

Community Knowledge Exchange

Digital career resources or a filled lecture theatre are efficient methods to deliver career guidance but are they effective?



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What makes career guidance effective is exactly the type of question the White Rose Industrial Physics Academy (WRIPA) are exploring (www.wripa.ac.uk). WRIPA is a collaboration between five Northern university physics departments and a business network of over 500 technical employers. WRIPA was created to provide physics students with the opportunity to gain skills and work experience that better prepares them for graduate-level technical employment. A key element of achieving this rests on effective career guidance.

Initial survey finds

WRIPA conducted a student survey to better understand decision-making in relation to and engagement with their career futures. A total of 185 students responded to this survey. A key conclusion was that student concerns of job rejection are more of a deterrent than the actual application experience. Students who received careers guidance were more likely to accept rejection as part of the recruitment process unlike students that had not. In this case, the fear of rejection is a key barrier. Additionally, physics students tend not to engage with lecture-based 'career guidance sessions'.

Taking a different approach

The University of York WRIPA Team has introduced a different careers guidance approach within the School of Physics, Engineering and Technology, offering a tailored 1-to-1, person-led approach. Just as individuals learn in different ways the same is true of how they acquire knowledge about career opportunities. Also students have different 'invisible barriers' to acquiring work experience or developing professional networks. Our physics students are academically equipped for technical roles. However, they need to have the self-awareness to align their skill set with particular technology sectors and the confidence to act on the careers guidance. An individual's level of self-awareness and confidence is often informed by their background and/or disability. Recognising and acknowledging the diversity of our student cohort and intersectionality drives the focus of this work. We believe this is an equitable way to support our physics students to realise their career potential.

Tailored support

Typically, one-to-one meetings last one hour. Students have the opportunity to ask specific questions relevant to them and their needs, and can discuss any concerns or fears. The guidance or support given reflects the individual's need. The needs of students can be complex and a professional relationship created through individual tailored support helps to address multiple factors of disadvantage.





Students leave the session with a tangible action plan and a clear ‘forward look’ of what to do next. Often, students are also connected to later stage physics students or early career alumni to offer insights into a specific organisation or job role or for mentoring. This dual approach minimises procrastination and motivates students to take on a higher level of independence and agency. It also reduces anxiety around the “world of work” and minimises both imposter syndrome and the fear of failure. This is highlighted in the student feedback shown below:

Student feedback

“The 1:1 talks really helped me with difficult areas of the application process and reduced the anxiety I was feeling about the process!”

“I found the advice really helpful, making applications can be quite nerve-wracking but I felt more prepared and confident after my 1:1 meeting”.

“Honestly, the encouragement you gave me last year to apply for internships despite me thinking I didn’t have the skills really gave me the starting step and the confidence to apply for multiple grad jobs this year”

Word of mouth

This person-led careers guidance was introduced in 2021-22. During this first year 104 individual physics students made use of this service representing 19% of the student body. In 2022-23, student engagement increased to 23% or 122 individual students. Additionally, for 2022-23, in total, 206 1-to-1 meetings took place, reflecting the student need for continued tailored support. Although the service is advertised to students, ‘word of mouth’ has been the biggest advocate to encourage their peers to seek careers guidance.

Currently, over a third of students participating in tailored support successfully apply for a role in a technical sector and the remaining students develop a deeper understanding of the opportunities available to them, how to move through a recruitment process and a recognition of the graduate attributes they develop through their physics curriculum.

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