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**An investigation into students' engagement with employability support**

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**Abstract**

Incorporating graduate outcomes into external league tables has made employability an indicator of teaching quality. There is also the view that maximising the employability of our students is the morally right thing to do (Kofler, 2021). Consequently, universities implement various initiatives to enhance students' employability. However, it has been observed that some students are reluctant to utilise the employability support services provided by their institutions (Bradley et al, 2021). To explore this issue, our project examines the engagement of students with employability support, drawing on Simon's theory of bounded rationality (1964). We have used an online survey to collect data from second-year students in the School of Accounting, Finance, and Economics at a modern UK university. Additionally, we have conducted student focus groups to gain further insights. Our poster will present an initial analysis of the survey responses alongside the findings obtained from the focus groups.

**Outline**

The significance of graduate employability is increasing for higher education institutions (Cheng et al., 2022). A primary driving force behind this is the inclusion of graduate outcomes in external league tables, so that employability serves as a proxy metric for measuring teaching quality. Moreover, there is the belief that maximising the employability of our students aligns with moral principles (Kofler, 2021). Consequently, universities offer a range of employability support services. However, some students are reluctant or unable to engage with this support (Bradley et al., 2021). Jackson and Tomlinson (2022) highlight that the level of engagement with extra-curricular employability activities varies based on student characteristics, with lower participation observed among students from low socio-economic backgrounds, older students, and female students who are more likely to shoulder additional caregiving responsibilities. Hence, ensuring the effectiveness of our employability support for students becomes a vital component of fostering inclusivity.

The project adopts a theoretical framework rooted in rational choice, which considers students as rational actors driven by self-interest when making decisions regarding their engagement with specific forms of employability support. The aim of the project is to investigate students' engagement with the employability support offered by the university. Our analysis takes into consideration the constraints and decision-making processes highlighted by Simon's theory of bounded rationality (1964). This theoretical perspective

would suggest that employability services could increase engagement by clarifying the benefits of their services to students and lowering the perceived 'costs' of using them.

The investigation uses an online survey with a mix of closed and open questions to gather data from second-year students in the School of Accounting, Finance and Economics in a business faculty at a modern UK university with a high proportion of students from low socio-economic groups. We also use student focus groups to explore the issues, document current experience and consider suggestions for the future. Our poster will present an initial analysis of the survey responses and findings from the focus groups.

The principal research questions are:

RQ1: What are the influential factors that either facilitate or impede students' engagement with employability services?

RQ2: Among the various employability support options and other extra-curricular activities on offer, which ones are more attractive to students due to their perceived greater benefits and/or lower costs?

RQ3: What practical steps can universities implement to promote inclusivity through enhanced student engagement in employability services, ensuring that all students have equitable access?

## References

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