

Using Diverse Perspectives to Evolve a Higher Education Coaching Programme

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Abstract

As higher education institutions face mounting pressure to improve graduate employability, coaching has become a valuable tool for development. However, there is limited research on its systematic use within undergraduate programmes. This study investigates the effects of a multi-perspective coaching programme on the learning outcomes and employability prospects undergraduates in Higher Education (HE). Building upon the exploration of coaching's potential within higher education, this study seeks to address several critical areas of impact with the following key research questions (RQs) guiding the investigation:

1. *How does coaching impact students learning outcomes and employability?*
2. *How can group coaching positively impact group learning?*
3. *How does coaching, either individual or group have sustainable impact?*

These questions aim to shed light on the diverse ways in which coaching may influence not only individual students but also group learning and organizational impact upon employment of these coached students. This qualitative study employs a social constructivist framework, drawing on student reflections, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest that structured coaching programmes play a transformative role in student learning, significantly enhancing career readiness and employability. These insights have direct implications for institutional student support strategies, advocating the integration of coaching frameworks in higher education curricula to bridge the gap between academic learning and workforce expectations.

Keywords

coaching • coaching outcomes • employability • career development • higher education (HE)

Introduction

Higher education institutions are increasingly evaluated on their ability to prepare students for employment (Gedye & Beaumont, 2018). As industries demand graduates with not only technical expertise but also strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills, universities face growing pressure to implement strategies that enhance students' career readiness. Coaching has gained recognition as a powerful tool for personal and professional development, yet its structured application within undergraduate programmes remains underexplored. This study seeks to bridge that gap by examining coaching as both an evaluative tool for coach programme effectiveness as reported by Jones and Smith (2022) and this paper's focus as an intervention for improving employability outcomes.

It was noted that the need for targeted support is particularly evident among business and accounting students seeming to experience barriers in securing graduate-level employment. To address this challenge, this study investigates how coaching enhances student learning outcomes, supports team-based

learning, and contributes to broader organizational benefits. By exploring these dimensions, the research positions coaching as both a means of enhancing employability and a tool for institutional development.

Using a qualitative approach grounded in a social constructivist framework, this study analyses student reflections, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews to evaluate the role of coaching in higher education. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about embedding coaching practices in university curricula to support both student development and long-term workforce preparedness.

The Role of Coaching in Enhancing Employability

Coaching is fundamentally about unlocking an individual's potential to enhance their performance (Whitmore, 2010). The Coaching in Higher Education Consortium

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(Campbell & Mogashana, 2024) defines coaching in education as the establishment of personalized connections with students that foster autonomy, self-awareness, and resilience which aligns with the assertion that coaching is a *targeted, purposeful intervention* that facilitates personal growth and a positive change in behaviour (Grant, 2012). The benefits of coaching align closely with the needs of students who value collaboration, transparency, and well-being (Deloitte, 2024). Coaching also enhances employability by improving self-efficacy, career planning, and networking abilities (Lin, 2015). These outcomes are particularly relevant for business studies students, who face challenges in securing post-graduation employment.

Coaching is rooted in social constructivist principles as it supports reflective learning by enabling individuals to integrate prior experiences with new knowledge within specific contexts, including social interactions (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This approach fosters self-assessment and guided discussions, empowering individuals to align their actions with their core values and strengths while striving toward personal goals (Connor & Pokora, 2017). Through collaborative dialogue, coaches and learners co-construct knowledge, uncovering insights that may not surface in isolation (Hilav, 1990, as cited in Erdem, 2001). Effective coaching challenges self-limiting beliefs, reinforces positive ones, and offers tailored feedback, promoting personal growth and development (Grant & Atad, 2022). The pilot programme was founded on the belief that, with appropriate support, every student has the potential to achieve their employment aspirations, thereby making meaningful contributions to their own lives and to society.

Berg & Karlsen (2016) highlight coaching benefits across multiple levels:

- **Individual:** Enhancing self-awareness and personal growth.
- **Team:** Strengthening communication and collaborative skills.
- **Organization:** Fostering a culture of continuous improvement and professional development.

Berg and Karlsen (2020) further summarized the benefits of coaching as:

- Increased self-awareness, confidence, leadership, management skills and assertiveness, attainment of work/life balance, communication skills, empowerment, emotional intelligence, self-management, feedback, visualization, resilience, clarity of goal setting.
- Enhanced perception of reduced workload and control of work intensity and stress.
- Increased social support from colleagues and leaders.
- Clarity of goals-setting, self-coaching, and positive self-talk.

Our goal was to achieve specific outcomes with the students, in enhancing their employability readiness. However, it is important to acknowledge that research on the coaching interaction as an intervention capable of driving significant changes in thinking and perspective remains limited (Cox, 2013, as cited in Fillery-Travis & Cavicchia, 2013). Müller and Greif (2022) explored the concept of gaining new insights by considering a question from multiple angles, leading to what is commonly referred to as an “Aha! moment”. This shift in perspective was further examined by Grant and Atad (2022) who attributed it to the application of practical positive psychology exercises and the use of personal strengths to enhance well-being (Seligman, 2019).

The coaching programme provided students with the opportunity to undergo a paradigm shift in their perspective, particularly with regard to their employability readiness. As Berg and Karlsen (2016) noted, coaching involves active listening and action-focused dialogue to help individuals or teams develop and change their thinking, behaviour, learning, and emotions. For the students, this shift in perspective aimed to enable, empower, and inspire their motivation to pursue their chosen career paths. Al-Nasser and Mohamed (2015) also employed coaching to help individuals appreciate the impact of their actions on productivity.

The benefits of coaching described above by Berg and Karlsen (2016) align closely with the needs and expectations of the students in our cohort. These student needs, shaped by distinct life experiences and a context of ongoing disruption and change, place a high value on self-agency and are focused on developing their skills and abilities. They also prioritize collaboration and transparency, which was evident in the group coaching sessions where students embraced mutual peer support. Students place significant emphasis on well-being, mental fitness, and authenticity, ensuring that their actions align with their words (De Witte, 2024). This focus on authenticity has driven our careful selection of coaches who not only possess the relevant competencies but also genuinely wish to support this emerging workforce; a discussion we will revisit later.

Employment is a major concern for younger generations, with 21% identifying it as their primary worry, second only to the cost of living, which affects 43% of the population (Deloitte, 2024) ranking employment among their top five worries. Consequently, supporting students in their transition to the workforce has become an essential responsibility for higher education (HE). Research has shown that factors such as skill development, career planning, networking, and job search abilities are strongly linked to future work self-salience, with career adaptability acting as a critical mediating factor (Lin, 2015).

Coaching has evolved from being a specific skill-enhancing intervention to a comprehensive leadership development

Table 1. Key Coaching Outcomes and Methodologies in Student Development

Reference	Key Coaching Outcomes	Application in Student Coaching	Methodology
Al-Nasser & Mohamed, 2015	Appreciation of possibilities of one's own actions.	Foster ownership of career trajectory.	Social constructivist interaction (group).
Atad & Grant, 2021 McFarlane, 2023; King 1992.	Enhance goal setting and achievement.	Clarify employment success goals.	Co-created goal setting and focus with coach.
Atkinson et al., 2022	Feedback in developmental coaching.	Self-assessment and coaching dialogue.	Reflection of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and coaching engagement.
Batson & Yoder, 2012	84% of coachees identified the quality of the relationship with their coach as critical to the success of the intervention.	Important coaches were able to establish rapport.	Social learning theory. Coach profiles shared with students – choice who to work with.
Batson & Yoder, 2012	Learning through joint reflection.	Group coaching and peer problem solving.	Group coaching/network.
Beattie et al., 2014	Sharing and problem solving through peer coaching.	Group coaching sessions became 'peer sharing' sessions.	Social learning theory.
Bellman et al., 2015	Motivation, self-confidence.	Build this capability based on strengths.	Positive psychology.
Bellman et al., 2015	Skill development e.g. time management, stress management, prioritization, via various management tools.	Personal development tools and mentoring.	Mix of non-directive and directive coaching & mentoring. Resource bank.
Ben-Yehuda, 2015	Increased students' motivation and self-efficacy.	Encourage ownership of own destiny.	Co-creation
Cameron et al., 2019 Jackson, 2018	Proactiveness and student crisis prevention.	Transferable skills, strengths focus.	Learning domains (skills).
Robinson, 2015	Reflective questioning, formal self-assessment, strategy sharing, and co-creation of tangible plans.	Reflective questioning in coaching. Reflective essay. Self-assessment.	Reflective practice and models. Personal development plan.
London & Mone, 2015	Improve performance through being directive and motivational.	Mix of directive and non-directive coaching.	Positive psychology.
McFarlane, 2023	Improved self-awareness.	Self-assessments highlight strengths and 'sell' themselves.	Positive psychology.
Mogashana et al., 2023	Collaborative partnership.	Unique 1:1 personalized support.	1:1 and group coaching.

tool that integrates psychology and strategic thinking. Its widespread adoption across industries reflects its effectiveness in enhancing employee performance, team dynamics, and organizational leadership. To further support the case for coaching in this context, a summary of relevant outcomes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 highlights several important observations regarding coaching outcomes and methodologies in student coaching. A central theme is the emphasis on fostering student ownership of their career paths, goal-setting, and self-efficacy, which are supported by co-created coaching goals and positive psychology-based approaches. Additionally, feedback in developmental coaching and the establishment of strong coach-coachee relationships are crucial to success, with the quality of these relationships being identified as a key factor for effective coaching outcomes (Lai & Smith, 2021).

Group coaching and peer problem-solving are also significant components, with social learning theory underpinning their effectiveness in facilitating collaborative learning and shared

experiences. The development of practical skills, such as time and stress management, being another important outcome. There is a focus on encouraging proactiveness and transferable skills that can prevent crises, alongside reflective practices that help students develop strategies for personal and professional growth. Self-awareness is another key outcome, with students being encouraged to identify and leverage their strengths through positive psychology self-assessment and support. The integration of 1:1 and group coaching methods allow for personalized support while also fostering peer learning, making the overall coaching experience more comprehensive and impactful.

These methodologies aim to enhance student readiness for the workplace by providing tailored, holistic support for their development and career transition. Thus, providing a solid platform to be able to address the questions that this research was aimed to address:

1. How does coaching impact students learning outcomes and employability?

2. How can group coaching positively impact group learning?
3. How does coaching, either individual or group have sustainable impact?

Institutional Impact

Implementing coaching programmes within higher education institutions has been associated with significant positive outcomes for both students and the institutions themselves. Research indicates that coaching can enhance student self-efficacy, improve academic performance, and increase retention rates through to graduation. Further, studies have shown that coaching interventions can lead to improvements in Grade Point Averages (GPA) and bolster students' belief in their academic capabilities (Alzen et al., 2021; Capstick et al., 2019; Catchings, 2014; Grover & Furnham, 2022; Losch et al., 2016, as cited in Bradley et al., 2024). Moreover, developing an integrated coaching culture within an institution can lead to a more goal-directed and supportive environment. By providing professional development in coaching and advocacy skills to student success personnel and leaders, institutions can foster a culture of care that permeates multiple functions. This holistic approach not only benefits individual student outcomes but also enhances the overall institutional climate, promoting collaboration and continuous improvement (Bradley et al., 2024).

In addition, coaching and mentoring programmes have been found to positively influence faculty development, which in turn benefits student learning experiences. Faculty members who engage in coaching are better equipped to create engaging, learner-centred online learning environments, leading to improved student engagement and satisfaction. This enhancement in instructional practices contributes to the institution's reputation for delivering quality education (Iskakova, 2024). Overall, the institutional impact of coaching encompasses improved student performance, higher retention and graduation rates, a supportive campus culture, and enhanced teaching practices. These factors collectively contribute to fostering student success and maintaining academic excellence.

Rationale for Engaging Professional Trained Coaches

Ellinger and Kim (2014) noted that 75% of issues related to coaching stemmed from a lack of support, inadequate coaching skills, and insufficient understanding of the coaching process and aims. Variability in coaching standards and training raises concerns about the quality and effectiveness of coaching services, especially within higher education, where

student well-being and future life trajectories are at stake. Therefore, qualified experienced coaches were engaged following a rigorous CV and interview process for this HE intervention.

London and Mone (2015) highlight that the quality of the narrative employed by coaches influences performance, particularly when they adopt both directive and motivational approaches. This underscores the importance of engaging professional coaches, while being sensitive to the nature of our student population and with over 200 languages spoken across the catchment area. Engaging professional coaches also serves the additional purpose of gathering valuable insights to shape a sustainable programme that aligns with high coaching standards. The small group coaching sessions aimed to help build trusted networks among students. As Garner et al. (2022) state, "it's about getting them to work together, not just to trust me (as coach), but to trust each other, and be comfortable with each other". The recognition that facilitating group coaching sessions is a skill also led to the decision to engage professional coaches. King's (1992) *Theory of Goal Attainment* outlines a transactional process involving four key concepts: perception, communication, interaction, and transaction. Effective contracting, a core competency of seasoned coaches, emphasizes the importance of ongoing transacting that evolves with the coachees' needs. Contracts were established between each coach and student, providing a structured framework to reinforce the students' needs within the programme objectives. Additionally, a contract template outlining expectations for the coaching groups was created to ensure equity and networking. This encouraged a culture of shared learning and mutual support, an approach familiar to professional coaches.

The programme was designed to ensure students were "coach-ready" for future employers, as coaching is recognized as the fastest-growing intervention in the workplace (Ciporen, 2015). It is widely endorsed as an effective strategy for enhancing teamwork and productivity, skills future employers seek in recruits. The programme aimed to position students for successful transitions into dynamic work environments, equipping them to meet the evolving demands of employees.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research design, incorporating reflective student portfolios, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews as data sources, targeting final-year business studies students, offering individual and group coaching sessions. The evaluation of coaching outcomes was based upon analysis from these qualitative sources. For all qualitative data, informed consent was provided and ethical approval given for the whole pilot. Additionally, a staff survey

Table 2. Stakeholder Assessment Methods for Coaching Outcomes

Stakeholder Group	Individual Assessment	Team/Group Assessment	Organizational Assessment
Students	Likert measure of progress (0-5). Reflective essay. Job attainment, Semi-structured interviews. Portfolio – self assessment.	Focus group. Reflections. Observation.	HE metrics. Employer feedback.
Coaches	Supervision. Focus group. Semi-structured interviews.	Group supervision sessions. Sharing insights.	Coach professional body. Feedback - impact on coaching standards.
University	Quantitative analysis comparing coached vs non-coached, surveys and demographic data (not referenced within this study).	Comparison of business studies student's vs other groups.	Destination 15 months after graduation.
Employer	Quantitative analysis. Semi-structured interviews.	Are these recruits good team players, adaptable, productive?	Student employability. Views regarding competency and value to the organization.

to gather their perspectives was also conducted, informing future iterations, and providing formative insights (Ely et al., 2010). Table 2 below outlines the stakeholder groups, and the analysis methods used.

This table highlights the integration of multisource evaluations, as recommended by Kochanowski et al. (2010), with research supporting the value of multisource feedback in enhancing work performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Smither et al., 2005). Johnson (2013) found that both evaluative feedback, such as self-assessment, and objective feedback positively impact task performance. As part of this, the programme encouraged students to actively seek and incorporate multisource feedback into their development process. As stated previously, a key aim was to foster behavioural change by enhancing the coachee self-awareness (Bozer et al., 2014) and emphasize the role of self-awareness (e.g., student SWOT) in creating an evidence base for effective coaching (Laske, 1999). These insights were central to the programme methodology, reinforcing self-reflection and awareness as critical drivers of personal and professional growth. Another crucial element is the programme's person-centred approach, which is essential for supporting development (Mount, 2000). Given the diverse, multicultural student cohort (approximately 60% non-UK) of this Northwest UK university, it was imperative that both staff and external coaches demonstrated an inclusive and respectful approach. The coaches involved in this project were experienced in balancing support and challenge, a process referred to as “nudging methods” by Muller and Greif (2022), tailoring their approach to optimize individual student development.

Pre-engagement briefings were conducted for coaches, students, and staff to outline the programme and garner broader support beyond the delivery team. Additionally, coaches attended a mandatory briefing day to clarify the goals and objectives, ensuring consistent delivery. During the briefing, various coaching styles, tools, frameworks, and standardization methods for both group and individual coaching sessions were discussed. The use of relevant metrics, such

as Likert scales, for evaluating student self-assessment and progress was also covered. A comprehensive handbook was developed for coaches, internal staff, and a corresponding student version to support consistent (metric) capture throughout the programme.

Data collection was carried out with the stakeholder groups identified in Table 2. Reflective essays were thematically analysed in accordance with the programme's learning framework, with themes mapped into nodes and assessed using Nvivo¹ 14. This analysis aimed to validate the reflective insights provided by students, indicating changes within specific areas of the learning framework. A coach focus group was conducted in person, enabling feedback to be captured and reviewed with the coaches for accuracy in transcription. Upon programme completion, semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed with twenty coaches. In addition, the programme supervisor documented anonymized notes to inform future programme planning by identifying emerging themes and challenges for consideration.

Programme Design and Outcomes

The pilot was initiated in response to the extension of the Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) metrics, which now measure outcomes up to 15 months post-graduation, an increase from the previous 6-month period. In response, a structured plan was developed to offer approximately 800 final-year students two one-on-one coaching sessions and two small-group sessions (1:4) with professionally contracted external coaches during the final two terms of their undergraduate studies. The insights gained from this initial phase led to adjustments in phase two, which improved both student engagement and their understanding of the coaching process. The programme

¹Software package for analysis of qualitative and mixed methods data.

specifically targeted business studies students, who exhibited lower post-graduation employment rates compared to their peers in other disciplines. Self-awareness was introduced as a foundational element of the coaching programme, aligning with its established relevance in coaching literature (Ellinger et al., 2011). As part of the process, students completed a series of self-assessments culminating in a personal SWOT analysis; ref. Figure 1.

This activity helped focus the coaching sessions and ensured a student-centred approach, as outlined in the programme stages in Figure 2.

Coaches participated in weekly supervision sessions, while students received regular reminders and updates through in-class “shout-outs” and their electronic learning portal. In response to requests from both students and coaches, a dedicated coaching space was established, emphasizing the importance of a suitable physical environment for effective coaching. Upon completion of the programme,

students compiled individual portfolios documenting their coaching journey and a 500-word reflection. The data gathered from over 800x500-word reflections revealed several key outcomes relating to student growth and development, highlighting the transformative impact of the coaching programme on the students’ personal and professional skills. Below the core themes are identified from the reflections, structured around individual, group, and organizational outcomes.

Individual Student Outcomes

The coaching programme played a pivotal role in enhancing self-awareness, confidence, and employability among students. Through structured self-assessments, coaching conversations, and peer feedback, students gained greater clarity about their strengths, skills, and career aspirations. Many discovered talents they had previously undervalued, such as multilingualism, leadership, and adaptability.



Figure 1. Analysis of Self-Assessments.



Figure 2. Programme Stages.

Confidence development was a key outcome, with students expressing greater self-assurance in articulating their strengths and making career-related decisions. One student reflected:

With this future knowledge, I have a much better perspective on myself and how to approach certain things ... I can now use my skills to guide me into the career I want.

Employability skills were strengthened through coaching, particularly in decision-making, career planning, and self-presentation. The programme helped students build resilience, refine their career goals, and apply learning to real-world job applications. Peer feedback sessions provided an added layer of validation, as one student noted:

I discovered that my peers see me as a helpful, happy individual ... this made me think about a career I hadn't considered before.

These findings highlight how coaching enhances student confidence in their career choices, strengthening their ability to manage their own development, and help build a clearer professional identity. Through coaching, students gained self-assurance in articulating their skills, improved decision-making, time management, and developing a stronger understanding of their career aspirations and professional strengths. As individuals develop these capabilities, they bring stronger interpersonal skills into their teams. This, in turn, fosters deeper collaboration, more effective communication, and a shared commitment to collective success. In this capacity, individual coaching acts as a foundation upon which group coaching builds.

Group Coaching Outcomes

Group coaching sessions (1:4 ratio) reinforced peer learning, emotional support, and collaborative career development. Students who participated in group coaching with existing peer networks demonstrated higher levels of engagement and openness, benefiting from established rapport and shared experiences.

A notable example involved a shy student who initially lacked confidence in discussing career prospects. A structured group exercise revealed that she was fluent in four languages; an ability she had previously dismissed as unimportant. Encouraged by her peers, she began to see this as an employability asset, leading to a visible transformation in confidence and self-efficacy. Similar exercises helped other students recognize their unique strengths, reinforcing the importance of peer validation in career development.

Students also valued group coaching as a space for exploring career possibilities through shared experiences. One student remarked:

Listening to my peers and openly discussing our future career paths helped me in a different way compared to the one-to-one meeting ... I now have more options in mind.

In addition, group coaching provided stress relief and emotional support. Sessions helped students manage uncertainty while improving time management and problem-solving skills. These findings align with Beattie et al. (2014), who emphasize that peer coaching acts as a "safety valve", reducing stress and encouraging reflective practice. As teams refine their collaboration and decision-making through coaching, these improvements extend beyond the group itself. Organizations benefit when high-functioning teams contribute to a culture of knowledge-sharing, innovation, and problem-solving. Organizational coaching amplifies these advantages by aligning leadership strategies with business-wide objectives, ensuring coaching becomes a strategic asset rather than an isolated intervention.

Organizational Outcomes & Insights

Beyond individual and group benefits, coaching informed organizational learning and policy development. Insights from the programme led to enhancements in the university's personal tutoring framework, which prioritizes three core support areas: namely Course Support (personalized coaching to improve academic performance), Community Building (strengthening peer networks for a supportive learning environment) and Career Development (structured coaching to improve employability outcomes). By combining individual coaching for personalized development with group coaching for peer-driven learning, the programme provided a comprehensive support system that strengthened the students' career readiness. In addition, its influence on institutional policy and student engagement strategies highlights the value of coaching in a higher education setting. The response supports coaching as enhancing team performance through the key benefits of improved communication and collaboration and that coaching is a critical component of student success with potential for widespread adoption in higher education.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Programme Development

It became evident that establishing interconnections among stakeholders, such as career services, counselling, and widening participation of staff was essential with all parties aligning to deliver the student-centred approach. A multi-stakeholder working group, led by the university's training academy, has begun developing a five-year plan aimed at enhancing the student journey from year one through to post-graduation, including the creation of a standardized policy for personal tutoring. This initiative seeks to unify tutoring

practices under a cohesive framework, ensuring greater coherence and consistency in the student experience, as demonstrated in the Future Success (Coaching) Programme.

Coaches vs. Personal Tutors

Coaches typically conduct an initial chemistry meeting (van Coller-Peter, S., & Manzini, L. 2020) with the coachee to establish rapport before beginning coaching. However, with over 800 students in the pilot, this was logistically challenging. In this case, the initial introduction to coaching focused on clarifying coaching expectations and fostering an open, co-created dialogue between the coach and the student. Personal tutors, on the other hand, were seen as a springboard for coaching, helping students reflect on transferable skills through self-assessment (e.g., SWOT analysis).

The variation in student engagement levels highlighted the need for flexible coaching methods. One group of students

was self-assured, actively seeking to improve their career prospects, while another group was uncertain and unsure of their participation in coaching. These students often faced barriers such as family culture and obligations, a lack of direction, and uncertainty about their degree. Coaches focused on building trust and helping these students recognize the next steps in career development, ensuring coaching was tailored to meet their diverse needs. As one coach explained:

From a personal effectiveness perspective, that early connection is needed to connect; to energize, motivate and inspire them to trust and work with me.

Coach Insights and Recommendations

The feedback from coaches led to the identification of an action plan designed to improve the coaching experience and outcomes for students. Table 3 below outlines the

Table 3. Coach Insights and Recommendations

Category	Action Plan	Purpose
Student Engagement and Success	Mandatory career hub engagement: Require students to engage with the career hub.	Enhance student utilization of career resources for job preparedness.
Coaching for assessment success: Offer targeted coaching sessions on assessment preparation.	Boost student performance in assessment contexts.	
Flexible and themed coaching sessions: Offer varied session sizes (1:1, 1:3, 1:4) both virtual and themed.	Cater to different student needs and preferences, enhancing engagement.	
Cultural Sensitivity and Ethics	Cultural awareness training: Train coaches on cultural sensitivity, language, and ethical guidelines.	Ensure inclusive and respectful coaching practices.
Code of conduct for coaches: Establish and review a code of conduct during induction and with regular refreshers.	Uphold ethical and professional standards within the coaching team.	
Coach Development and Support	Peer support and supervision: Hold regular peer-support and supervision sessions for coaches.	Provide a collaborative environment for professional development.
Skills matching: Conduct a skills audit to align coach strengths with specific student needs.	Increase coaching effectiveness through tailored student-coach pairing.	
Student Development and Reflection	Reflective journals: Implement post-session reflective journals, submitted via Moodle.	Encourage ongoing self-awareness and personal growth among students.
Soft skills and holistic development: Incorporate soft skills, personal growth, and well-being themes in coaching.	Prepare students for diverse career challenges, focusing on all-around development.	
Career readiness by year: Establish a year-by-year progression (Year 1: self-awareness, Year 2: reflection, Year 3: employment readiness with Personal Development Plan).	Support phased, comprehensive personal and career development aligned with academic progression.	
Programme Tools and Resources	Knowledge bank for coaches: Develop an online resource repository with scenarios, templates, and best practices.	Support coaches with accessible materials for effective coaching sessions.
Templates for career documents: Provide CV and self-assessment templates accessible to all students.	Standardize career preparation materials, helping students create essential documents efficiently.	
Employability assessment wheel: Introduce an assessment wheel for students to visualize their career readiness.	Aid students in tracking their career readiness progress and identify improvement areas.	
Showcase coaching impact: Use video testimonials and case studies to highlight coaching outcomes.	Engage current students and attract prospective participants by showcasing programme success.	
Optional intro module for year 1: Launch an introductory, optional coaching module for first-year students.	Build early awareness and foundation for coaching benefits among newcomers.	
Virtual coaching guidelines: Develop clear guidelines for virtual coaching tools, like Zoom.	Ensure smooth, consistent virtual coaching sessions with clear expectations.	

recommendations based on the insights provided, which have been implemented in the evolving programme.

Many of the challenges mentioned above were addressed, for example videos were created to help students understand what coaching is and why they should engage. Testimonial videos from phase one students endorsing the programme's value helped further participation. The coaching space was also improved with partitioned pods, and the programme is now embedded into all courses from year one, no longer just an "add-on". Staff training on strengths-based approaches has led to broader adoption, and consistent coaching practices are being cascaded through personal tutor templates and university-wide training.

The Importance of the Coaching Relationship

The effectiveness of any coaching intervention hinges on the quality of the relationship between the coach and coachee. As our findings demonstrate, a key challenge arises when coaching is externally initiated, such as when third parties, like universities assign coaches to students. The contractual agreement and mutual commitment between the coach and coachee are vital to ensuring successful outcomes. The introduction of coaching within the university context often leads to complex dynamics, where student participation may feel imposed. This underscores the importance of aligning coaching with existing student support frameworks to promote engagement and self-motivation, it needs to be embedded.

A significant opportunity exists in integrating coaching approaches with the existing student-tutor relationship. By positioning personal tutors as facilitators of coaching, this dynamic could alleviate the challenges often associated with third-party intervention. A similar model could be applied in higher education, where multiple stakeholders, including staff, career services, and academics, collaborate to deliver a holistic coaching experience.

Insights from Group Coaching Sessions

Group coaching sessions offer an opportunity to reflect on the impact of peer interactions in the coaching process. Our findings reveal that students benefit significantly from collaborative learning experiences. Peer feedback, in particular, plays a vital role in boosting self-assurance and widening career options. It is essential to view coaching as a collective, supportive process that includes the sharing of experiences and insights. Peer coaching sessions create an environment of mutual support, which is particularly beneficial for students navigating the uncertainties of career choices and employability.

As coaching becomes increasingly integrated into educational institutions, the perception of coaching as an exclusive or privileged service will shift. It should be positioned

as a resource accessible to all students, regardless of background or career stage. This inclusivity can be facilitated by fostering partnerships across departments and aligning coaching initiatives with university-wide career support and employability strategies. The cultural and linguistic diversity of students is another area that warrants further exploration, ensuring that coaching interventions are sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of students.

Implications for Human Resource Development (HRD)

The findings of this study have important implications for Human Resource Development (HRD) within higher education institutions. As Pandolfi (2020) suggests, coachee preparedness, motivation, readiness for change, and receptivity to feedback, are critical to the coaching process. Higher education institutions can play a key role in fostering this preparedness by embedding coaching into curricula and career development programmes.

A crucial element of HRD is promoting the notion that coaching is not solely remedial but a proactive developmental tool. This aligns with the growing emphasis on positive psychology and strengths-based approaches to coaching. In this regard, universities should consider offering staff development programmes that raise awareness about the potential benefits of coaching and how it can support students' personal career growth. Moreover, HRD can be instrumental in embedding coaching as part of an institution's strategy for diversity, inclusion, and equality helping create a more cohesive and supportive student journey.

The Role of Personal Tutors and Coaches in Higher Education

The distinction between coaches and personal tutors in the university context is another area that warrants discussion. While coaching is typically focused on individual goals and development, personal tutors have an established role in supporting students academically and socially. However, if personal tutors were to adopt a coaching approach, particularly with students who might be uncertain or disengaged, the integration of coaching into their practice could enhance the tutor-student relationship and provide students with more holistic support. This approach could address the diverse needs of students, particularly those who are unsure about their career direction or feel overwhelmed by their academic responsibilities. The flexibility of coaching, whether through one-on-one or group engagements can cater to the varied needs of students and foster a sense of ownership over their personal and professional growth. Furthermore, as our data suggest, a strong connection between students and their coaches can significantly impact a sense of trust, motivation,

and commitment to the coaching process, which students port with them to the benefit of future employers.

Future Success Programme: A Holistic Coaching Model

The Future Success Programme has been developed to provide a structured and scalable coaching model across various student cohorts, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and apprenticeship learners. Recognizing the diverse needs of each group, the programme is designed to enhance self-awareness, employability skills, and professional development while embedding coaching principles within the personal tutoring framework.

Figure 3 provides a high-level overview of the programme structure, detailing its integration across different academic levels and its alignment with institutional career support strategies. By adopting a student-centred approach, the programme ensures that coaching is not an isolated intervention but an embedded element of the university

experience, tailored to the developmental needs of each student group. The structure of the programme is underpinned by three key phases:

Undergraduate Coaching Pathway

Introducing self-awareness and strengths-based coaching from year 1, ensuring students develop confidence and career clarity early in their academic journey, supporting peer learning and group coaching, enabling students to gain insights from shared experiences and providing structured guidance on career exploration, networking, and professional identity formation, bridging the gap between academia and employability.

Postgraduate Coaching Pathway

Building upon the undergraduate experience, adapting coaching methodologies for students entering professional roles, research, or leadership pathways; offering one-to-one coaching, advanced career planning, and mentoring,

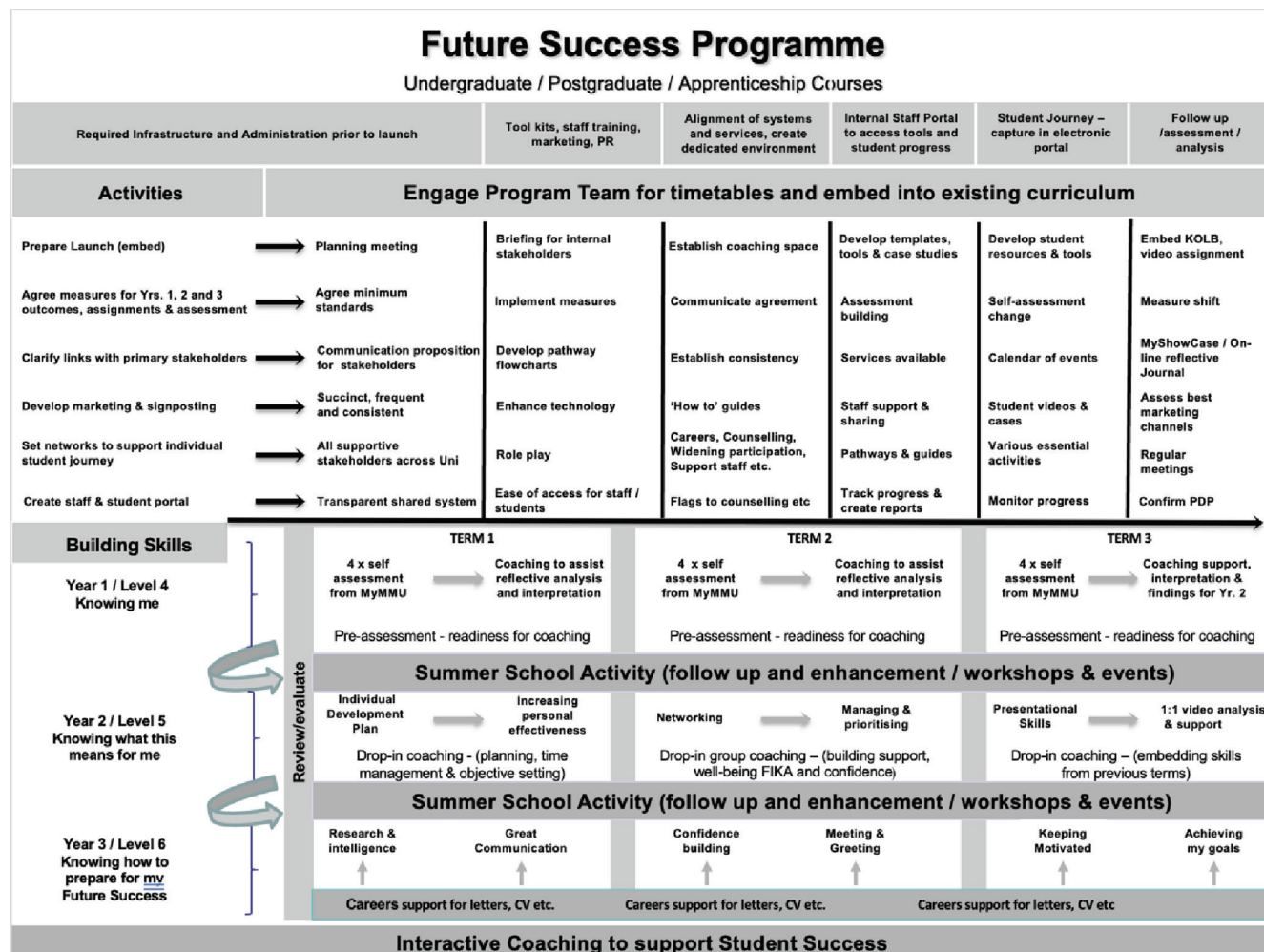


Figure 3. Overview of the Coaching Programme Structure.

equipping postgraduates with robust decision-making and self-management skills and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration, fostering a professional mindset and expanding career opportunities.

Apprenticeship Coaching Model

Focusing on work-based learning, reflective practice, and professional development, addressing the unique needs of students balancing academic study with workplace responsibilities; strengthening employer engagement by aligning coaching outcomes with industry expectations, ensuring apprentices develop practical skills that translate directly into their careers and embedding structured coaching interventions, allowing apprentices to navigate career transitions, workplace challenges, and leadership opportunities.

Coaching Outcomes & Limitations

The insights from the individual, group, and organizational outcomes of the coaching programme are summarized in Table 4 below. This table provides a comprehensive overview of the key benefits observed across these three perspectives, highlighting the programme's impact on career readiness, social and emotional intelligence, and organizational alignment with employability goals. The observations offer a clear foundation for understanding how coaching contributed to these outcomes across stakeholder groups.

For individual students, the outcomes highlight significant personal growth with an ability to identify their strengths, improve decision-making, time management skills, and enhance networking abilities; all of which contribute to better job attainment and career progression.

In the group coaching sessions, peer learning and mutual support were key factors that encouraged students to reflect collectively, boosting social and emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and teamwork. This group dynamic fostered an environment where students could share

feedback, collaborate, and hold each other accountable, leading to enhanced motivation and interpersonal skills.

At the organizational level, the coaching programme aligned with the university's career support initiatives, improving graduate employability metrics and fostering stronger collaborations between students, staff, and external coaches. The integration of a structured coaching framework contributed to the development of a sustainable model within university services, ultimately strengthening the university's reputation and supporting students' career readiness.

Clearly, while coaching enhances personal development, its impact extends beyond individuals. When applied at the team level, it fosters stronger collaboration, improved communication, and collective problem-solving. Further, as teams become more cohesive and aligned through coaching, the broader organization benefits from increased efficiency, innovation, and a stronger workplace culture.

In general, coaching at the organizational level has been shown to significantly boost employee engagement, reduce turnover, and enhance performance (Jones et al., 2016). It also helps identify and address issues early, preventing disengagement and turnover (Smither et al., 2005). Research from the International Coach Federation (ICF, 2014) demonstrates that organizations with strong coaching cultures experience higher employee retention and satisfaction. Implementing coaching programmes can lead to improvements in employee engagement and leadership effectiveness, and a significant reduction in turnover (Jones & Smith, 2022). A further notable example is Google's Project Oxygen which aimed to identify the key behaviours of effective managers within their company. The project analysed over 10,000 manager observations, including performance reviews, surveys, and nominations for top-manager awards. The findings led to the identification of ten key behaviours exhibited by high-performing managers, such as being a good coach, empowering the team, and expressing interest in team members' success and well-being (Snyder, 2021). By integrating coaching into its leadership

Table 4. Key Outcomes of the Coaching Programme

Perspective	Insights	Benefits
Individual (Students)	Increased self-awareness and confidence. Clarity in career goals and employability readiness. Strengths' identification and self-efficacy. Improved decision-making and time management skills. Enhanced networking and professional relationships.	Improved job attainment rates and career progression. Greater resilience and adaptability in the job market. Ability to apply learning to real-world career scenarios. Strengthened self-coaching and problem-solving abilities.
Group (Peer Learning & Coaching)	Strengthened peer networks and collaboration. Mutual support and shared learning experiences. Development of social and emotional intelligence. Encouragement through peer feedback and validation.	Creation of safe, supportive learning environments. Enhanced problem-solving through collective reflection. Increased motivation and accountability within teams. Improved communication and teamwork skills.
Organizational (University & Employers)	Alignment with career support initiatives and employability goals. Improved graduate employability metrics. Development of a structured coaching framework. Stronger collaboration between students, staff, and external coaches.	Sustainable coaching model integrated into university services. Enhanced employer engagement and recruitment success. Standardization of personal tutoring with coaching principles. Stronger institutional reputation for student support and career readiness.

framework, Google fostered a high-performing management culture, which enhanced innovation and employee satisfaction. Building upon the insights from existing research, our findings provide a fresh perspective on how coaching translates into measurable outcomes.

While this study provides valuable insights into the implementation and outcomes of coaching interventions within, HE, it is not without limitations. As the research was conducted within a single institution, it would be beneficial to replicate in other universities. The sample size of over 800 students does provide a solid foundation, but future research should focus on exploring the long-term impact of coaching on career success.

A further limitation arises from the assumption that personal tutors can effectively replicate the outcomes achieved by professional coaches. As highlighted in the literature, the role of personal tutors as coaches requires careful consideration, including the ethical implications of dual roles and the training required to deliver high-quality coaching interventions. There is a need for further research to explore the ethical and legal considerations of coaching within higher education and the potential risks of expecting tutors to take on this role in addition to all the other tasks they carry out.

Conclusion

The integration of coaching into HE presents a promising avenue for enhancing student development and employability outcomes. By aligning coaching with existing student services and adopting a more flexible, inclusive approach, universities can provide students with the tools and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of their personal and professional lives. As demonstrated in this study, the collaborative nature of group coaching, the strength of the student-coach relationship, and the alignment of coaching with institutional goals all contribute to the success of coaching interventions. Moving forward, it is crucial for universities and HR departments to continue investing in coaching as a key component of student success and career readiness.

In relation to the three key questions guiding this study,

1. How does coaching impact students learning outcomes and employability?
2. How can group coaching positively impact group learning?
3. How does coaching, either individual or group have sustainable impact?

Our findings indicate that coaching enhances motivation by fostering greater self-awareness and goal clarity. The students who participated in this study reported improved confidence, resilience, and communication skills, which

directly translate to better performance in their work environment.

Secondly, coaching significantly enhances communication and collaboration, particularly in high-pressure environments. By fostering trust and psychological safety, team coaching enables members to voice concerns, align on shared goals, and develop more effective problem-solving strategies. These factors lead to stronger team cohesion and more resilient decision-making.

In answering the third research question, the findings suggest that organizations implementing structured coaching programmes report higher employee retention rates, stronger leadership pipelines, and improved workplace culture. This aligns with industry studies indicating that organizations with formal coaching initiatives experience up to a 20% increase in employee engagement, 15% improvement in leadership effectiveness and a 25% reduction in staff turnover (Jones & Smith, 2022).

The recommendations for future programmes will promote expansion of coaching accessibility to ensure all students benefit from structured interventions and refinement of group coaching methods to enhance peer learning dynamics. Embedding coaching into career and academic support frameworks will likely lead to a sustainable long-term future. Future research should explore the long-term impact of coaching on career success and the ethical considerations of integrating coaching into personal tutoring roles.

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