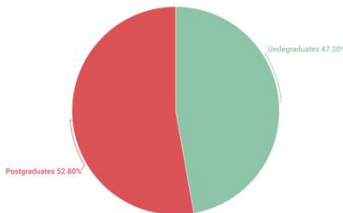


Why do undergraduates use the careers service less than postgraduates?

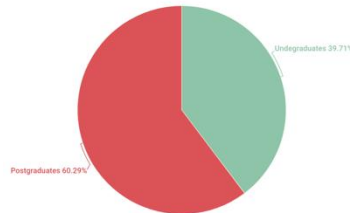
Last academic year (2018-2019), the undergraduate LSE Careers Service attendance rate was 56% compared to 76% for postgraduates. This has remained fairly consistent over the past 4 years, shown by data from LSE Careers. The aim of this study is to understand why undergraduates are not engaging with their careers service relative to their postgraduate peers.

LSE has a higher postgraduate population, therefore I first looked at the relative ratio of attendance between postgraduates and undergraduates in the 2018-2019 session.

Undergraduate vs Postgraduate population at LSE



LSE Careers attendance rate



The second pie chart shows out of those who attended, the percentage that were undergraduates and postgraduates. This shows the issue in not only in absolute terms but also in proportional terms too relative to their size within the university. (Population data from LSE website regarding student statistics).

LSE Career Hub:

This is the main point of contact to find opportunities and the platform needed to book in advance of attending a LSE Careers service event or appointment.

I wanted to explore how undergraduates interacted with Career Hub and how this impacts their physical attendance. As there is no clear way to measure the extent to which a student is engaged with Careers Hub online, I decided to use bookmarking data as a proxy as it would show the correlation between engagement on Career Hub and attendance.

From 2018-2019 data: postgraduates made up 69.4% of bookings, with undergraduates making the rest. This shows a positive correlation between undergraduates engaging less with Career Hub in the bookmarking process which is then associated with lower attendance.

Focus groups:

- Used focus groups to explore opinions and experiences of undergraduate students.
- Held 3 focus groups, 11 students in total from the Economics department, with students from every year of study.
- Focused on Economics department as it is large, thus more likely to get range of opinions reflective of the undergraduate population.

With respect to Career Hub, a couple students had utilised the opportunities section and found it helpful. The general consensus was it got the job done with one saying, "I wouldn't say it's like a reflex to go on Career Hub". However, no student knew the resources page on Career Hub existed, showing a lack of awareness preventing students from taking full advantage of the resources available.

There were 4 main reasons that students talked about which led to a lack of engagement:

1. Awareness; lack of awareness about the service and the opportunities it offers

- Students first found out about the Careers Service in a range of ways including; Fresher's Fair, emails, seeing the main fairs in LSE Life.
- A student which had never attended anything by the careers service said it was due to a lack of awareness about what they did.

Marketing:

- Majority of students did not follow LSE Careers on their Facebook page and some weren't even aware of their existence. Two students asked, "They have a Facebook page?".
- Student who followed the Facebook page said "when their stuff came up on my feed, it was the same thing over and over again, just really generic" which doesn't build excitement or interest around opportunities.
- Within the first focus group, students mainly relied on word-of-mouth to find out about events or opportunities
- Very few people check emails by LSE Careers with a student saying, "you get so many emails from the university that even if I do see LSE Careers, I won't necessarily press on it".

Opportunities:

- Most students were aware of careers fairs, company presentations, CV and cover letter checking service.
- Majority didn't know about the 'coffee mornings' or 'meet an alum' events. A student who had been to a coffee morning said, "I found it better than a careers fair because there's less people there and you can have more one-on-ones". This shows utility being derived from it, but there is a lack of awareness leading to a lack of attendance.

2. Relevance; many thought the service was general, especially for students wanting to follow a set career path.

Opportunities:

- "It's quite like a generic careers service" when talking about the service as a whole.
- A 2nd year student who had gotten their CV checked in each academic year said the "advice was limited" but "marginally more effective in first year" when they didn't know how to write a CV. Indicates advice in those types of sessions is more relevant for students with little careers knowledge and may discourage use from other students.
- Student who had been to an assessment centre (AC) preparation session thought it to be "not representative of an actual AC". Another student said they "couldn't get tailored feedback" which was a downside.
- Two students in the last focus group who had positive feedback was due to how specific and tailored their experience was to them. This was in relation to a mock interview and a consulting specific interview.
- Many other students mentioned they would like interviews focused specifically on a sector or division. Student in second focus group "if I wanted to know something specific about consultancy I can go to a specific person, I think that would be very helpful."
- A student said they would "much rather go to a specific friend who probably knows a lot about a specific career path".

Perceptions:

- Some students had a perception of what they would be like before even attending; a student believed the interview service to be generic so had not gone for help before any upcoming interviews.
- Another student said "I've got a negative perception of how useful a careers service is" due to their past school experiences.

Availability:

- Within first focus group, they all agreed their desired events were full; "whenever BCG, Bain come to campus, they're always full in 5 minutes, so what's the point". This led to their disengagement with the careers service in the future.

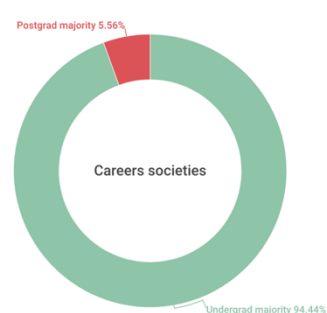
3. Careers societies; many students preferred using this platform as their source of information

From the 36 active careers labelled societies on the LSESU website page (cross referenced by data from the Student's Union), 34 of them had an undergraduate majority (51% of members or greater).

This sentiment was reiterated from the majority of students within focus groups;

- "I tend to go to it because it's better advertised, see it all over the place."
- "Societies get better firms"
- "Not a lot of careers societies have sign ups like career hub does"
- "Less formal, more inviting"
- "You get to build a network"

Career societies partitioned by their majority student base



Through the lack of engagement on Career Hub shown by bookmarking data, unawareness of all resources on career hub, lack of awareness and relevance of the careers service, a cycle of disengagement is created amongst the undergraduates:

Undergraduates engage less with career hub:

- Aren't aware of the range of events which are being held
- Don't read their email
- Don't follow LSE Careers Facebook
- Aren't aware of all the tools on Career Hub

Undergraduates attend fewer things by the careers department:

- Weren't aware of the events being held
- Didn't book on Career Hub
- Don't find the events/appointments engaging or relevant
- Aren't aware of who will be speaking/attending the events
- Prefer go to career societies, friends or family

4. Recruitment cycle; usage of the careers service was mainly aligned with the recruitment cycle

- Majority of firm recruitment occurs during the start of the year and then tapers off; many student's views on the careers service highlighted this as well.
- A 2nd year student said, "I think the best things are at the beginning of the year and then nothing".
- A 1st year student who used the service at the beginning of the year quite a number of times said, "after October, I never even checked like any careers service".
- 5 students said that they hadn't used the careers service in their first year and weren't very aware of it. However, as internships applications came around in second year, that is when they started engaging with the careers service more. A 1st year student said, "I would be more interested in second year when there are a lot more internships available".

Therefore, undergraduates may face a different recruitment cycle to postgraduates especially as their degree lasts between 3-4 years, whereas many postgraduate degrees are 1-2 years which translates to differing levels of usage of the careers service.

Recommendations:

A three-pronged approach to increase engagement levels amongst undergraduates, with ways of achieving them.

1. Enhance the marketing strategy

- Get in contact with the appropriate careers societies to promote relevant LSE Careers services since many undergraduates already follow their Facebook pages and many are a member of those organisations too.
- Actively tell students to follow the LSE Careers Facebook page at appointments, through emails and events.
- Can integrate Careers Hub onto the LSE Student Hub mobile application. This way, if students are interested in a particular firm or event which will be held, they could get notifications on their phone reminding them to book in advance and where the event would be held.

2. Provide greater focus

This is to address the fact that many students thought the services provided were generic and those who had positive experiences was due to the fact that their appointments

- Have CV and interview checks and practices which are focused on certain sectors/divisions. The career advisors could be trained on those certain areas and appointments would be advertised accordingly on career hub.
- Increase promotion of smaller, more intimate events such as 'meet an alum' or the 'coffee mornings'. They are more focused and students in the focus groups showed an interest in these events but weren't too aware of them or when they occurred.
- Provide greater information on Facebook posts about the event, the speakers/attendees and give a sneak preview of the events that are to come in the future, so students regularly check career hub.

3. Increase engagement throughout each year

This is to help break up the recruitment cycle highlighted in the focus group and try eliminating negative perceptions people may have of careers services.

- Have an LSE Careers ambassador in each department and year group to promote LSE Career events. This could help increase engagement throughout the year as students would hear about the different ways LSE Careers could help on a regular basis. It would also reduce the negative perceptions as students would be encouraged to try the opportunities themselves as they are hearing it from their peers.

Overall, it is clear the careers service has a wide range of services to offer which can be very beneficial to undergraduates. However, due to the lack of awareness and focus, this has led to a lack of usage which is most likely enhanced by the recruitment cycle faced by undergraduates and the career societies they are a part of.