

'Brand Me' presentations increase students' confidence and enhance their employability

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The University of Portsmouth is helping its students build a strong personal brand to increase their confidence and enhance their employability.

Today's graduates may no longer have one job for life and instead could have a variety of careers. Employability education should take them

beyond development of generic skills to give them confidence in their [career](#) management abilities, and the [self-awareness](#) and self-confidence to navigate the changes which they are likely to face in their future career paths.

A new study, published in the journal *Studies in Higher Education*, has shown how 'Brand Me' presentations in the University's Faculty of Business & Law have led to an increase in students' employability-related self-confidence (ERSC).

A 'Brand Me' [presentation](#) is a two/three minute elevator pitch in which students sell themselves to a prospective employer. The presentations were incorporated in a career management module for second-year undergraduates in response to an increased emphasis on personal branding in business, and use of video submissions or interviews throughout the graduate recruitment process.

One of the authors of the study, Charlotte Harrison, Principal Lecturer and Employability and Enterprise Co-ordinator for the Faculty of Business and Law, said: "We developed the 'Brand Me' presentations as a way to harness the students' career management learning and provide a focus for the construction of their personal brand."

The students had to give 'Brand Me' presentations at the beginning, middle and end of the module. Measurements of ERSC were taken at each stage from a sample of 105 full-time students in the 2015/2016 academic year. A carefully trained team of mock employers, made up of anonymous reviewers with experience of the recruitment process, scored the presentations in pairs against measurements such as:

- the [student](#) has presented a range of relevant qualities;
- the student talks positively about themselves;
- the student uses confident language; and

- the student uses a confident tone of voice and body language.

These measurements were supplemented by interviews with students and lecturers 6—12 months after completion of the module.

The findings showed that measurements of ERSC increased over time, skills were learnt, and new behaviours developed. While increasing their ERSC, students demonstrated that they could communicate their personal brand clearly and effectively, enhancing their impression management and self-promotion, which researchers say are important for success in the graduate recruitment process.

Charlotte said: "While the data suggests that students found the activity challenging and, at times, uncomfortable, it also indicates that they had learnt the skills of proactive self-promotion and developed their ERSC.

"By the end of the process it was acknowledged through interviews with lecturers and students, that there was an improvement in performance and confidence. It is even more pleasing that the student interview data provides evidence of students using their learning during interviews for placements or other jobs and transferring their learning to different contexts, which demonstrates real depth of learning.

"The study also suggests that [self-confidence](#) can be developed through targeted interventions, which brings practical implications in terms of career management teaching."

As well as the ratings provided by the mock employers, students were able to review and reflect on their presentations, which were stored on an online portal. This reflection was enhanced by feedback from fellow students and tutors in class at each stage, plus intervening workshops dedicated to: reflection; understanding values; personal branding; skills mapping; and awareness of what employers are looking for in the

graduate recruitment process.

Three quarters of the students who completed the unit participated in all three 'Brand Me' presentations even though it was not a compulsory part of the unit. This high level of continued engagement indicates the importance of ensuring that career management teaching is authentic and that the 'real world' relevance is communicated to students.

Charlotte said: "We recommend devoting class time to repeated 'Brand Me' presentations to develop ERSC. The presentations should be introduced within a carefully managed and structured career developing learning programme, which draws on theories of experiential and social learning. We also recommend that the presentations are introduced in a way that emphasises the 'real world' relevance and authenticity, and that multi-source feedback is employed.

"Linked to this is a recommendation that lecturers are provided with professional learning opportunities to develop their skills and confidence in relation to career management teaching. The resulting development of sustainable employability can have long-term benefits for students, universities and employers."

More information: Alex Tymon et al, Sustainable graduate employability: an evaluation of 'brand me' presentations as a method for developing self-confidence, *Studies in Higher Education* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1602757](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1602757)

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