

Career Journey Influences on Arts, English and Languages Students

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Problem and need for research

Results from a 2020 QUB Graduate Exit Survey revealed only 5% of Arts, English and Languages (AEL) students had secured a graduate job. This was the lowest score in the university.

First and Second Year Experience surveys showed consistently falling results, 50% of second years weren't aware of the Careers Service and only 43% of the rest were satisfied with the service.

Why was our engagement not working or being recognised?

Methodology

- Detailed literature review acknowledging influences of Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Patton and McMahon (2006).
- 12 semi-structured interviews with AEL students, across a range of subjects, ages, life stages, abilities and disabilities, identities and career readiness.
- All interviewees were final year students completing an optional credit-bearing Work Placement Module.
- Thematic analysis allowing student voices to express new ideas.

- Negative feedback and little support from family, school teachers and non-arts peers.
- Struggled to find relevant careers information.
- Frustrated by focus on networking and contacts.
- Geography – disadvantage of a regional university.
- Time to pursue relevant skills, juggling jobs, creative rehearsal, academic study, caring responsibilities.
- Lack of mobility through car ownership or public transport.
- Could not afford to pursue unpaid or volunteer experience.
- Difficulty navigating a non-linear career environment.
- Lack of technical skill training in curriculum.
- Perceived lack of careers support.

Barriers

Key Influences

How do AEL students make career decisions?

Key Values

Measuring success

- Subject was an integral part of their identity, belonging to their school before the university.
- Seen as brave, defiant and different studying a non-vocational subject, considered part of a cultural resistance movement.
- Persistence, initiative, and determination, stating due to the lack of embedded careers, 'no-one is going to walk you through this'.
- Flexibility – didn't have a ten year plan but didn't want one.

- Pre university careers guidance (poorly executed and received).
- University Academics, especially Lecturers of Practise with industry experience.
- Family members with creative careers.
- Current practitioners they had met during work placement.
- Fellow students, their 'academic tribe' who encouraged them with shared experiences.
- Peers in other subjects for careers provision comparison.
- No mention of the careers service or memories of careers interventions.

- Getting to university was the goal, they hadn't thought beyond that.
- Intradisciplinary peer on peer comparison.
- Huge pressure to use subject in their career or deemed themselves a failure.
- Work at graduate level wasn't deemed important, using their subject was.
- Wanted a job title related to their skills.
- No pressure of time scales, happy to continue in part time jobs or piece work to gain experience.
- Longitudinal outlook to expand horizons for action.

Implications for Practice

Optimising AEL support

Recognition of bespoke needs and career drivers.

Increased collaboration between careers service and academic schools.

Career management skills available from Level One in a format students will recognise.

Support to gain relevant work experience.

Stronger working relationships with employers.