevant to different student cohorts and subject areas actually do recruitment. While the above exercise focused in on competency based questions and while this is currently the most common graduate job interview scenario, some major graduate recruiters have moved away from this and adopted strengths based interviewing techniques.

Research on and relationships with relevant recruiters need to inform mock interviewing based exercises used with and by students.

References

Swingler, M. et al (2018) Enhancing employability through a multi-disciplinary approach to graduate attributes: embedding engagement and developing self-efficacy in pre-honours undergraduates. *11th Annual Learning and Teaching Conference*, University of Glasgow, March.



This resource is part of the 'Graduate Attributes – Roadmap for Staff' resource:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/goodpractice/graduateattributes>

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