

University of Surrey

Established in 1894, the University of Surrey aims to give its students a competitive edge through the power of education and innovation. By always moving with the times, the institution equips students not just with academic excellence, but with the skills that enable them to excel in the modern workplace. Its success has been reflected in fantastic leaps up the university league tables.



Project background

A good university education can result in a well honed intellect and a creative mind, but all too often little thought is given to developing the various non-academic skills essential for workplace success.

The University of Surrey's Industrial Doctorate Centre (IDC) annually recruits the most promising students as research engineers to enter its prestigious EngD programme. Backed by industry leaders, this programme offers an opportunity to combine cutting-edge research with business application in a sponsor company.

However, if the research engineers are to reach their full potential in the business world, they need additional guidance. Empowered by

a broader set of people skills that complement their technical expertise, they will be better equipped for life after academia.

The university approached OPP to initiate training that would address students' leadership and interpersonal skills. Even the most gifted academics need to marry these attributes to their existing achievements if they are to function as tomorrow's business leaders.

Raising awareness, breaking down barriers and adding to the skill-set were key concerns in a project that sought to heighten the student experience for the benefit of everyone concerned – student, business and university.

EDUCATION SECTOR

Business needs

- Developing students' leadership skills
- Assisting research engineers in their transition to the workplace
- Enhancing interpersonal skills
- Fuelling the ongoing success of the University by improving the student experience

Psychometric tools used

- MBTI Step I

Benefits

- Enhanced understanding of needs and challenges in the workplace
- Greater insight into behavioural drivers in self and others
- Action-planning skills
- A practical and inclusive vocabulary of personality based on type

The workshop brought a lot out of me. It can help to get the best out of others.

It helped me to see what the blind side of my personality may be, and to do something about it!

I now understand that other people can think completely differently to me... and why.

*Research engineers
EngD programme*

The solution

The university asked OPP to create a series of developmental activities to assist research engineers in their transition to the workplace.

OPP worked in close partnership with the IDC to address all aspects of this personal development. The resulting programme, based on the MBTI® instrument, aimed to:

- Explore the impact of interpersonal style on professional development
- Recognise the importance of managing professional relationships
- Learn how to adapt approaches to a situation based on its context
- Enhance individuals' relationships with colleagues
- Appreciate and take full advantage of the diversity within work and study groups
- Give students an early opportunity for networking.

Using the MBTI tool to increase self-awareness, the workshops were designed to help students build a greater understanding of their own behavioural drivers, interpersonal style and likely managerial approach, as well as an appreciation of why others may prefer to work in different ways. Each workshop was built around a series of experiential activities, offering a fun but challenging and thought-provoking learning environment.

Action planning played a key part in each event, with participants exploring the practical actions they wanted to take in order to shape their career paths and achieve their full potential.

Results

The sessions were a resounding success. 93% of participants judged that the workshops would have a positive impact on their future performance. This level of satisfaction is reflected in the university's eagerness to continue running the training sessions as part of the students' induction week each year.

The concept of MBTI type has created a new buzz within the EngD programme, becoming part of the researchers' vocabulary and working process. Thinking in terms of type has broken down some barriers too, such as addressing stereotypes around what are 'female traits' and 'male traits'. These are, instead, being considered as type traits, not based on gender, age, etc.

Students are able to use the acquired knowledge to interact and empathise with people at all levels in an organisation, using enhanced interpersonal and leadership skills. These are areas that, traditionally, have not been addressed by people for whom academic training has been the sole objective. It therefore presents a new challenge, and a new skill – even for the most academically gifted students.

The sessions have become part of a very positive student experience – something central to the aims of a university enjoying great success in a competitive world of fees and league tables.

OPP is also running follow-up sessions that address key areas such as stakeholder management.

Noelle Hartley, Manager of the IDC, commented: "Having experienced it myself, I came back to the MBTI tool with enthusiasm and commitment, but I was concerned about the appetite that my community might have for it, as the academic culture and tone is so very different. My reservations were unfounded, and feedback confirms that our students consider type fascinating – and, best of all, useful in their time at the university and their sponsor company."

Established in 1989, OPP is one of Europe's largest providers of business psychology solutions. Its market-leading personality assessments include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®), FIRO®, TKI™, EJI™ and Strong™ instruments.

This portfolio supports high-impact results for unlocking business potential and personal development, including team and leadership development, improving communication, building resilience and conflict resolution.

To find out how OPP can help your organisation, call +44 (0) 1865 404 500 or visit www.opp.com.