

EMPLOYER PROJECTS AS COOPERATIVE LEARNING: ADVANCING INCLUSION AND CAREER READINESS IN PSYCHOLOGY

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**CAREERS
SERVICE**



Employers Project in the BSc Psychology Programme

- **Career Pathways** unit is a core Year 2 module within the BSc psychology; designed to help explore career options.
- The **employer project pathway** is a structured group-based learning experience where students work on a real-world brief set up by an external organisation
- This allows them to apply psychological knowledge and research skills to authentic workplace problems while gaining experience of professional practice.
- The pathway supports:
 - Development of soft skills** including communication, teamwork, problem-solving
 - Gain experience **working with stakeholders**
 - Reflect** on future career goals



Employer Project: Psychology and Careers Service partnership

The Careers Service has historically worked closely with the Psychology Programme to co-develop employability related learning in the Career Pathways unit

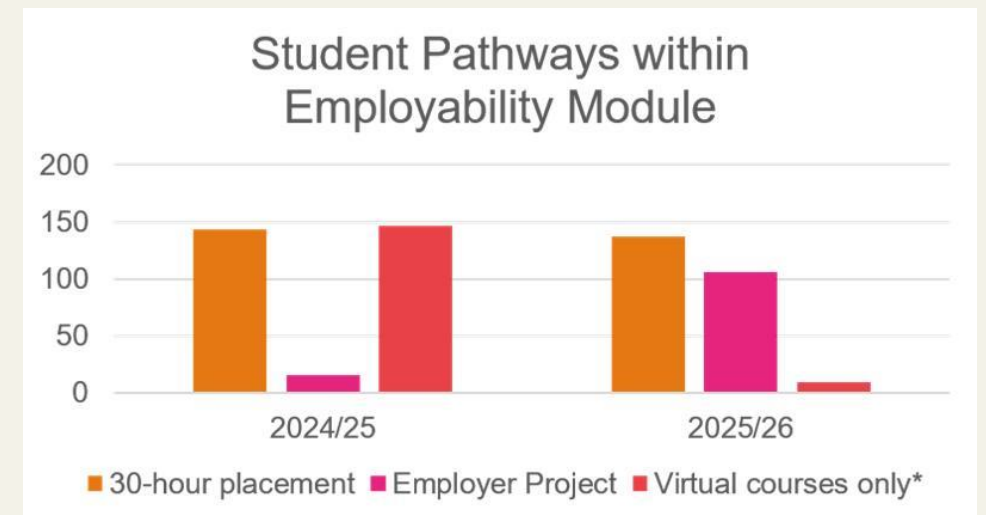
Our role in the development of the EP initiative includes:

Securing Employer Contributors through our Business Development Team

Creating skills development-based workshops and plenary sessions to 'bookend' the initiative

Supporting collection of feedback and evaluation activities

Aligning the initiative with our Careers Service strategy and Employability Goals



Our **vision** is to empower and inspire every student and graduate to confidently pursue a meaningful future, through a sector-leading, inclusive careers education aligned with university learning, institutional ambition and global context. This strategic approach to enhancing the experiences of our students and graduates is built upon four key priorities.

Embedded Employability

Position employability as a fundamental part of the academic experience, securing institutional adoption of Employability Framework and a co-created definition of the UoM Graduate Attributes.

Experiential Learning

Advocate for all students and graduates to have embedded, experiential learning throughout their academic journey, in support of career development, fostering reflection and preparing for a changing global labour market.

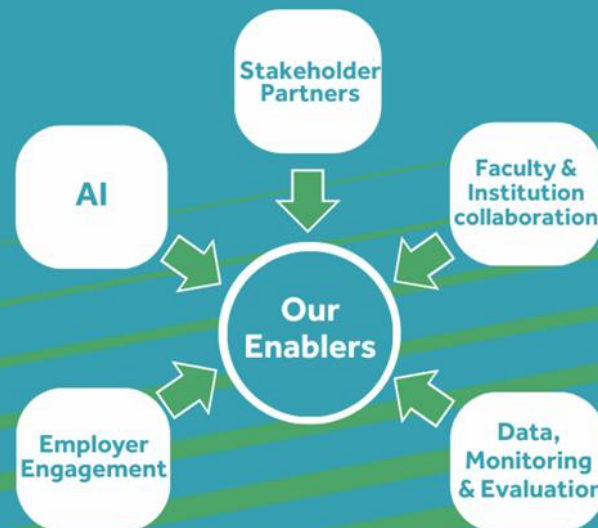
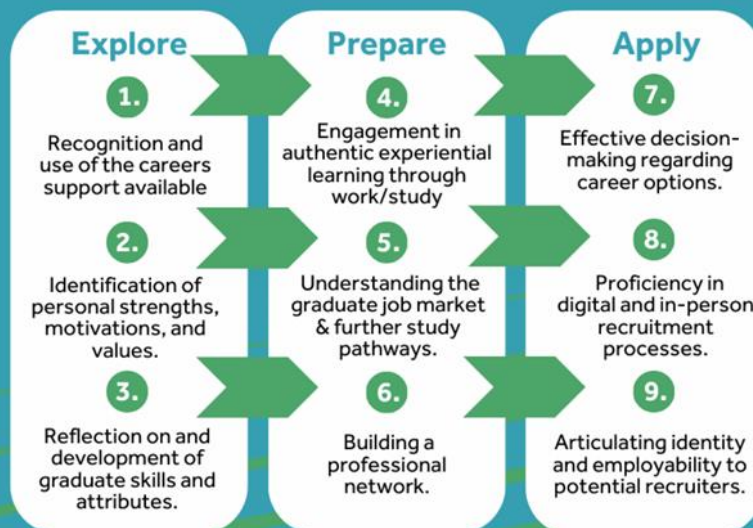
Inclusion First

Embed inclusive practices throughout our work to empower our students/graduates whilst acting as advocates to address structural barriers impacting on equitable access to careers education and opportunities.

International Student Success

Facilitate visa-informed, culturally responsive advice/support tailored to international students/graduates' unique needs based on improved understanding of their ambitions and realistic accessibility of different opportunities (UK/globally).

Our Employability Goals



Measuring Impact

Short Term

% students reporting increase in Career Confidence

Medium Term

% students completing guided pathways/ in-curriculum employability assessments/ experiential learning
Increase in student's self-reported attributes via Skills Audit/Educational Gains survey

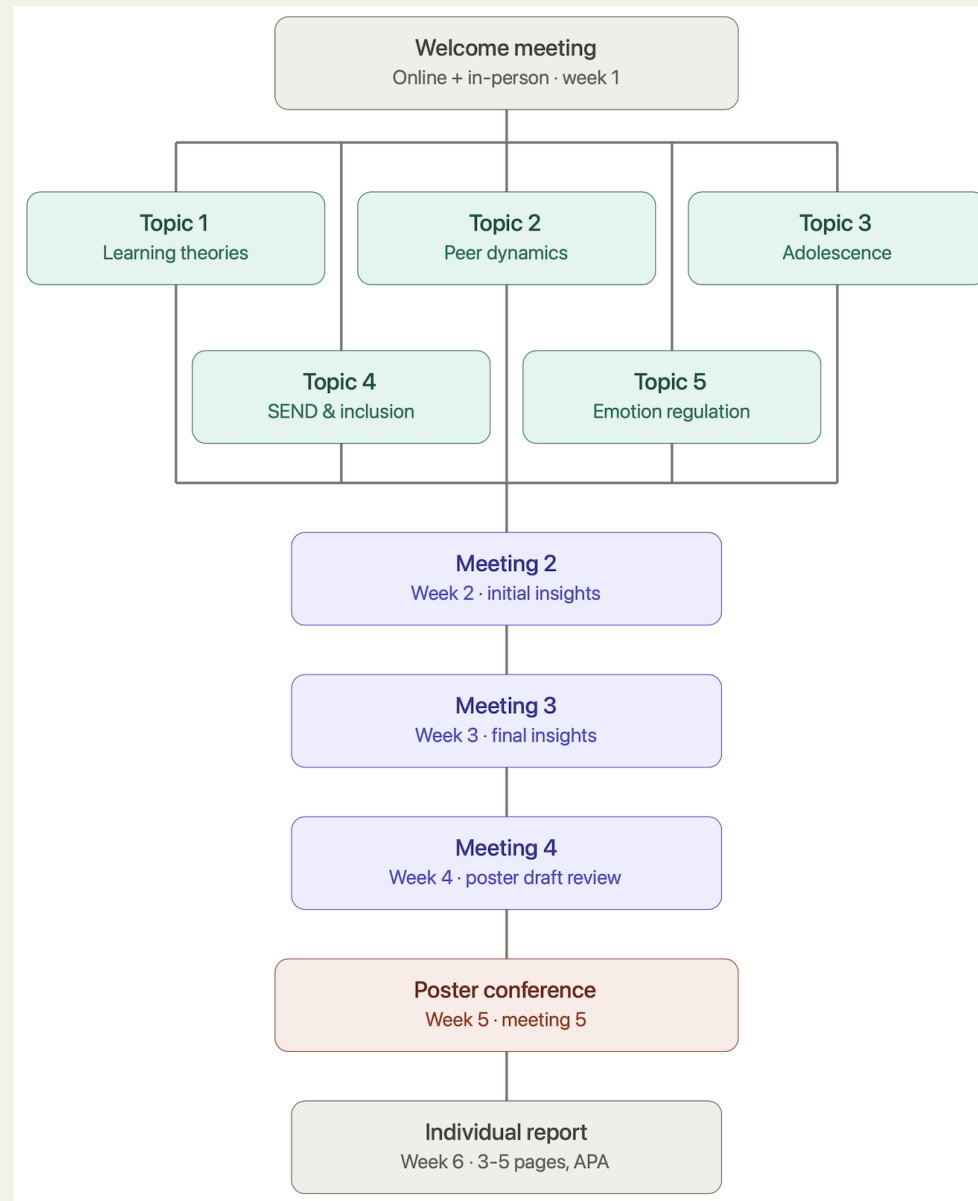
Long Term

Graduate Outcomes Survey/NSS B3 questions

Reimagining Employers Projects through Cooperative Learning

- Traditional approaches to employers project require students to work in the brief as a group--> this can create challenges around contribution, motivation, and ownership
- This year, we adapted the employer project applying the **principles of cooperative learning**:
 - Each student becomes the designated **lead for a specific research strand** within the employer brief.
 - Students develop **expertise** in their assigned area (e.g., labour market analysis, policy, education pathways, technological change).
 - Topic leads gather, evaluate, and synthesise evidence before teaching their findings to the wider group.
- Cooperative learning creates **positive interdependence, increases accountability, encourages peer teaching and knowledge exchange**

Employers Project Learning Workflow



Employer Project feedback/evaluation

Employers voice

"We have thoroughly enjoyed working in partnership with the University of Manchester through the Employer Project initiative. The experience has been extremely positive, particularly the opportunity to engage directly with students as they responded to our brief. The quality of work, creativity, and professionalism demonstrated in the final posters was fantastic to see.

What has been especially rewarding is seeing students who took part in the project go on to join our programme for their placement year. The project clearly helped them develop a strong understanding of our organisation, our values, and the nature of our work, which they were then able to confidently articulate during their interviews.

This project is a great example of how meaningful employer engagement can enhance student readiness, and we are proud to support and continue our collaboration with the University of Manchester."

City Year

Employer Project feedback/evaluation

Student voice

The Employer's Project helped me realise that, despite the rejections and knocks on my confidence that I had experienced during the search for a 30 hour work placement, my failures were never due to a lack of ability that I possessed. I had learned that I was perfectly capable of being assertive in the completion of a shared goal, able to communicate effectively not only with my colleagues but in a public speaking scenario, and most importantly that I had a level of resilience that I had never known I could possess prior to the project. I was truthfully feeling ready to give up at the beginning of the project, but I still went on to fully commit to my role and the team, working as if being assigned to my role and the project at large was my choice from the beginning.

The Employer's Project taught me how to trust and invest in myself and renewed my confidence in my ability to thrive in a professional capacity, so I will continue to

The project did not give me a perfect career plan, but it did make my direction clearer. I now know that I enjoy work connecting psychology to real-world problems, especially when it involves people, behaviour, and communication

Overall, the Enterprise Mobility project helped me understand that career readiness is not a finished state. For me, it is a process of learning how to turn knowledge into action and recognise where my strengths can make a real difference. My biggest takeaway for other students is that feeling unsure at first does not mean you are unprepared. Often, it means you are doing something new to help you grow.

Employer Project feedback/evaluation

What students valued...

Theme	Example Student Comments
Collaboration and Social Belonging	"Working as a team"; "made new friends"; "deep group discussions"; "communicating with the team"
Authentic Application of Psychology	"Applying psychological theories"; "real-world problem"; "put theory into practice"
Exploration and Intellectual Growth	"Researching something completely new"; "exploring an area I wasn't familiar with"
Skills Development	"Problem solving"; "research experience"; "making a PowerPoint and poster"; "critical thinking"
Structure and Support	"Instructions covered all bases"; "feedback was clear and helpful"

86% of students surveyed (37) said they **feel more confident** about group work

Students identified **Communication, Teamwork** and **Research Skills** as some of the top skills developed*

*from a selection of provided skills

Employer Project feedback/evaluation

What students wanted improved...

Theme	Example Student Comments
Need for Greater Structure	"More structure"; "clearer framework"; "more information about presentations"
Preparation for Poster Conference	"Didn't feel prepared"; "need examples"; "clarity on presentation"
More GTA Contact and Support	"More meetings"; "more workshops"; "better use of meetings"
Group Coordination Challenges	"Communication was tricky"; "team engagement was low"
Integrating Individual Research	"Difficult to synthesise after working on separate tasks"

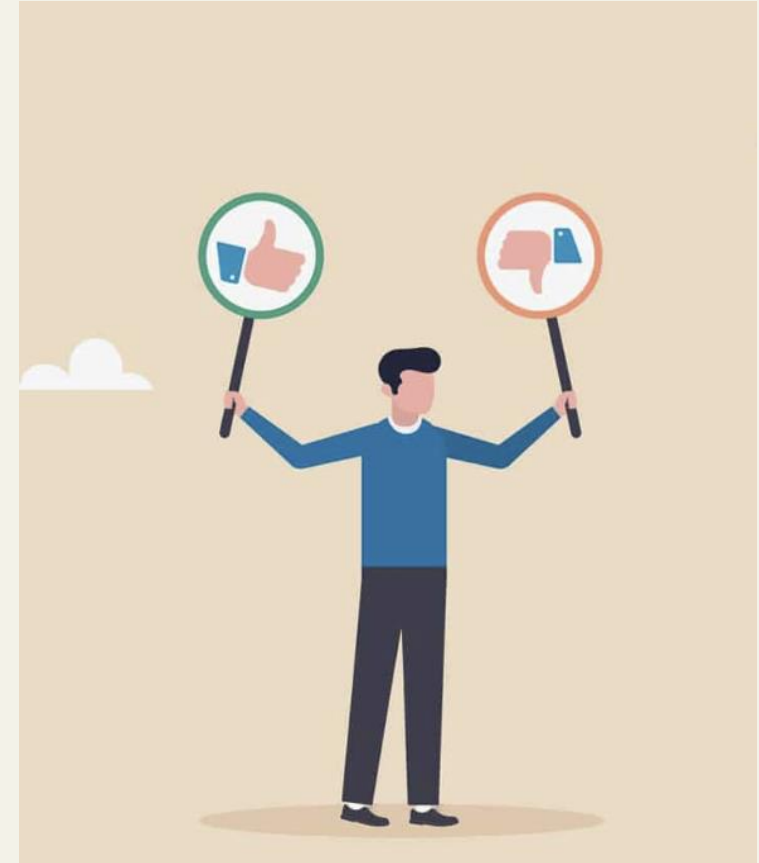
Lessons Learned and Future Directions

1. Strengthen **knowledge integration**
--> aim for integration at the end of each session
2. Increase **scaffolding** of both students and GTAs
3. Improve **authenticity** --> further interactions with employers



Recommendations for Adopting Employer Projects in other Programmes

1. Start with real problems
2. Design for cooperative learning
3. Co-design along the way
4. Scaffold the process with clear milestones, templates, and exemplars
5. Ensure individual accountability with individual outputs too
6. Make explicit professionalism and employability development



Thank you for listening!