Making a difference with psychology: Reporting on a module to develop psychological literacy in final year undergraduates

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Improving students' psychological literacy has become a key part of the new British Psychological Society accreditation. This is fuelling an emphasis on helping students to apply their degree knowledge critically and innovatively, both to enhance their chances in a competitive job market and to give them the skills to make a real-world difference. This paper describes the design, implementation and evaluation of a module that boosts psychological literacy in final year undergraduates. We invited external partners to give us examples of current problems they were facing. We then asked groups of students to design a feasible solution to the problem, supported by psychological theories and findings. The module also helped students explore the psychology behind job hunting. We found that the module had a beneficial impact on students' learning and skills and the external partners found their ideas useful and innovative. Here we outline the challenges and successes of our approach as a model for any colleagues who may be interested in developing their own teaching in this area.

Keywords: *psychological literacy; employability; innovative assessment; compartmentalisation of knowledge; transferable skills.*

1. Introduction

BETWEEN 80 and 85 per cent of psychology graduates will not continue into careers in professional psychology (QAA, 2010). If their degrees are to have relevance to our students' future lives we need to find a way to connect their studies with the fields of work they are most likely to enter. However, psychological literacy is not simply a way of helping our students in their future employment, it is a way of developing their understanding of how psychology can be used for the betterment of society as a whole (Trapp et al., 2011). In this paper we describe and evaluate a final year undergraduate module that was specifically created to develop students' psychological literacy and to better prepare them to use their psychological knowledge in the workplace and beyond.

Psychological literacy has been defined as having the ability to '…apply psychological principles to personal, social and organisational issues in work, relationships and the broader community' (McGovern et al., 2010, p.11). Specifically, psychological literacy entails:

- having a well-defined vocabulary and basic knowledge of the critical subject matter of psychology;
- valuing the intellectual challenges required to use scientific thinking and the disciplined analysis of information to evaluate alternative courses of action;
- taking a creative and amiable sceptical approach to problem solving;
- applying psychological principles to personal, social, and organisational issues in work, relationships, and the broader community;
- acting ethically;
- being competent in using and evaluating information and technology;
- communicating effectively in different modes and with many different audiences;

- recognising, understanding, and fostering respect for diversity;
- being insightful and reflective about one's own and others' behaviour and mental processes (p.11).

We felt that some of these skills were well developed during other modules within our programme. However, some were either not explored, or only addressed implicitly, making it hard for students to recognise that they had developed these skills or to apply them outside of academia. We aimed to tackle what we saw as some of the key unrecognised and underutilised psychological literacy skills (compartmentalisation of knowledge, application of knowledge and skills, and helping students to recognise their value to potential employers) through a new final year module entitled 'Making a Difference with Psychology'.

Most lecturers will be aware of the problem of compartmentalisation in students' knowledge. Vinner (1990, p.92) described this as 'situations where two pieces of knowledge (of information) that are known to an individual and that should be connected in the person's thought process, nevertheless remain unrelated'. Often students do not see material that was covered in another module or lecture as relevant to their current topic and therefore do not use it. This compartmentalisation can impede development and use of knowledge.

By their third year most students are experts at ignoring anything that isn't specifically mentioned in a particular module, or even the lectures specifically relating to the assessment. When it comes to preparing students for the world beyond academia we felt this was counter-intuitive, as they need to draw on all their knowledge and to understand the links between different pieces of information. A key aim for our module was to empower students to draw on all their available knowledge and evaluate for themselves what was relevant or applicable to the task at hand.

Florance, Miell and van Laar (2011) state that 'just about every job suitable for a general graduate will be done better by a psychology graduate' (p.699). For example, the strong foundation in research design, scientific thinking and critical evaluation that all psychology students receive equips them to be able to undertake a disciplined analysis of available information and evaluate alternative courses of action in any number of occupational contexts. In practice, however, we observe that many students struggle to use their theoretical knowledge in an applied fashion. Although students might occasionally be asked to design an intervention or develop practice recommendations, such tasks are typically not embedded within specific, local environments and contingencies. This means that knowledge remains at a decontextualised, academic level and is not necessarily connected to work and lives outside the academic context. Our module aimed to encourage students to consider how to apply their knowledge and skills in the real-world.

Employability is 'a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen careers' (Knight & Yorke, 2003). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveyed 260 employers and asked what skills they planned to prioritise when recruiting from the class of 2015. The most important abilities were: teamwork, decision making, problem solving, communicating effectively with people inside and outside the organisation and planning, organising and prioritising work. We wanted our module to help students to develop all of these skills (some of which are not developed elsewhere in the curriculum) but crucially we wanted students to recognise their existing employability skills.

Hulme (2014) suggests that the training psychology students receive during their degree can benefit potential employers. We would argue this can only be true if psychology graduates are able to successfully apply the discipline-specific knowledge and skills gained during their degree to novel

scenarios and contexts once they graduate. The ability to leverage their degree training following graduation relies on students recognising its relevance and utility in novel settings. Forging those links was a key goal for the module.

In this paper we will introduce the structure of our module and how it addressed what we saw as the key issues for developing psychological literacy. We will discuss the challenges we faced when implementing the module and how we overcame these. Finally, we will evaluate the effectiveness of the module in achieving our aims and make suggestions for others considering developing a similar course or embedding psychological literacy within their existing curriculum.

2. Making a difference with psychology

The module's explicit aim was to develop students' psychological literacy, particularly by encouraging them to search for links between previously compartmentalised knowledge, apply knowledge to real-world situations and recognise their employability skills. The intended learning outcomes that focused on specific, demonstrable examples of those aims were to:

- Present information and arguments effectively to both academic and non academic audiences.
- Apply psychological theories and findings to real-world situations.
- Evaluate existing theories in psychology
- Identify and select appropriate and relevant information from the research literature.
- Design a real-world intervention grounded in social psychological theories and findings.
- Work effectively as part of a team.
- Critically evaluate theories and techniques for employment recruitment, candidate selection, and interviewing procedures.

2.1. Teaching outline

We started by identifying some of the common career destinations for psychology graduates from career destination statistics from our institution and through informal discussions with our students. The three most popular areas were advertising, teaching, and business management. We then used these to design our course. The module's teaching schedule was as follows:

Week 1 – Advertising.
Week 2 – Marketing.
Week 3 – Teaching.
Week 4 – Learning.
Week 5 – Leadership.
Week 6 – Management.
Week 7 – Preparing for assessments and getting feedback in class.
Week 8 – Student coursework presentations.
Week 9 – Graduate recruitment.
Week 10 – Interviewing.

During the first half of the module we ran sessions covering key theories and findings in the three career areas. We focused on reminding students of theories they had already covered, rather than teaching them new content. Crucially, the classes involved extensive practical exercises in which students had to generate novel ideas, solutions or recommendations to solve hypothetical challenges using their psychological knowledge and understanding. For example, one class activity was as follows:

> 'A local council is streamlining its' home-care support services. Three teams of 10 support workers are being condensed into two teams of 12 (six staff will be made redundant). Use your knowledge of social psychology of groups to generate recommendations for the new team managers about how to manage the organisational change.'

During class we made sure to challenge students to support their recommendations with theories and research evidence. The aims of the classes were to refresh and extend students' understanding of relevant key theories and findings, and support them

to see how they might convert their academic understanding of a topic into something useful and beneficial to practitioners in that field.

Two sessions were then spent supporting students to prepare for the coursework assessment and assessing their presentations before the final two sessions focused specifically on exploring how psychology theories, findings and research methods are used during employment recruitment and selection procedures. The aim of the final fortnight was to help students recognise how their discipline-specific training could assist them in understanding and engaging with their imminent job hunt following graduation. Again the teaching sessions contained practical exercises; for example students were asked to advise a recruitment panel about appropriate selection methods for specific positions (e.g. leisure centre manager).

2.2. Assessment regime

At the start of the module, groups of between three and five students formed psychology consultancy firms. They worked in these groups during all class activities. During the first class, the firms were presented with an 'Invitation to Tender' (ITT) for contracts from local schools and businesses; one was presented for each of the career areas. For example:

A. Design a marketing campaign to promote bedtime reading to parents of KS1 children.
B. Design a training programme to boost the confidence of primary school teaching assistants.
C. Design a training programme to boost the effectiveness of mid-level managers in a large logistics company.

The ITTs contained detailed information outlining the local context, scale and scope of the project, essential and desirable deliverables and logistical constraints. For the first two years in which the module ran, the ITTs were fictional. However, by the third year we began to involve external partners and ask the students to solve real challenges. In their consultancy firms, students were asked to design the campaign/intervention/programme specified in the ITT and also use the research literature to demonstrate their ideas stood a good chance of being successful. They had to pitch their ideas in a presentation (10 per cent of the module mark) and produce written tender documents (40 per cent of the module mark). The documents took the form of:

1. Project Proposal Outline (PPO) – What they planned to do and examples of their designs (1500 words).
2. Research Informed Rationale (RIR) – Why their idea would be effective, based on theories and findings from psychology (1500 words).

Because of the novelty of the assessment, we devoted a session to discussing the students' ideas and helping to prepare them for *Dragon's Den* style assessed presentations. We also provided feedback after the presentations and gave students a few days to revise or modify their written tender documents before they were finally submitted.

We were initially cautious about running a final year module with such a large element of group work. Previous literature has suggested that group work can lead to tensions, particularly around ensuring that group members recognise the mixed talent within the group and delegation of tasks, ensuring fair participation of all group members and evaluating each individual's contribution (Barfield, 2003; Kennedy, 2006; Meyer, 2010). To negate some of these challenges, reflect individual performance and minimise social loafing we required students to give anonymous peer assessments for themselves and others in their group using WebPA software. These assessments were used to moderate group marks by + or – five per cent. This allowed us to give higher marks to students who had contributed more and lower marks for those who had contributed less. Although this was the first time the students had done any formal peer assessment, no students reported any concerns or problems. The end-of-module eval-

uation indicated that 76 per cent thought using peer assessment to moderate group marks for individuals was a good idea.

The second assessment was an end-of-module exam (worth 50 per cent of the overall module mark). The style of questions mirrored the type of questions set for the in-class activities. Students were required to write three essays in two hours to demonstrate breadth across the topics covered by the module:

Section A: This was similar to the ITT in that students were asked to design interventions and use psychological evidence to show that their idea stood a good chance of success.

Section B: Students were required to write one answer from a choice of two questions about employment recruitment and selection.

3. Designing teaching to promote psychological literacy

Most final year modules are highly specialised, focused entities, that target advanced niche knowledge; for example autism or peer relationships. However, instead of introducing students to more topic knowledge, our module aimed to bring together knowledge they had learned throughout their degree, encourage them to reflect on the knowledge they already held and discover how they could use this for their own development and the development of others. The module was specifically designed to help students:

1. Overcome the perennial problem of knowledge compartmentalisation in which students do not cross pollinate their thinking and reasoning with information gained in different modules.
2. Apply their existing discipline-specific knowledge and skills to novel problems and situations to create new ideas and produce tangible impact on the world around them.
3. Recognise and leverage the unique value of their psychology training to prospective employers.

3.1. Compartmentalisation of knowledge

We wanted to empower students to draw on all their available knowledge and evaluate for themselves what was relevant or applicable to the task at hand. In our lecture material we revisited key studies and theories instead of presenting new information on the topic. We hinted and mentioned much more than we covered in detail. For example in Week 1 the students were asked to think about everything they had studied that might be useful when trying to persuade someone. We then created a list of many potential psychology theories and studies that could be referred to when designing an advertising campaign.

Throughout the module (including for the assessments) we continued to encourage them to draw on all sources of knowledge, including those from their other Dual Honours subject or elective modules. They became more consciously aware of the large store of knowledge they had developed throughout their degree and how this resource was now available to help them to develop themselves, and also those around them. Through this, we encouraged students to better understand the nature of knowledge as changing and evolving and how removing the artificial compartments between their knowledge could help them to develop exciting new ideas.

Critically, however, they needed to evaluate the relevance of any information they chose to cite and defend its inclusion and credibility. This was an important skill for the module and beyond because we 'live in a world full of data' (Porkess, 2013). Students need to be able to select relevant, reliable information and synthesise this to develop their own ideas on a large range of topics which affect their lives, for example, around voting or health care choices. To enhance this skill, during class we provided students with a pack of six to eight articles or book chapters. We would set time-limited activities that required the students to work in groups to very quickly select relevant information out of the materials provided. They needed

to develop mechanisms for quickly eliminating or including material based on the specific scenario at hand.

3.2. Application of skills

We wanted our students to be able to use the knowledge and skills gained during their degree to accomplish something tangible and relevant to the world beyond academia. For us the goal was not to teach the skills that might one day be transferred but actually to help students manage the process of transferring their existing skills from the academic context to an applied setting. Various theorists have advocated experiential or constructivist models of learning to help students build flexible and transferable knowledge structures through the process of producing a tangible object (e.g. Kolb, 1984; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; Papert, 1991). Both of the assessments for our module required students to design a creative solution to a workplace challenge. They needed to demonstrate that their idea was both practically feasible (drawing on research design and methods training) and likely to succeed (based on the available research evidence).

Teaching activities were designed to encourage students to more broadly apply their ability to think critically. For example, during a session on advertising the students spent time dissecting a television advert and identifying the various persuasive strategies being used. In addition to evaluating the work of other people, we also wanted them to be able to evaluate their own ideas and designs. All the ITTs contained a requirement for the students to state how they would evaluate the success or failure of their plan if it were to be implemented. A marking criterion specifically addressed the rigour and appropriateness of their evaluation strategy. This aspect of the module developed students' understanding of what 'critical evaluation' is beyond the academic context and helped them recognise the value of their skills to a potential employer.

Students responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to be creative during in-class activities. Initially we found we needed to push students to provide the empirical support behind their ideas. However, week by week we could see the students improve at grounding their ideas in an evidence base and using research evidence to generate better ideas and justify them more convincingly. By the end of the module we were confident that our students had come to appreciate that whilst 'common sense' may help them to invent novel ideas to solve real-world problems, an evidence-based, informed approach was vital for longer term success (Mair, Taylor & Hulme, 2013).

The module emphasised engaging with real-world problems and situations that the students might face in their future careers. Many students cite a wish to help as a reason for enrolling in a psychology course (Bromnick & Horowitz, 2013) and, in fact, psychology students are more likely than some other graduates to engage in voluntary work (HESA, 2012). The fact that their work could be used to make a real-world difference encouraged the students to think deeply about creative ideas which could be used, which also took into account real-world limitations. For example, when we ran the module with hypothetical ITTs, students were a little fanciful and over ambitious with their ideas. However, when we worked with external partners, the students took greater care over the feasibility of their ideas and the rigour about the theoretical underpinnings. They knew that there was a chance that their ideas could be used in the real-world and this encouraged them to think about practicality more deeply. Using genuine problems for the ITT meant the students' ideas had the potential to impact practice. For example, elements from our students' postgraduate recruitment campaigns are now being implemented. This provides additional motivation and sense of accomplishment for the students as well as being an exciting addition to their CV.

3.3. Recognising employability

Employability skills were foregrounded in the design of the module and reinforced explicitly throughout. Many students do not understand the recruitment and selection process, including, how job descriptions are developed and how candidates are selected. In fact, 26 per cent of students report feeling mentally distressed due to concerns about graduate employment (NUS, 2013). Throughout the module we asked students to use their psychological knowledge to help others to solve problems. In the final section of the module we asked them to use this knowledge to help themselves manage the recruitment and selection process. We taught students more about the process, both as a psychologist and as a candidate who is actively searching for jobs. We also helped them to recognise all the skills that they already had which would help them to find a job.

In order to do this, we gave students examples of challenging interview questions and asked them how they would answer them. We then discussed the theories behind what interviewers were looking for and gave them the opportunity to answer again. In this way, we gave them more knowledge of the process of applying for jobs which will hopefully give them an advantage over other graduates. The in-class activities helped them to recognise the personal relevance of their research methods training in understanding processes such as psychometric testing. Additionally, the end-of-module exam assessed their knowledge of recruitment and selection practices from an academic psychology perspective. Students, therefore, developed their understanding of the recruitment process both as a psychologist and as a job applicant.

A key element of the module was encouraging students to think about how to present to different audiences, both orally and in their writing. During their university career almost every piece of work they do is presented for an academic audience. However, in the future they are likely to need to be able to present to a range of audiences (NACE, 2015) and this is a key element of psychological literacy (McGovern et al., 2010). To allow them to develop this skill during class, students were asked to, for example, design a poster about promoting a positive classroom environment for children for use in a classroom and another to display for teachers in a staffroom. They had to think about language and how to present their ideas differently to these different audiences. Students also had to pitch their assessed presentation for a non-academic audience. They needed to be persuasive in encouraging the external partner to choose their idea and be aware of the fact that they were presenting to an audience which had different skills and knowledge to their own. Additionally, the written assessment involved students writing for two audiences. The PPO was written for a lay audience to describe what their idea was. However, the RIR was written for an expert academic audience to evaluate the research evidence supporting their proposal. Therefore, we helped students to think about how to present their knowledge differently depending on their audience. This is likely to stand them in good stead in their future workplaces.

4. Outcome

Overall we have been delighted with the success of this module. Students were challenged by the activities but engaged well and could demonstrate that they had achieved the intended learning outcomes through the assessments.

4.1 Tutors' perceptions of the module

This module was fun to teach. It was refreshing to concentrate on helping students to develop skills rather than gain knowledge. Whilst teaching this module both authors saw the students experience more 'light-bulb moments' (suddenly grasping a new way of thinking) than we have in seen during any of our other teaching. The innovative assessment proved to be an effective measure of how well

students had achieved the aims of the module. The specificity of the project proposal, combined with the need to justify their design choices with appropriate research evidence, forced students out of their comfortable module-bound compartments and into a creative mindset focused on the needs of their 'clients'.

The originality and rigour of the work produced by the students was exciting and the marking criteria were effective for grading the work consistently. As with any new assessment regime, elements were revised after first being trialled. We discuss some of the implementation challenges in a later section.

4.2 Students' perceptions of the module

Student feedback supported our own intuition that the module did achieve the intended learning outcomes. In the student end-of-module evaluation, 100 per cent of respondents agreed that the module had helped them to work effectively as part of team, 84 per cent agreed it had helped them apply psychological knowledge to real-world situations, and 92 per cent said the module helped them to understand recruitment and selections strategies.

It is particularly noteworthy that 85 per cent of students reported that they valued the applied nature of the module. In the additional comments section, one student wrote; 'I really enjoyed this module and liked how the assessment felt relevant and realistic.' Overall, informal feedback within class was very positive. It was a challenging module but the students seemed to enjoy it and particularly valued the practical element.

Many students told us they found it valuable to consider recruitment and selection within their psychology curriculum. They acknowledged that they would have been unlikely to visit the careers service to explore this. However, having being made aware of the variety of selection techniques to which they might be subjected, they now felt better equipped and more confident to tackle their own job hunt. Several students commented that they now had a concrete example of how to demonstrate 'competencies' when applying for jobs.

4.3 External partners' perceptions of the module

The external partners stated that the input required from them was relatively small and easy to manage. They were excited to obtain a fresh perspective to help them to 'solve' a problem or develop some new ideas. They also enjoyed the opportunity to get involved with the students. Furthermore, a crossover benefit of engaging external partners is that these partners also become more aware of the real life applicability of psychological skills and knowledge. This may encourage them to consider employing psychology graduates in future.

5. Implementation challenges

In this section we will briefly discuss some of the peculiarities of this module, which any colleagues who are considering adapting this to suit their own teaching context might want to bear in mind. The implementation challenges were linked to the distinctive elements of the module, namely the assessment design and engaging with external partners.

5.1. Assessment design

Many of the students were nervous at the start of the module because of the unusual focus on skills instead of knowledge, the novel assessment method and the reliance on group work in their final year. For these reasons, many students did not select the module as a first choice. However, we found that even those students who did not choose the module subsequently came to value the experience. Previous literature suggests that students take action to minimise anxiety and stress in their degree (van der Wattering et al., 2008). Similarly, novelty in assessment has been found to increase negative affect in students (Bevitt, 2015). However, we and others have found that once students complete the assessments successfully and develop new skills, they feel a sense of pride, achievement and can see the value of the

task (Young & Marks-Maran, 2014). This was certainly true for our module and is one of the reasons we feel it might work better as core module to support all students rather than a small elective option where students might be worried about choosing a 'risky' option compared to others in their cohort.

Group work formed a substantial part of the module as we strove to make the coursework similar to real work situations where most employees must work as part of a team. Although initially anxious about this, in-class discussions of how group work is common in the workplace combined with the use of WebPA to evaluate each student's contribution allayed students' fears. A pleasant surprise was the alacrity with which students embraced the use of WebPA peer assessment to moderate group marks. In fact, we increased the weighting of the peer assessment from six to 10 per cent when repeating the module. No students expressed any concerns about the use of peer assessment.

A key challenge with such a radical departure from the standard final year assessment methods was generating appropriate and robust marking systems. Before the very first use of the Contract Tender assessment the first author created a detailed set of marking criteria, including specific indicators of performance for all grade boundaries. As an example, one of the four marking criteria for the PPO is included in Table 1 below.

In practice we found the criteria almost completely removed ambiguity about marking decisions and provided an effective framework for evaluating innovative and imaginative work by students. It also helped to focus student attention on the key skills they needed to demonstrate.

We did not develop unique marking criteria for the exam questions, choosing instead to be guided by the normal academic judgement used when marking. We felt it was important to ensure parity across all final year modules so as not to advantage or disadvantage students taking our module. During the first year of exam marking, both authors were slightly disappointed by the overall quality of student work. We felt that they struggled to show the same creativity that they had shown during group work.

We found that marks in the group coursework report were higher than those in the individual exam, which supported our observations that group work enhanced students' performance in these applied tasks. On this basis we felt that more support was needed to help students transition from group-based applied thinking – in which different students may have been responsible for the creative and research focused aspects – towards individual applications of knowl-

Table 1: Design a feasible project that could realistically be implemented.

Fail (<40%)	The proposed project is not feasible. It could not be practically or realistically implemented.
D (40–49%)	Feasibility issues have either not been addressed or have been given only minimal consideration. The project could not easily be implemented.
C (50–59%)	Considers some practical concerns and the project is broadly feasible. Some implementation issues remain. No alternatives have been considered.
B (60–69%)	The project is feasible and the proposal outlines how this could be achieved. There is some evidence that alternatives have been considered.
A (>70%)	The project is feasible and the proposal outlines how this could be achieved. It shows awareness of potential areas of difficulty. Some indication is given for how problems might be overcome.

edge required for the exam. The following year we changed the exam to a seen paper to give students more time to cultivate their ideas and ensure that they used all the skills they had developed in the module. This had the intended effect of giving students more time to be creative and more opportunity to locate and evaluate relevant literature. The exam answers did then better reflect student attainment of the learning outcomes.

Presenting to a non-academic audience was also challenging for students, but they coped admirably. During years where the ITTs were fictional, we saw students in suits give elaborate performances which were very creative. Unexpectedly, the flamboyancy of earlier years vanished when the external partners were invited to attend the presentations. We can't be sure if this is down to individual differences in the cohort or the additional nerves associated with presenting to an external audience but it does indicate that students might need more encouragement and support to break the mould in front of a new audience.

5.2. Working with external partners

For the first and second years in which we ran the module we developed fictional ITTs, designed to encourage students to engage with the theories that had been discussed in the sessions. This worked well and is a simple (and more controllable) way of running the module. However, in the third year, we decided to involve external partners in the module to make it more applicable to real-world settings. We worked together with these external partners to design ITTs based on real-world problems. The external partners were recruited from contacts which we already had in place, through research groups, schools and through a social enterprise network. Because of existing contacts, recruiting external partners has not been particularly difficult for us, but is a potential challenge for the module and needs to be carefully considered.

The input required from the external partners was around four hours of their time. Partners were recruited at outreach events, where we gave them information about the module and asked if they might be interested in being involved. If they were interested, we invited them to a planning meeting to explore their workplace challenges and to draft out the ITT. This was then sent to them for approval and they could make changes if required. The partners were then asked to attend the student presentations and ask questions, which took approximately two hours depending on the size of the class. With the students' permission, we made a copy of their tender documents available to the external partners. All of the students agreed and were excited that their ideas could have a real-world impact.

As well as engaging the external partners, it was also important to manage their expectations. For example, in one year no students chose the Leadership ITT. We think this was because it was the final of the three topics covered in the sessions and, therefore, it gave the students less time to work on developing their ideas. We did make partners aware that this could happen but of course it was disappointing for them. We have decided that we will use the same ITT the following year and will change the order of the topics in order to give all ITTs a similar chance of being chosen.

We also had to manage partner's expectations of the difference between having a group of students compared to a professional company responding to their ITT. We had trained the students in delivering presentations and designing interventions but of course they were not yet at a professional standard. For example, while we had extensive discussions with the students about the tone of their presentation and documents, there were times when thoughtless phrases such as 'Teachers don't know the research' were uttered. Teaching was, therefore, a good choice of topic as teachers were used to giving feedback in a constructive fashion and were less fazed by these slips than others may have been. This illustrates the importance of considering who to invite as an external

partner and having discussions with both students and external partners about expectations and appropriate behaviour.

Overall the external partners were a very valuable addition to the module and offered students a rare opportunity to solve real-world problems. It is, however, important to consider how to develop these external contacts and to engage fully them in the process.

6. Summary and recommendations

Although our module has so far operated as an elective module, our recommendation would be to consider offering it as a core component of a psychology degree. We noted that the novelty of the assessment could be a barrier to students selecting the module. Obtaining the highest possible overall mark in their degree is often more important to students than developing new skills. A module such as this may be seen as a risky choice as it involves novel assessments and group work. However, upon completing the module all our students recognised that they had fostered skills that would stand them in good stead in the workplace. Indeed, despite low initial take-up numbers, the end-of-module feedback indicated it had been very positively received in comparison to most other elective modules on offer. As a core module, all students would have the same opportunity to develop important employability skills that are not covered elsewhere in the curriculum. In the increasingly competitive graduate job market it is becoming ever more important to ensure that all our students are able to recognise and articulate the value of their psychological training to any future employer.

We chose our three topics based on a combination of staff expertise, career destinations and informal conversations with students. However, tutors could explore different topic areas, for example law enforcement and criminal justice, healthcare, sports and exercise or coaching, depending on the specialist knowledge of staff and the interests of students and external partners. As the module does not necessitate developing a wealth of new material refreshing, synthesising and applying knowledge, it would be possible to change quite regularly to allow students to explore a range of topics.

Our experience with this module revealed that students really valued explicitly exploring how the knowledge and skills gained during their degree would be useful to them, both when seeking graduate employment and once they have entered their chosen career. Exploring links between psychological topics and workplace scenarios could be embedded in core lectures and many of the in-class activities we developed could be incorporated into seminars throughout the degree. Whether through a dedicated module like ours or scattered across the curriculum, we recommend that others consider how to help students apply psychological knowledge in their future workplace and graduate job hunt as this was the key element which students seemed to enjoy and value.

The contract tender assessment need not focus exclusively on employment scenarios. Instead, ITTs could be developed to allow students to develop strategies for tackling the ethical and social challenges present in our communities and wider society. If this approach were to be adopted, then there would be less of a need to involve external partners, though this would still be desirable if possible. Thus, our approach could help develop graduates who are able to think both critically and innovatively to make a real-world difference on a larger scale (McGovern et al., 2010).

As a concept, psychological literacy continues to gain both traction and importance as part of degree level teaching. It is now referenced in the BPS accreditation criteria and universities are increasingly likely to be required to explicitly demonstrate how they support students to gain relevant skills beyond the independent final-year research project and ethical awareness instruction. As such, this module provides one model for how psychological literacy can be embedded within the undergraduate curriculum.

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