



What Do Students Want? Supporting Outreach, Providing Authentic Learning Experiences and Career Trajectories.

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Abstract

In response to ongoing challenges in recruiting students onto relevant degree routes that would work towards a career in the Probation service, we undertook outreach activities aimed at enhancing young people's motivation to engage with further and higher education. Central to this work was a simple but critical question: what do students want? This guiding question reinforced our commitment to high quality learning and teaching grounded in relevant lived experience and aligned with meaningful career trajectories.

Building on this outreach, the research employed focus groups and surveys to explore how prospective students perceive and navigate their social worlds, and how they imagine their future career development. The findings were analysed through Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), facilitating examination of students' dispositions, needs, behaviours, and aspirations. This theoretical lens provided deeper insight into how expectations and educational decisions are influenced by structural and cultural factors.

The research is embedded within Sheffield Hallam University's values of inclusivity and supports a forward-looking vision for student futures, including employability, successful graduate outcomes, and alignment with the Access and Participation Plan. By advancing understanding of student habitus, the study informs more equitable, responsive, and socially attuned curricular design.

In response to the findings, we actively engaged students through innovative and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning. Most notably, simulated practice pedagogy was developed as a core delivery component, enabling immersive engagement with realistic professional scenarios. Feedback that was provided indicated this approach strengthened student engagement and enhanced opportunities for sustained career development within contemporary probation contexts.

Keywords

simulated practice pedagogy, student recruitment, inclusive practice, access and participation, employability.

References

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. SAGE.

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