

## Personal and Professional Development at the LSE

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### Background

Our research project was proposed by Philip Rauber, a learning developer for personal and professional development at the LSE. The LSE aims to support its students to not only understand our rapidly changing world, but to also shape it and create an impact locally and globally. In this project, we looked at what LSE students need in terms of development opportunities, beyond academic development, to become effective agents of change.

We focused on the personal and professional development opportunities LSE Life or LSE Careers offered that alumni either found:

- a) useful
- b) would have liked to pursue while studying at the LSE

Our research complements an ongoing personal development pilot with current students and our findings will contribute to the planning and design of programmes offered to students in 2024/2025.

### Literature review

Existing research shows that opportunities at university that emphasise personal and professional development have significant impacts on the professional outcomes of students. Hooley and Taylor (2014) found that a module focusing on practical employment-related activities, such as psychometric tests and mock interviews, led to a 31% increase in students securing graduate employment within 6 months. Cranmer, Mason, and Williams (2009) found that employer-led involvement such as talks and guidance of careers services increased the ability of students to secure graduate level employment. Furthermore, with regards to the opportunities available at the LSE, a previous Changemakers project by Asif (2020) discovered that in the 2018-2019 academic year, many undergraduate students said that advice given by the Careers Service was very vague and not tailored to a specific career. We targeted some of our interview questions to ascertain whether these findings hold, or still hold, for the LSE.

### Methodology

In our research project, we constructed our interview and survey questions with three main focuses:

- 1) Alumnis' experience and usage of LSE Life and the career services during their time at the LSE

- 2) Whether the services or opportunities communicated by the LSE adequately prepared them with the skills necessary for the graduate application process and their current career
- 3) In retrospect, improvements that could be made to LSE Life and the career services

We utilised a qualitative approach, carrying out semi-structured interviews with LSE alumni in the workforce. We wanted our respondents to have graduated fairly recently to ensure our findings were tackling the most current and salient issues. Furthermore, department offerings and support vary wildly across the LSE, as well as experiences between home, EU, and international students. Hence, our criteria for respondents were as follows:

- Completed undergraduate studies within the past 0-5 years
- Graduated from various academic departments
- Hailed from various geographical backgrounds

## **Data Analysis**

**The skills participants believe are the most important for future workers are:**

- Soft skills: active listening / interpersonal skills
- Handling pressure, public speaking, time management

**The most useful services LSE could/have provided:**

- 2 participants mentioned Mock interviews, 3 participants mentioned Excel workshop and CV workshops, 1 participant mentioned Networking events with different speakers

**Impactful comments from multiple participants:**

- 2 participants discussed a lack of promotion of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, such as not being aware of the importance of spring weeks until too late.
  - 1 person suggested a fund for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to buy a suit for interviews due to their expensive prices or more support in careers for these students
- 2 participants said that if you are unsure about career paths there is a lack of signposting/guidance.
- 4 participants said there is minimal breadth of options of industry
  - No software or tech opportunities, people who don't want to go into the typical industries did not have careers services/workshops available

**Comments from individual participants about LSE careers services:**

- The careers/skill workshops were oversubscribed and not communicated well enough
- Startup/international companies work was too focused on the USA

**Wellbeing comments by participants included:**

- The LSE Counseling waiting list is extremely long and don't offer specialized support

## **Recommendations**

- **Qualitative support:** Bloomberg terminal workshops, building DCFs and other models
  - Accounting workshops: how to read the three statements

- **Technological advancements learning:** 3 participants emphasised importance of learning coding and how python should be taught instead of R and workshops weren't communicated well enough or available to all degrees
  - More speakers from the tech world, discussing tech trends, utilising AI, growth of crypto
- **Assessment day workshops:** organise practise with groups of students as soft skills are important to develop and meeting other students in similar careers can build support and relieve some stress
- **New networking methods:** 5 participants suggested more active networking opportunities or mentorship bootcamps with companies that come to campus.
  - For example, American universities and Oxbridge host career events where you can hand in your CV in person and representatives shortlist you for a coffee chat
  - Easier ways to contact alumni in similar fields should be found and publicised to students
- **Breadth of career offerings:** 2 participants discussed how important it is LSE shows students the variety of careers that they can enter
  - Perhaps by offering a careers stream/channel where people can apply to a channel they are interested in and LSE careers recommends you on steps to take or people to speak with to better understand the career and be ready for interviews
  - 2 participants suggested departmental level support would be beneficial in discussing what industries previous students have entered and focus talks on what people in particular departments go into (e.g 30% in Anthropology go to industries other than finance or consulting)
- **Wellbeing support:** LSE should expand counselling services to make sure no students face a long waitlist and also publicise well-being opportunities more such as meditation apps

## Conclusion

- While LSE Careers have expanded their services over the years and provide career support through CV workshops and skills labs, graduate interviewees in retrospect argue for greater provision of services
- All participants felt the variety of services offered should be greater:
  - LSE often cultivates a culture of finance and consulting being the sole industries that students should look to enter. As such, our results show that it is important for LSE to present students with more information on possible career paths (e.g start-up world, diplomacy)
  - Results also showed that current support provided lacks tailored advice and a forward-looking outlook. As such, inviting alumni or banks to conduct workshops may be a solution as well as publicising and developing LSE's tech workshops
  - Many students also felt that job opportunities were disproportionately skewed towards London and the UK. Hence, greater support for international students or people looking to work abroad can be useful
- We hope this research can provide preliminary understandings into what LSE careers and

LSE Life can develop to better support students in their professional and personal development opportunities.

- For LSE students, the career support they receive plays a large part in the jobs they reach for and acquire after university which ultimately impacts their happiness and stability post graduation which is why this research can help LSE improve its offerings.
- To continue the research, perhaps a quantitative focus can be used to analyse the number of students that use LSE Life and Careers to find which ones are most and least popular, lending insight into what areas can be further developed.

## **Bibliography**

- Cranmer, S., Mason, G., & Williams, G. (2009). Employability Skills Initiatives in Higher Education: What Effects Do They Have on Graduate Labour Market Outcomes? *Education Economics*, 17, 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645290802028315>
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