

STRENGTHS - PROFILE

CASE STUDY

The Student Opportunity's Career Services Team at The University of Warwick provide skills development opportunities, career advice and guidance for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The University of Warwick is consistently rated as one of the top universities in the UK. It is one of the most targeted universities by graduate employers for graduate recruitment programs.

Challenge

University students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, often face a number of hurdles in their transition to employment and the world of work. These can include a lack of a clear understanding of the direction to go in, the need to increase their self-confidence and self-awareness, and the ability to distinguish themselves at interview and demonstrate their employability.

Anne Wilson, Head of Careers at The University of Warwick, identified that helping students to understand their strengths and weaknesses might help them improve their self-awareness and self-confidence, as well as enhancing their employability. The trend for UK graduate employers to use strengths-based recruitment in their graduate campaigns is up to 43%, demonstrating a further value-add through identifying and developing the strengths of students and graduates.

Approach

The University of Warwick partnered with Cappfinity to design two workshops that integrated Strengths Profile as part of an exploration of career planning. The entire Career Services Team were subsequently trained as Certified Accredited Strengths Practitioners in the use of Strengths Profile as a strengths identification and development tool for students and graduates, through the following approach:

- Two groups of 15 students were used in a pilot project to test the approach: second year students about to apply for internships and final year students with no clear career plans
- Two workshop sessions were delivered for each group, helping them to focus on understanding their strengths through Strengths Profile and using this to inform their own career development decisions

Outcome

Both groups showed significant increases in their ability to:

- Describe their strengths in an application or resume – **from 40% to 80%**
- Articulate their strengths to a recruiter – **from 60% to 80%**
- Strengths Profile workshops increased students' confidence in attending interviews – **from 50% to 70%**

Feedback from students on the workshops has been consistently positive. **20%** of participants specifically attributed their success at securing a placement to their understanding of their strengths that they achieved through the Strengths Profile workshop. In the short-term, using Strengths Profile can help students to prepare for interviews and strengths-based assessments, and also perform more authentically. In the longer-term, strengths can be a useful tool to help students understand themselves and ultimately this can have a massive impact upon their career pathway.

"As career professionals we have found having the strengths methodology a useful addition to our professional tool kit that we use with students as part of effective guidance interventions."

James Goodwin, Career Services Manager

Roll-Out

To date, Warwick's Career Services Team have engaged over 1300 students through workshops and feedback of individual profiles. The team continues to offer regular one-to-one debriefs with students and graduates to help them inform their career choices. Through this work, they have been nationally recognised for their work around strengths with a nomination for a National Undergraduate Employability Award.

Warwick was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council to lead a research project (LEGACY) in partnership with six Russell Group Universities, exploring the Employability Learning Gain involving almost 600 students in the project, to showcase the impact strengths can have in terms of developing both self-awareness and confidence in those students who are less confident about their plans.

"We have found that both the Strengths Profiles and the strengths workshops have proved to be a valuable addition to our work with students. Often students struggle to find the language to articulate their skills, motivations and strengths. Strengths Profile provides students with this language, which when qualified with personal examples, enables students to describe themselves authentically and with increased confidence to recruiters."

Anne Wilson, Head of Careers