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Focusing careers engagement: Oxford University Careers Service's programmes for schools

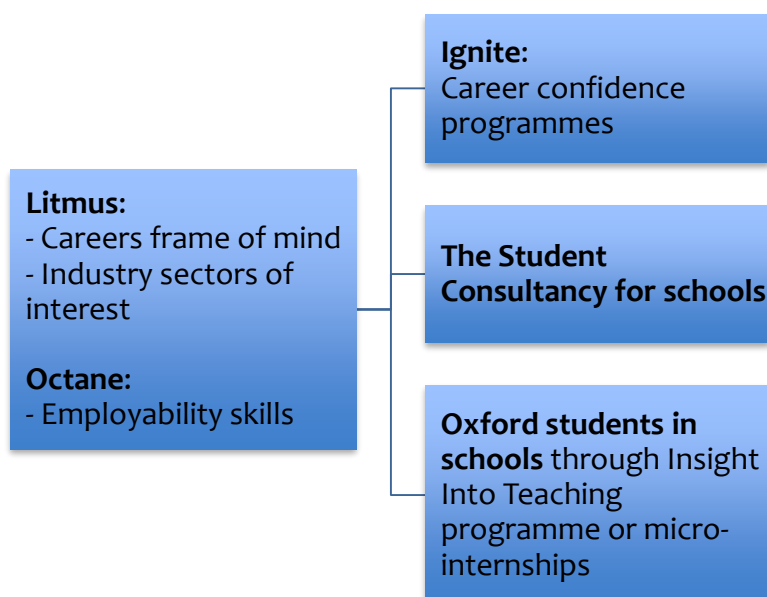
Background

Education providers are increasingly expected to offer helpful, demonstrable, and effective careers help to their students; schools have limited careers resources and cannot afford to take up significant time in the classroom that might distract from core academic work and the many competing demands of PSHE and other priorities for tutorial time.

Identifying groups of students with similar skills development needs, and groups at a similar stage in their engagement with a careers discussion, could help the Careers Teams to target relevant resources in an effective and efficient way. Furthermore, subsequent assessment of pupils could quantify the effectiveness of any intervention, in turn leading to refinements of both how the groups are identified and of the careers programmes.

A structured approach can also reduce anxiety in parents and carers, and provide a clear map of how pupils can engage actively and positively in thinking about the options for after they leave school.

The Careers Service at the University of Oxford has five key programmes available, at no charge to schools in the state sector, for schools to use to support and enhance their careers work with pupils.



Profiling tools

1. **Litmus:** assessing careers frame of mind and industry sector interest, and
2. **Octane:** assessing employability skills levels

Learning and Development tools

3. **Ignite:** career confidence programmes for KS3, 4, and 5
4. **The Student Consultancy in Schools:** mainly for sixth forms / Y13 – to work in teams with basic consulting training on real business problems in local organisations

Working with Oxford undergraduates and postgraduates

5. We also welcome schools that would like to host one or more Oxford students for ~3 days as part of our **Insight into Teaching** programme; school teaching is the most popular single sector that Oxford students enter after graduating, and to encourage and support this we have created a programme in which interested students can spend some time in a real school, observing and helping. The **micro-internships** programme facilitates 2-5-day work experiences in December, March and June, at the end of each university term. For schools it is a valuable opportunity for staff and students to engage with Oxford students and gain interesting and insightful external assistance. Projects completed have included quantitative and qualitative research, marketing campaigns, website production, and curriculum review in the light of national educational policy changes.

Profiling: Frame of Mind

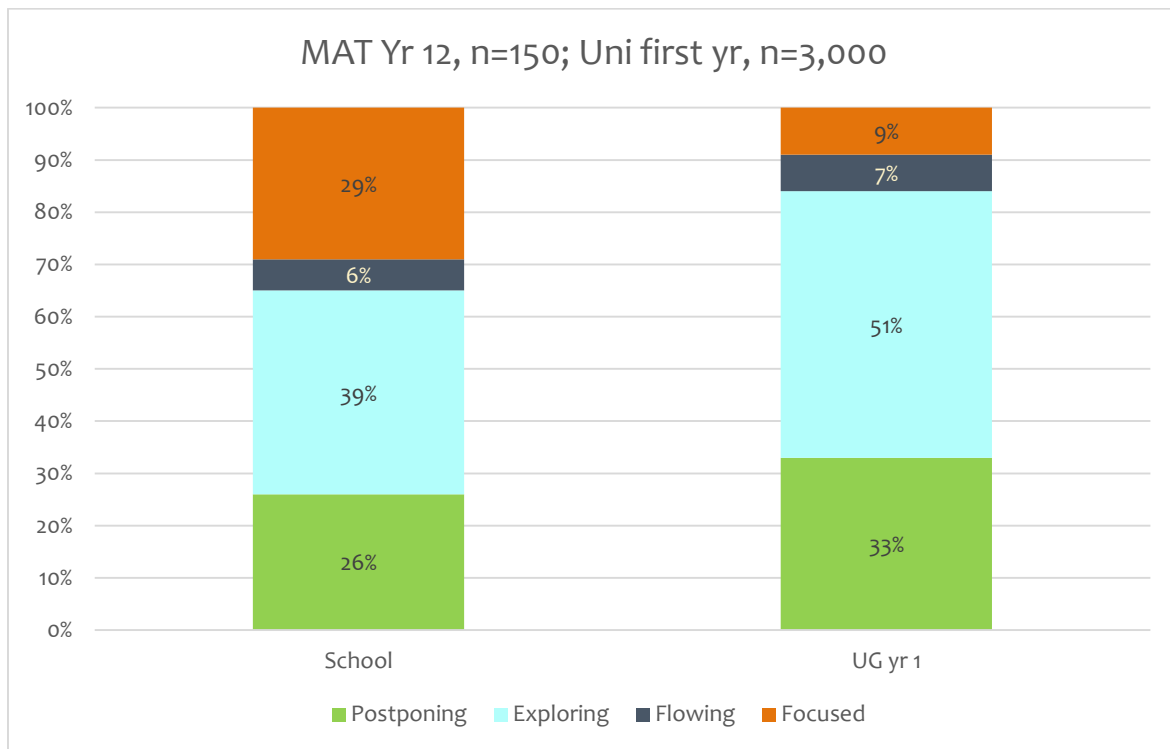
The Oxford University Careers Service designed and introduced the ‘Litmus’ measures of students’ frame of mind to capture what students were thinking about for their career, post university. We identified four different, positive frames of mind:

- **Postponing**
I'm focusing on school and social activities at the moment. I'll think about my career and jobs later.
- **Exploring**
I am exploring some career ideas as well as getting involved in activities such as clubs, sports and voluntary work both in and outside school
- **Flowing**
I haven't really thought about it but will probably do something similar to what other people I know do (eg, my family)
- **Focused**
I think I know what I want to do, but I may need some help on specific issues.

The rationale behind the Litmus structure for the Careers Service is to encourage:

- Postponing and Flowing students → to start Exploring
- Exploring students → to start becoming Focused

An example of results from Year 12 pupils in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) are shown in the chart below, and contrasted with the results from first-year students at Oxford.



As background, at Oxford when we reviewed each subject area, we found a significant and positive correlation between the proportion of undergraduates unemployed and looking for work, six months after leaving, and the proportion of undergraduates 'postponing' at the beginning of their final year. Given that we want to reduce/minimise the proportion unemployed and looking for work, we now focus our efforts on the 'Postponers', with one set of messages, and on the 'Explorers' with other, targeted messaging.

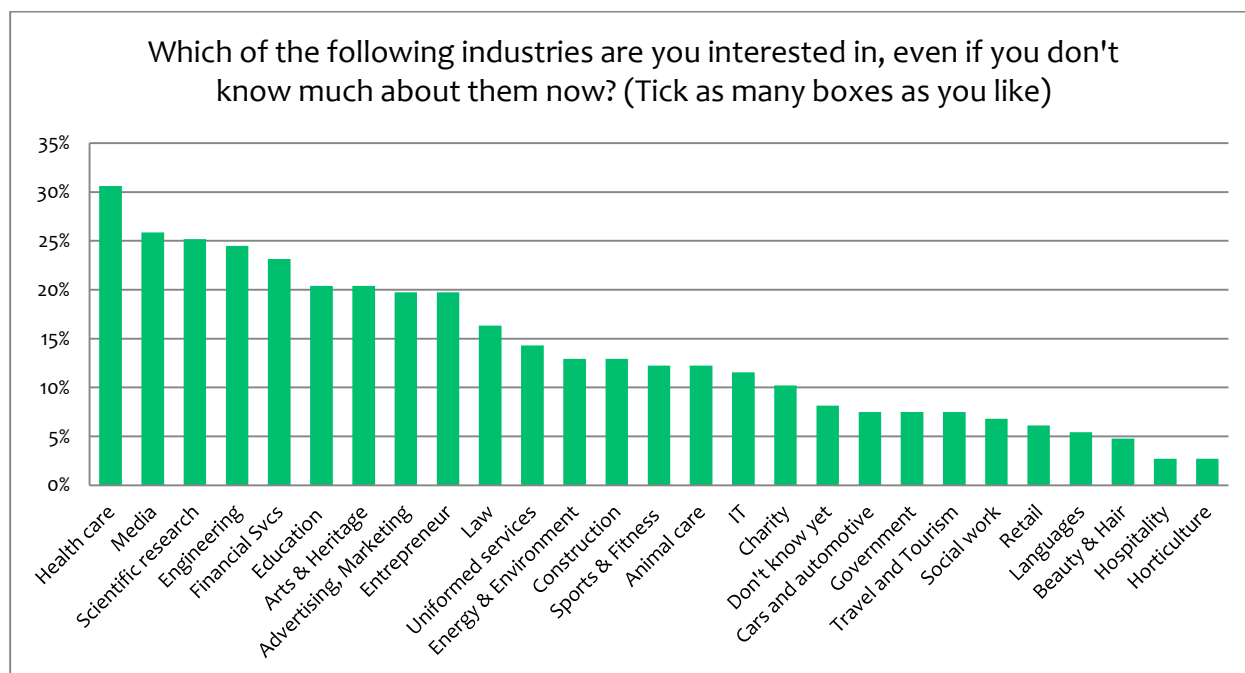
Profiling: Industry sectors of interest

A second question asks students to indicate which industry sector/s, if any, they might be considering for their life after they graduate. This also enables us to target relevant information to individuals and not send them information of no interest.

Our pilot MAT results from Year 12 are shown below; pupils ticked 3.5 boxes on average.

Extended examples of jobs are given for each sector, for example:

- Health care - doctor, nurse, physiotherapist, pharmacist, therapist, ambulance, paramedic, dentist
- Media - TV, radio, online, social media - 'talent' or technician
- Arts & Heritage - dancer, musician, DJ, film making, fashion designer, backstage theatre work, historic site curator, museum manager



It is worth noting that while this survey was run with Year 12 pupils, there is no restriction on age group – some may consider it useful to run it with Year 9 or even younger pupils.

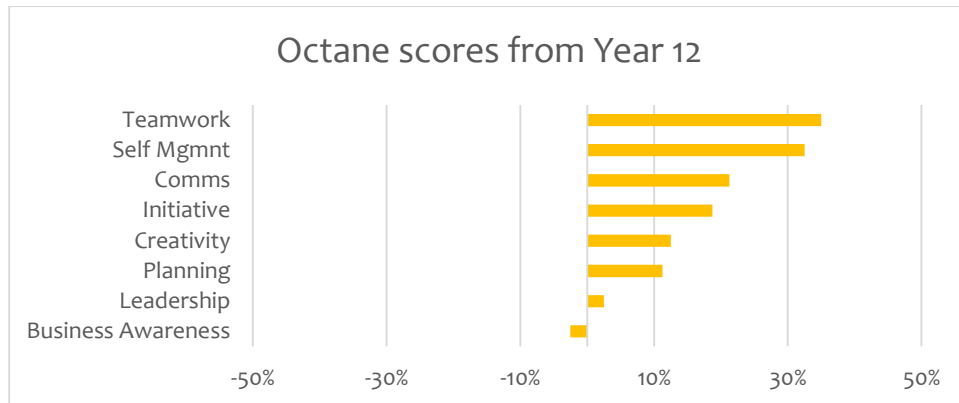
Oxford sets up a secure SurveyMonkey for each school to use, coordinates on specific wording and industry sectors, provides access to the results; the school adds relevant demographic data (remove identifiers) and returns the consolidated data to Oxford for aggregate review.

Profiling: employability skills

Third, Octane asks students to state, on a scale from 0-9, how well they feel they could demonstrate eight employability skills:

- Business awareness: understanding what makes businesses successful, the importance of innovation and providing customer satisfaction.
- Communication: listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analysing and evaluating.
- Creativity: demonstrating an innovative approach, being creative, collaborating and taking appropriate risks.
- Initiative: analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.
- Leadership: motivating, influencing and leading others.
- Planning: scheduling resources, managing time, multi-tasking and meeting objectives.
- Self-management: accepting responsibility, being flexible, resilient, self-starting, appropriately assertive and taking feedback.
- Team work: respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading and contributing to discussions.

Using a Net Promoter Score¹ method, the initial results from Year 12 show:



Such results can help schools teams focus their efforts on, for example in this case, raising demonstrable skills in Business Awareness and Leadership, initially.

Potential Benefits for Schools

The data collected can be used for

1. School careers teams to provide personalised and targeted information, perhaps cross-school, eg to all postponers, or to groups feeling they wish to enhance their 'creativity' skills. Information resources can be improved for popular sectors.
2. Careers teams can ensure employers from specific industries of interest to students are invited in or can provide work experience.
3. Overall analyses on correlations between demographic measures, careers measures, and skill levels; these analyses would be led by Oxford, with schools providing the demographic data.

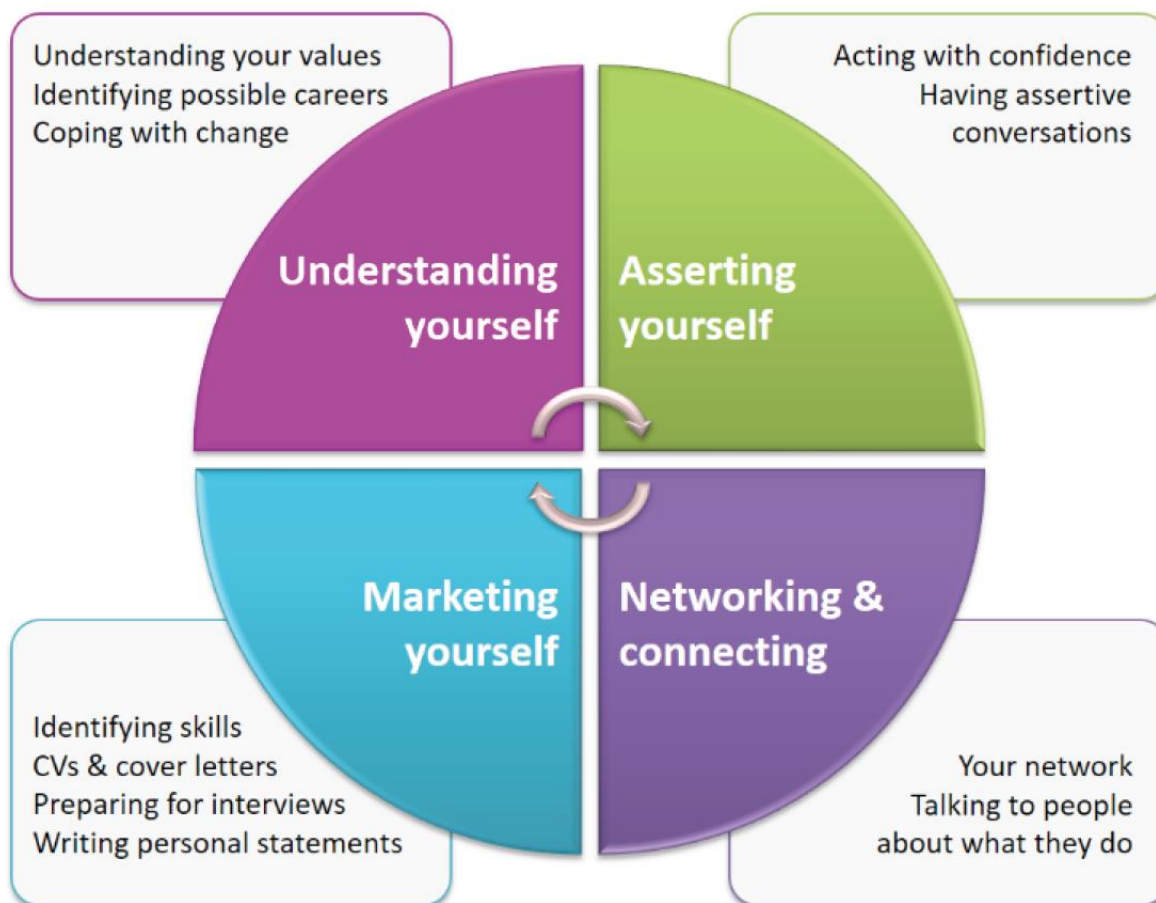
Previous literature would suggest that there might be a gender gap on perceived skill proficiency and we can test this with a large sample. Other hypotheses to test include: students from less advantaged social backgrounds might be more engaged (Focused) than other students; students with disabilities might be more likely to be postponing than other students, and so on.

Ignite

Ignite: Career Confidence Programme for Schools and Colleges aims to help develop pupils' assertiveness and confidence in academic, extra-curricular, family, social and eventual career activities.

¹ Net Promoter Score calculates the average score when answers 0 to 5 are valued at -1, 6 & 7 are valued at 0, and 8 & 9 are valued at +1. Average scores above 20% (or 0.2) are excellent

Four key modules with several activities per module



The programme is applicable to girls and boys, delivered within the school by teachers / PSHE tutors, and available in modules to be applied and used as appropriate.

Activities are tailored for each stage of school (eg, Years 7-9, Years 10-11, and Years 12- 13 or Key Stages 3, 4, and 5).

The Student Consultancy for Schools

The Student Consultancy for Schools is a successful learning and development programme that links Sixth Form students to local community organisations. It has been designed to provide schools with a proven programme to help students develop key employability skills and demonstrate these in the real world.

Students from all backgrounds and with a wide range of career interests participate in the programme. They work in teams to address a strategic issue or business problem for a local organisation. It is an effective way for schools to support their local community and to add value to local organisations.

Oxford's Careers Service co-developed the teaching materials with Berkhamsted School in Hertfordshire, based on a 10-year programme run in Oxford for around 500 students each year. The pilot programmes with schools have created a set of support resources (eg, letters to parents, pupils, potential clients). There is a regular training day for schools to attend, review the content, meet students who were on the programme, and discuss the details with teachers who have run programmes.

Insight into Teaching and Micro-internships

Undergraduates and postgraduates at the University of Oxford are resourceful, interesting and interested people. They can offer much to schools and their students over 2-5 day visit; as well as their direct input into a project, they are also a good advocate for the university and, importantly, for the benefits of going into Higher Education at any institution.

For example, in December 2017 a micro-internship focusing on education policy was hosted at a school. The student was tasked with reviewing the school's current curriculum in light of 21st-century education demands. The student conducted research, staff interviews and organised student focus groups, producing a report for the Senior Management Team. This project lasted the maximum duration of 5 days and the feedback from both organisation and student was extremely positive.

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