

Title of case study

Bouncebackability: the importance of resilience in the graduate job market

Staff Lead

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School/ Department

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Please briefly describe the activity undertaken for the case study

We know that resilience is key to success in the graduate jobs market. Not only do employers seek resilient characteristics in the graduates they recruit but the graduates themselves need to display resilience as they enter the competitive recruitment process. It is possible it will bring them into close contact with rejection and disappointment. The ability to 'bounceback' - to be persistent, positive and realistic - is absolutely critical. The Careers and Employability Service have designed a 50 minute small group interactive session for students using the theory of Mental Toughness (in particular the research of Professor Peter Clough) which breaks down resilience into four qualities, the so-called '4 Cs' (commitment, confidence, control, challenge). This theory is applied to two scenarios that the students will encounter as they approach the end of their degree: being successful in the application process (from job search through to interview) and then the transition into a professional workplace environment.

How was the activity implemented?

In the session up to 12 students complete a range of activities designed to demonstrate the importance of the four Cs of resilience and help them develop self-awareness of their own resilience and how it could be improved. Activities include a simple numbers task which is completed individually to demonstrate the impact of focus; and an interactive exercise using the Stroop Test (a distraction task that asks participants to identify the colour of ink used for various words) designed to place the students into a situation of 'gentle' and controlled pressure to test how it affects their capabilities, i.e., confidence, handling pressure, staying calm, overcoming a challenge. To complement the individual work, group discussions also take place during which students are encouraged to share personal stories of employment related experiences and resilience (good or bad and always on a voluntary basis within a safe, confidential environment). A hand-out with ten 'top tips' is provided at the end of the session for the students to read and reflect on in their own time.

Has this activity improved programme provision and student experience, if so how?

While support within the university has always been very strong around the topic of wellbeing, this session deliberately avoids issues that relate to this and tries to give resilience an employability focus. Key are the practical tips and the chance to increase self-awareness. It is about being equipped to succeed by understanding why resilience is so

important to graduate employers, thinking about ways to demonstrate it during application processes and developing the tools for to maximise the chances of success. Students who have attended the session have commented on how useful it has been and how they feel better prepared for the application process. I have also received encouraging support from departments across the university who wish to embed this session at key touch points in their teaching. We are always open to working collaboratively on these topics.

Did you experience any challenges in implementation, if so how did you overcome these?

The main challenge has been demonstrating the relevance of resilience as an employability skill to students; why this is such an integral element to future success and why it is vital that they address it before they leave university. To ensure students are aware of this the Careers and Employability Service work with departments, employers and other partners whenever possible to demonstrate and promote the importance of resilience collaboratively.

In addition, the issues raised in group discussion can be sensitive and students can feel uncomfortable discussing the issues raised in a large group setting. Therefore, we limit the group size to 12 in our central programme offer.

Which Liverpool University Hallmarks and Attributes does this case study relate to (tick all boxes that apply)

Research-connected Teaching **X**
Active Learning **X**
Authentic Assessment
Confidence **X**
Digital Fluency
Global Citizenship

How does this case study relate to the Hallmarks and Attributes you have selected?

Research-connected Teaching: This workshop has been developed using research into resilience, mainly the concept of Mental Toughness and the '4 Cs' as discussed by Professor Peter Clough and Doug Strycharczyk

Clough, P., & Strycharczyk, D. (2012). *Developing mental toughness: improving performance, wellbeing and positive behaviour in others*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Active Learning: The students are engaged in a range of activities throughout the session with as little didactic lecturing as possible. The students need to engage with the activities and group discussions to maximise their learning.

Confidence: A key underpinning feature of resilience is confidence. Clough describes a resilient person as having high levels of self-confidence as well as confidence in their own abilities. This session helps students start to identify the skills they need in order to be resilient and recognise their own knowledge and attributes, a key step in the development of confidence.

How could this case study be transferred to other disciplines?

The key messages behind resilience apply to all aspects of life and work. In this session, we look at job applications and the transition into the professional work environment as examples of when students may encounter difficulty, rejection and set back and will therefore need high levels of resilience. You could equally apply this to exams, course work, PhD research or any other aspect of student life. Where challenges exist, resilience is needed.

If someone else were to implement the activity within your case study what advice would you give them?

Relevance and group dynamic are key to this type of activity. If students think a topic is irrelevant they will not engage with it, therefore it is important to demonstrate relevance, in our case through collaborative working with employers and departments. A supportive group is also important so that students are not intimidated or start to feel uncomfortable.



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