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FRI: Bridging The Employability Gap (Bernadette Laffey)

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Abstract

Bridging the Employability gap: Development of a workshop to support widening participation students to use social media effectively for career planning and job search.

Widening participation initiatives by government have focused on making higher education accessible to students who are at risk of social exclusion for a range of reasons, including economic hardship, disability, caring responsibilities, ethnicity and being the first in family to go to university.

While initiatives have been successful in attracting widening participation students into higher education, it is still the case that widening participation students are at greater risk of not completing their studies, and are less likely to secure the best graduate jobs. (Budd, 2017). As an example, just 57% of state school educated graduates are recruited into graduate schemes though they make up 90% of undergraduates and under half of disabled undergraduates secure graduate jobs (Ball and Hooley, 2018). This is the employability gap.

Reasons for this disparity are complex but include the following: Lack of social capital, lack of cultural capital, low confidence and lack of resources. Many widening participation students do not have the safety net of parents who can subsidise their study, and often work long hours to support families and cover living costs. They are unable to undertake unpaid internships and less likely to have the time to attend professional networking events. They do not have a ready-made network of contacts to help them access work experience opportunities.

Social media has become an increasingly important tool used by employers to advertise vacancies, search for candidates, and vet applicants. Consequently, careers services run social media workshops and signpost students to online resources to help them develop their digital identity, and professional networks, as part of career planning and job search.

A recurring theme of one to one career interviews with widening participation students has been students' lack of confidence in using social media for professional reasons. Many students have a LinkedIn profile, but there is an unrealistic expectation that the LinkedIn profile alone will enable employers to find and recruit them. They are less clear about the long-term benefits of active professional networking online and how to present themselves online. They

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lack 'digital wisdom' (Sutherland and Ho ,2017).

A follow up survey was conducted with 30 first year students and confirmed that they are most concerned about how to build their profile and engage appropriately online. Their preferred source of support was a face to face workshop, followed closely by peer support. Other research has shown how business students need more classroom support to develop effective digital identities (Slone and Gaffney, 2016).

This informed the decision to develop a face to face workshop which would include collaborative working, and which could be adapted for different subject groups. The conference presentation will review the key features of this resource. It will also examine whether using online professional networks fulfils the promise of building social capital, helping widening participation students to compete more equitably in the graduate job market.


References

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[Munir Moosa Sadruddin](#)

8:43am 10 January 2019 (Edited 5:43am 29 January 2019) [Permalink](#)

Hello

Congratulation for choosing such a creative topic.

I have the following query: Is there any research study you come across in your context on the trends among young people about the use social media for job search? Are there any risks?

Who will be your target population for the workshop?

What are the expected outcomes of the workshop?

In your viewpoint, do you think that digital identity can support getting employment opportunity? Are individuals willing to take this ownership? If yes, do you think it will raise their expectations from digital networking?

Munir



[W Taleo](#)

7:51am 16 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

I look forward to your presentation. I think that this lack of 'digital wisdom' applies to a lot of people (including myself) and it seems to be an ongoing process to use current tools effectively.



[Annette Hendley](#)

7:11pm 17 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

I agree. This is a very interesting and necessary project. I think it is very true that students with a 'ready-made' networks have an easier journey. It takes time and effort to build useful networks, especially online.

'Only 57% of state school graduates are recruited into graduate schemes'. Is there any evidence that certain fields have higher percentages of recruitment than other, which might correlate with students from independent schools or is it the same for all fields? It would be interesting to know how much difference the study field you choose will make a difference.



[patrick shearer](#)

7:18pm 20 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

Bernadette Really engaging theme especially for those in FE and others involved in developing cams in young people. I have found anecdotally that my students are knowledgeable and skillful at using social media for personal tasks but really have little knowledge using these skills in a professional or employment situation. They have social networking skills but not social networking literacies. And seemingly very little digital

literacies either. The good thing is a lot of digital natives- who have less skills than the young people- at least have a good idea of how the tools could be put to good use in career management situations.



[Cathy McGovern](#)

2:03pm 25 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Bernadette, Please forgive me if I'm posting in the wrong place. I've been offline for the last few weeks so this is my first time back. Your project looks great. The subject of 'digital wisdom' is very relevant to me, my students, and some of my friends. I love that you are interested in actually widening participation through to employment, and that your vision is to address employability gap through focused actions. I particularly like that your choice of format and content is informed by your students' interests, something I've rarely seen in action despite all the 'Student-centered' rhetoric. Is there anything I can do to help?



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

1:50pm 29 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

Some really interesting comments here, some of which I will endeavour to address in my presentation. I agree Wendy that lack of digital wisdom is something that applies to lots of us . I don't think it is detrimental to students to allow them to see that we too are on a journey and we don't have all the answers. Especially with students who lack confidence. Catherine Cronin spoke of learning how to best use social media alongside students and I tend to agree.

Munir, there are undoubtedly risks in using social media and any workshop on social media should include information about digital footprint and what 'professional' looks like. A bad social media presence can do more harm than good. Ultimately students have the choice about whether they want to use social media for job search. That choice must be an informed choice.

As for raising expectations of the benefits of digital networking, it is an issue. Students may expect instant results, (i.e. job offers) but of course building a network takes time and is an ongoing process.

Annette, I will try and get some data which breaks down the figures. Suffice to say there are problems with how many employers recruit (for example only attending careers fairs at Russell Group universities) which help to perpetuate inequalities. Law and medicine are two areas which are now very aware of lack of diversity in their recruits and are undertaking some initiatives to try and redress the balance.

Patrick, I agree that students seem to be digitally confident but don't have 'social networking literacies'. Linked to the wider issue of developing professionalism generally, when many don't have professional role models in day to day life.

Cathy, thank you for comments. I may well need to seek your input on accessibility issues in delivery of face to face workshop.



[Cathy McGovern](#)

3:41pm 30 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi B, I'd be delighted to provide input on accessibility issues in delivery of face to face workshop. I look forward to learning more details so as to better advise.



[Sioban James](#)

5:09pm 30 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

It seems to me that this is a very necessary project Bernadette!

'They do not have a ready-made network of contacts to help them access work experience opportunities.'

Is this the main factor that contributes to their lack of digital wisdom? Is the issue about networking skills or tech skills – or both combined?

I am interested in this and think there is some overlap with my own project – the idea that just because this is happening in a digital environment and the individuals concerned tend to be younger, assumptions are made about skills. This is about using social media – this is the generation that were brought up on this, therefore they know what they are doing in all its many uses, seems to be a majorly flawed assumption.

If they do not have the contacts in the first place, we can assume that their networking skills may be limited, shifting this online won't suddenly make them great networkers, this is a learned skill, as indeed is the use of particular digital platforms. If this is the way business is going then these skills need to be acquired, your project makes a lot of sense to me.



[Potenza Atiogbe](#)

9:58am 1 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Bernadette just to echo others comments this is a necessary topic, a really great project. As Sioban says although there is a lot of evidence about young people, millennials etc be used to social media tools and growing up with it, there is a lack of digital wisdom and the necessary skills in a professional capacity. Agree with Patrick's comments that digital literacy is an issue too. I can see some parallels with the health sector e.g. in a bid to embrace and use social media e.g. blogs to show that you are a professional reflective nurse practitioner for example for a potential employer. Student nurses etc are encouraged to do this and some don't have the necessary skills and support to do this. This as you say requires a very different skill set to blogging for pleasure/socially. Really interesting and am looking forward to your talk.



[Phill Grimes](#)

6:16pm 2 February 2019 (Edited 6:18pm 2 February 2019) [Permalink](#)

I agree with the digital literacies sentiments and these opinions have been expressed to me with my project.

One of the interesting naiveties that adult professionals have, let alone teenagers and graduates, are the sales based tactics that are used throughout the professional networks.

We want our connections to be "connections" and not just "contacts" and it is common with

linkedin for sales and recruitment to connect with you purely for access to your contacts and do not necessarily provide you with much in return. (Hopkins, 2019)

Hopkins, A.J. (2019) Having 500+ LinkedIn Contacts Means Nothing, Unless... [online] Available at <https://www.themuse.com/advice/having-500-linkedin-contacts-means-nothing-unless> (accessed 2nd January 2019)



[Munir Moosa Sadruddin](#)

7:28am 12 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Thank you! I think students must have skills to use the right platform but with regard to expectations, it is very important to familiarize participants with their personal and professional identities

Munir



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

10:30am 18 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

We want our connections to be "connections" and not just "contacts" and it is common with linkedin for sales and recruitment to connect with you purely for access to your contacts and do not necessarily provide you with much in return. (Hopkins, 2019)

Phil, interesting point you make about connections and contacts. I think teaching netiquette to students must include this distinction and help them to recognise sales tactics, and also not to engage in such tactics themselves i.e. asking outright if someone can give them a job!



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

10:35am 18 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Is this the main factor that contributes to their lack of digital wisdom? Is the issue about networking skills or tech skills – or both combined?

Sioban, possibly both combined. Lack of networking skills but also LinkedIn profiles that are sub standard. Possibly this isn't a technical skills issue so much as a lack of understanding of what the LinkedIn tool can do and how to make the most of it. I find that students are very reluctant to look at videos on YouTube or LinkedIn's own helpsheets. It seems they mostly learn by peers showing them. Good to harness peer expertise in a workshop.



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

10:38am 18 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Potenza: *use social media e.g. blogs to show that you are a professional reflective nurse*

practitioner for example for a potential employer.

I think this is a massive ask of a student nurse! Especially if they feel obliged to blog and do not yet have the necessary skills. I think it needs a lot of support.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

1:47pm 18 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Bernie

Well done on a great presentation! Here is a summary of the comments and questions you received following your presentation (including those you may have addressed verbally). Please respond in whatever way you choose.

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ This area seems to me to have commercial potential: do you know what the market might be for offering this workshop as part of careers' advisors professional development?
- ▶ I think a punchy intro is needed for the workshop based on what you said



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

10:17am 22 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

This area seems to me to have commercial potential: do you know what the market might be for offering this workshop as part of careers' advisors professional development?

This is an interesting point. There probably is commercial potential to adapt the workshop aimed at students and run it for careers advisers through Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). AGCAS runs workshops as part of careers' advisors professional development, and there is usually a fee to attend these. There is an AGCAS training and development group, so this is definitely something that I could discuss with them. When I did a survey of AGCAS members to find out their approaches to teaching social media skills, there was a great interest in this aspect of our work and many advisers felt that they could be doing more. So there is definitely a demand for this.

There is an annual AGCAS conference which is a platform for sharing good practice in careers work (in implementation, inclusion and innovation) in the workshop sessions, but there is no commercial benefit! Generally AGCAS members are so helpful and supportive to one another through our AGCAS network, we don't immediately see the commercial potential of our knowledge and expertise!



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

10:25am 22 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

I think a punchy intro is needed for the workshop based on what you said

I am not sure what in particular is being referred to, but I do agree a punchy intro to grab students' attention is important.

Maybe a quiz re stats about employers rejecting applicants based on digital identity or lack of digital identity?

Maybe some horror stories - I have a few good examples of people losing their jobs because of indiscretion on social media!

And to counterbalance, some good news stories. I did canvass alumni through LinkedIn alumni group but the response was very disappointing. I will have to approach alumni in a different way.

I would be very interested in ideas or thoughts on the workshop intro from others.



[Cathy McGovern](#)

5:04pm 24 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Bernadette, Great presentation, I really enjoyed hearing you thinking and seeing the projects developments. I'm reading the following and thought you might find it useful: Doug Belshaw's THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL LITERACIES 2014, available from <http://www.digitalliteraci.es> I took some pictures to give you a taster, I'll post this again with those in WhatsApp.



[Cathy McGovern](#)

5:04pm 24 February 2019 (Edited 5:05pm 24 February 2019) [Permalink](#)

Hi Bernadette, Great presentation, I really enjoyed hearing you thinking and seeing the projects developments. I'm reading the following and thought you might find it useful: Doug Belshaw's THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL LITERACIES 2014, available from <http://www.digitalliteraci.es> I took some pictures to give you a taster, I'll post this again with those in WhatsApp.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

8:13am 28 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Many Congratulations Bernie! Your presentation has been voted by delegates to be one of the most effective of the H818 Online Conference 2019 and you are officially one of our H818 Presentation Star Open Badge Winners! Please see how to Apply for your Badge here: <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/badge/view/33>

Well done!

Simon

H818 Conference Organiser



[Bernadette Laffey](#)

5:35pm 28 February 2019 (Edited 5:36pm 28 February 2019) [Permalink](#)

Wow, Simon, I am really chuffed! Thanks to all those who voted and liked my presentation. I thought the standard of other presentations was brilliant so this is quite a surprise!

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