

# Supporting the Next Generation of WO Psychologists: Evaluation of the ‘Emerging Occ Psychs’ Initiative

Simon Toms, Nikita Mikhailov, Hardeep Viridi, David Biggs, Eloise Mason, Simon Gander, & Amanda Lopes Pacca

PsychologyAtWork.Blog

## Introduction

Occupational Psychology represents a popular field of study, with over two-dozen MSc courses in the UK alone. However, graduates frequently report difficulties in transitioning from their degree programmes into professional roles that are relevant to their qualifications.

## Emerging Occ Psychs (EOP)

The EOP initiative was launched in 2020 to provide free mentoring and support to recent graduates of MSc programmes in Occupational Psychology (and related fields). The goal of the initiative was to increase graduates’ engagement with their desired profession by pairing them with a mentor who possessed experience in relevant areas of the industry.

The current research project sought to evaluate the EOP’s ability to increase the professional engagement of mentees taking part in the second cohort of the EOP, which ran from Autumn 2021 through to Summer 2022.

## Method

When applying for the EOP, Mentee applicants were administered several variables relevant to their engagement with, and transition into, the occupational psychology industry. These variables included perceived employability (Berntson & Marklund, 2007), career planning confidence (McAuliffe et al., 2006), and self-esteem (Robins et al., 2001).

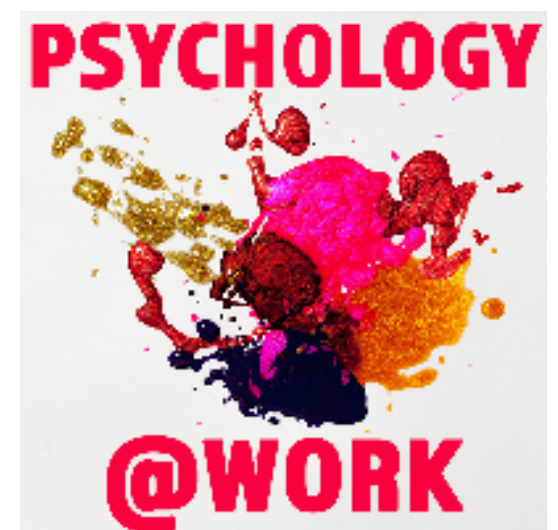
At the EOP’s evaluation nine months later, these variables were re-administered, resulting in 34 participants. Further interviews were conducted with 6 Mentees, resulting in a longitudinal mixed-methods study.

## Results

Analysis of the resulting data using a paired-samples T-test identified significant improvement across most variables (see Table 1). Mentees’ perceived employability increased by 34.3%, Self Esteem increased by 24.0%, and Career Planning Confidence increased by 11.0%.

Table 1. Paired Sample T-test of Scale

Scale	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Perceived Employability</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>8.82</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>.000*</b>
<b>Self Esteem</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>.005*</b>
Readiness to make a career decision (CPC)	-0.06	-0.67	33	0.505
Self-Assessment Confidence (CPC)	0.25	2.38	33	.023*
Generating Options (CPC)	0.38	2.55	33	.016*
Information-Seeking confidence (CPC)	0.45	4.26	33	.000*
Deciding Confidence (CPC)	0.13	1.23	33	0.228
Confidence in Implementing your Decision (CPC)	0.26	2.50	33	.018*
<b>Career Planning Confidence - Total</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>.005*</b>
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)				



Thematic analysis of the interviews highlighted various themes of note. Greater professional engagement was reported by mentees, as the EOP enabled them to engage with a wider community of experienced professionals, peers, and potential employers. Improvements in perceived employability and networking were also cited. Benefits of mentoring included greater awareness of the industry and improvement to key skills relevant to career progression. Analyses highlighted various recommendations for the EOP organisers and future mentors.

## Discussion

The provision of mentoring had a clear and positive impact on various aspects relevant to mentees’ engagement with the profession. This demonstrates the important role the EOP, or similar initiative, could play in facilitating the transition of fresh talent into the profession. This will also have clear relevance to the universities that offer MSc programmes, as transition into suitable employment is an important goal. Finally, the research provided some useful guidance for mentors interested in enhancing their effectiveness in supporting graduates.

## Mentee Testimonials

Several mentees have recorded brief testimonials detailing their experiences on the EOP. Scan the QR code below to access a YouTube playlist containing these recordings!

## Join the 2023/24 EOP cohort

The next cohort of the EOP is set to launch in the Autumn of 2023. If you are, or will be, a recent graduate of a WO MSc degree, scan the link to learn how you could apply to receive a mentor!

