

Conversations of Transition: The impact of participatory action research on Student-Alumni Career Journeys

Emma Lennox
e.lennox@qub.ac.uk
Queen's University Belfast

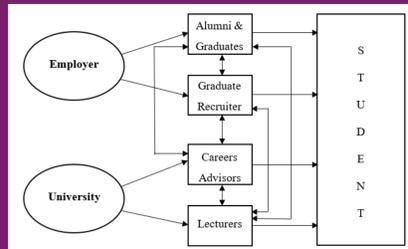
Introduction

Experiential learning and networking are critical for AHSS students making **career decisions** (Lennox, 2023). This project connected **English students and alumni** with two aims:

- 1 – Understand experiences of English UG alumni **transitioning** from university - first steps, change management, areas of difficulty, recommendations for career support.
- 2 – Examine impact of informational interviews on **current** student career development management, developing skills and initiating next steps.

Theoretical Framework

The Sustainable Career Ecosystem Theory views careers as evolving over **time**, across different **spaces**, and involving interconnected **actors** including individuals, organisations, societies.



Methodology

20 UG English students were trained to conduct informational interviews with 21 English alumni from their course.

Thematic coding and analysis allowed key themes to be constructed from interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Student Likert surveys before and after the project assessed distance travelled, free text questions were thematically coded. Student focus groups provided feedback of experience and evidence for future actions.

Research Questions

RQ1 - How do English alumni **navigate** key career transitions, and strategies used.

RQ2 - What retrospective **support** would alumni suggest that would have helped?

RQ3 - What career skills do students **develop** conducting informational interviews?

RQ4 - Has interviewing course alumni **impacted** student career management?

Student Reflections

It can feel **extremely daunting** with a degree that doesn't lead directly to a job, this has **given me a vocabulary** to explain benefits of English that I didn't have before.

I have begun **looking for opportunities**, as well as completing online courses in the specific areas I am interested in to **help my knowledge base**.

It was a useful project to gain **professional experience** - my interviewee did mention he felt was an **important skill** that an academic degree **can't teach**.

Current English Students

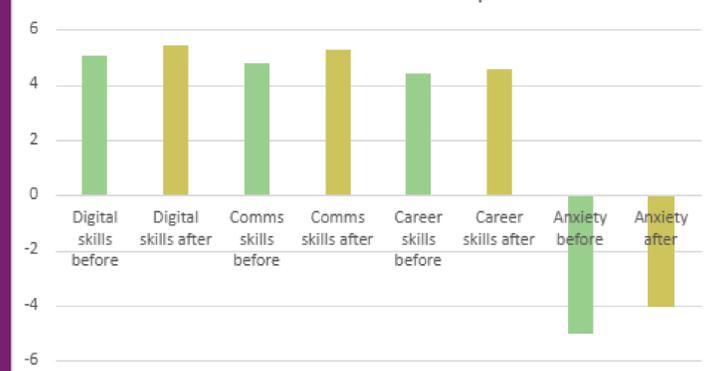
Skills Gained

- 01 **Communication**
- 02 **Professionalism**
- 03 **Digital Skills**
- 04 **Confidence / Networking**

Gaps Identified

- 01 **Relevant Experience**
- 02 **Labour market information**
- 03 **Networking**
- 04 **Need to broaden horizons**

Student Interviewer Impact



English Alumni



Recommendations

1. Supporting current students

Integrating alumni stories into student journey to **enhance career readiness**.

- Alumni guest lectures
- Mentorship programmes
- Case studies and workshops
- Alumni-led workshops or micro-internships for industry-specific skills



2. Curriculum development

Incorporating alumni insights reinforces **long-term value** of non-specialist disciplines.

- Alumni inclusion in curriculum reviews
- Regular alumni surveys
- Collaborative projects for real-world learning



3. Wider subject sustainability

Engaging alumni post-graduation **strengthens talent networks**.

- Positioning English degrees skills as essential in a dynamic job market
- Expanding internships and placements
- Providing incentives or recognition for alumni supporting student employability

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Donald, W.E., Ashleigh, M.J. & Baruch, Y. (2018). Students' perceptions of education and employability: Facilitating career transition from HE into the labor market. *Career Development International*, 23 (5), 513-540.
- Lennox, E. (2023). From passion to profession: Career journey influences on Arts, English and Language students. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 51(1), 26-39.

Project supported through JISC research grant funding