

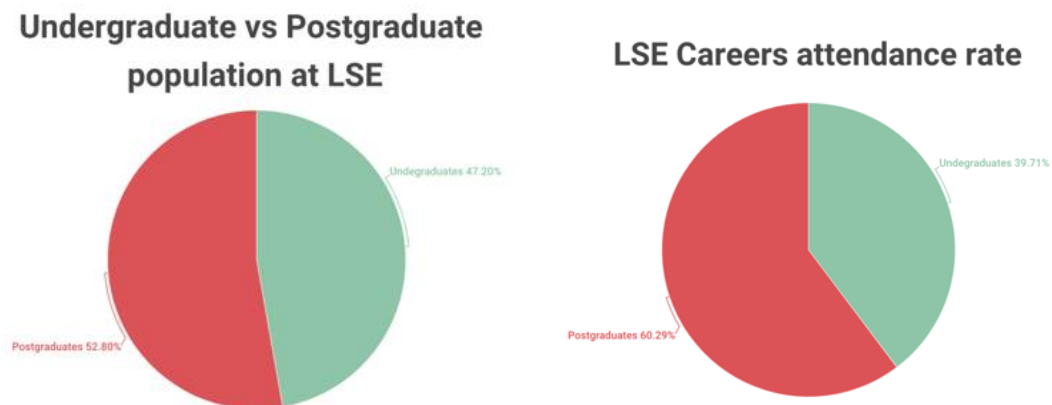
Why do undergraduates use the careers service less than postgraduates?

Sarah Asif

Last academic year (2018-2019), the undergraduate Careers Service attendance rate was 56% compared to 76% of 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 the Careers Service relative to postgraduates.

A longer version of this summary report is available from

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.



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 an event or appointment. I wanted to explore how undergraduates interacted with Career Hub and the impact on physical attendance. As there is no clear way to measure the extent to which a student is engaged with Careers Hub online, I used bookmarking data as a proxy to show the correlation between engagement on Career Hub and attendance.

From 2018-2019 data: postgraduates made up 69.4% of bookings, 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.

Methodology

- Held 3 focus groups, 11 students in total from the Economics department, with students from every year of study.
- Used the Economics department as it is large; more likely to get range of opinions reflective of the undergraduates.

Findings

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

Marketing:

- A student who never attended anything said it was due to a lack of awareness about what the service did.
- Majority of students did not follow the Careers Facebook page and two students asked, “they have a Facebook page?”.
- Student who followed the page said, “when their stuff came up on my feed, it was the same thing over and over again, just really generic”.
- 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 the 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:

- A 2nd year student who had gotten their CV checked in each academic year said the “advice was limited” the 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 said they would like interviews focused on a sector or division; “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 and availability:

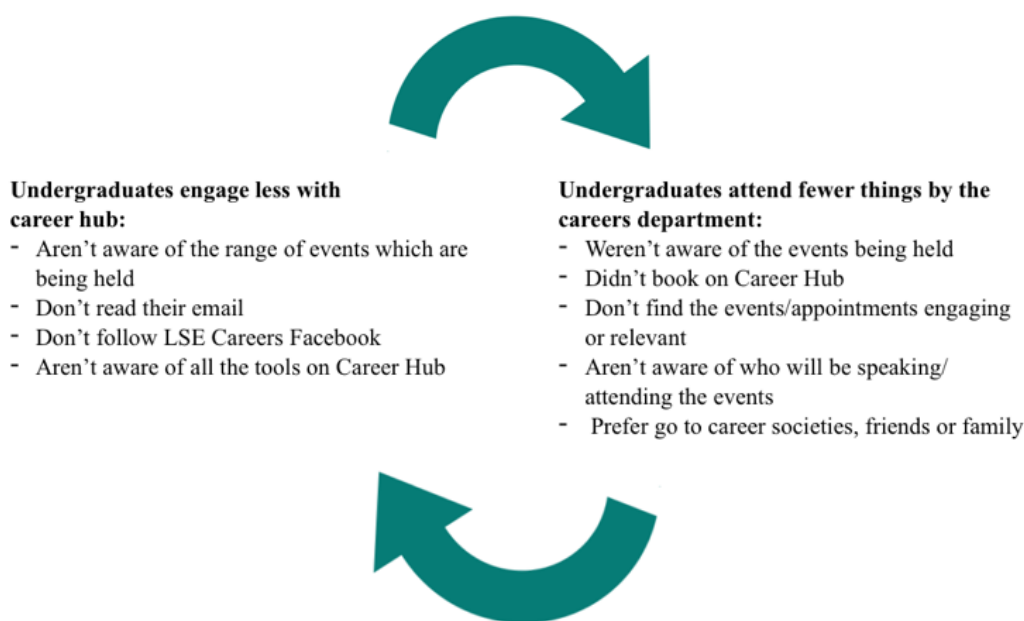
- Some students had a perception of what the service would be like before even utilising it; a student believed the interview service to be generic so had not gone for help before any upcoming interviews.
- Another student said “I’ve got a negative perception of how useful a careers service is” due to their past school experiences.
- 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”
- “You get to build a network”

A cycle of disengagement is created amongst undergraduates:



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

- A 2nd year student said, “I think the best things are at the beginning of the year and then nothing”.
- 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”.

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 engagement.

Recommendations

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

1. Enhance the marketing strategy
 - Liaise with appropriate careers societies to promote relevant LSE Careers services.
 - Actively tell students to follow the LSE Careers Facebook page at appointments, through emails and events.
 - Integrate Career Hub onto the LSE Student Hub mobile application. Students would get relevant notifications then.
2. Provide greater focus
 - Have CV and interview checks and practices which are focused on certain sectors/divisions.
 - Increase promotion of smaller, more intimate events such as 'meet an alum' or the 'coffee mornings'. 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.
3. Increase engagement throughout each year
 - Have an LSE Careers ambassador in each department and year group to promote LSE Career events. This also helps eliminate negative perceptions as students are hearing about the opportunities from their peers.