

Sprint for success

The Sprint programme is helping the UK's female students, their prospective employers and the economy, says **Bob Little**

Writing, last September, in the *New Statesman*, Mark Boleat, policy chairman at the City of London Corporation said, "Hot on the heels of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission study which concluded that the UK is 'deeply elitist', the TUC's Frances O'Grady has added that we are becoming a 'Downton Abbey-style society'. These headline-grabbing comments make for depressing reading, but only tell part of the story. I firmly believe that momentum for social mobility is gathering pace in places people would least suspect.

"Within the Square Mile, we are surrounded by London boroughs like Tower Hamlets where almost half the young people live below the poverty line. There is not only a social inclusion argument to be made, but our long-term economic sustainability is left vulnerable unless we improve diversity and cast the net wider in the search for talent.

"More businesses need to work with schools to improve dramatically the life chances of young

people. Social mobility starts with young people actually envisaging themselves in top careers and having their expectations raised by teachers and business leaders."

Mark's views on the need for employers to cast their net wider in the search for talented workers includes encouraging diversity. One aspect of this is developing young women to take up senior leadership positions in the City.

Kate Llewellyn-Cripps, Head of Marketing and Attraction for Early Career at the high street bank, RBS, has revealed that RBS had noticed a lack of women applying for jobs at all levels in the bank. She added: "From a diversity and inclusion point of view, we wondered how to address this, and then Oxford University drew our attention to the Sprint training programme from the Springboard Consultancy (SBC). Among other things, this programme fits our wider agenda of opening the gates of the City to women in occupations that are, traditionally, male dominated."

Consequently, RBS has become one of the Sprint programme's sponsors, with Kate becoming RBS's Sprint project leader as well as a trainer, licensed to deliver the programme. She explained: "For one thing, sponsoring Sprint allows us to have more meaningful conversations with students than just giving them literature at careers fairs."

The Sprint training programme is the brainchild of the Springboard Consultancy (SBC), an international training company with a track record in work and personal development training. Specifically designed for undergraduate women, the programme is built on work carried out by the University of Cambridge and further developed in collaboration with the University of Oxford.

SBC's training programmes address women's development issues, especially via its award-



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winning Springboard Women's Development Programme. SBC's core business is training and licensing trainers to deliver award-winning development courses in locations around the world. In this way, more than 240,000 people have used its programmes and more than 1,300 trainers have been trained in 43 countries.

While Sprint is intended for those from all backgrounds, ages and stages in their lives and study, this is more complex than it might seem. Although most women undergraduates in the UK's universities are from the UK, there are also students from overseas. In addition, there are mature students, in addition to those who have come to university straight from school or a gap year. Then again, there are differences between the needs and perspectives of, say, first and fourth year students.

"We believe that everyone is 'born to shine' but that life circumstances, including a lack of skills and opportunities often prevent that happening, to everyone's detriment," said Jenny Daisley OBE, SBC's joint-CEO. "SBC uses training to enable everyone, especially women, to develop themselves further, benefiting the person, their employer, family and community."

"Raising women undergraduates' aspirations and developing their skills, confidence and focus develops their leadership skills and increases the likelihood of them going into leadership roles after university," commented Jenny's colleague and fellow joint-CEO, Liz Willis OBE.

When she was a fourth year undergraduate student at the University of Oxford, Camilla Pearce-Trapp joined a Sprint cohort. She commented, "I was looking for a career but didn't know where to look or what to do. Sprint helped me address my values, motivation and so on in a more relaxed environment."

Her undergraduate colleague at Oxford, Rachel Fowden-Hulme, said, "The Sprint programme provided me with a mentor [from another Sprint programme sponsor, the global management consulting firm, Oliver Wyman]. When I was going to be interviewed for an internship with another internationally known consulting firm,

my mentor spent an hour and a half giving me a mock interview, along with tips on how to prepare for the interview. Not only have I received good ongoing advice from my mentor, I feel that the whole Sprint experience helps you make the most of the university experience in general."

The Sprint programme came about because, having carried out its regular analysis of the university's recent graduates, the Oxford University Careers Service realised that:

- Some 50 per cent of Social Science male graduate leavers earned £27,000 or more, while 70 per cent of similar female graduates earned this amount or less.
- Five years after graduation, 73 per cent of women are likely to be in full time work — compared with 85 per cent of the men.
- Five years after graduation, women graduates are earning £2,000 a year less than their male counterparts and, for women who studied part-time for a degree, the differential is £3,000 a year.
- While 34 per cent of men sign up for research degrees after their first degree, only 24 per cent of women go on to study for higher degrees.
- Annual earnings for women appear to level off earlier than for men. This happens at around 32 years of age for women and at around 40 years of age for men. So women have eight fewer years to become established in their careers, at exactly the same time as they are likely to be having children.
- Over the last ten years, male graduates could expect to earn 20.4 per cent more than female graduates.

In addition, while they are undergraduates, more women than men report:

- A lack of confidence.
- Lack of assertiveness, especially feeling insecure at interview.
- An inability to speak up (for example, at tutorials).
- A fear of networking and building contacts.
- Seeking in a career: security, work/life balance and working for a 'worthwhile cause' (for example, women taking science subjects are more likely to choose medicine as a career than their male equivalents).

Moreover, evidence also emerged that, in comparison with male undergraduates, female undergraduates:

- Are poor at searching for jobs.
- Study too hard, resulting in a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, suffering more

stress and becoming less 'well-rounded' than the male undergraduates.

- Leave it later than the men to form career plans because they're concentrating on studying, so they graduate at a disadvantage, despite having at least as good a class of degree in the same subject.

RBS's Kate Llewellyn-Cripps explained, "When Oxford University told us about their research — and the consequent need for a programme such as Sprint for the undergraduates — RBS not only helped to fund the development of Sprint but also found other sponsors.

"Then, having helped to get the Sprint programme off the ground at Oxford, we approached other universities with the concept," she added. "A common response was that the university liked the idea of the programme but had no budget to run it. So I and a colleague, Emily Bryant, underwent training to become Sprint trainers and we started delivering Sprint in other universities."

RBS now has a team of five trainers who currently deliver Sprint to 12 universities in the UK. Kate commented, "The universities that offer Sprint now see its benefit and are beginning to get their own trainers qualified to run the programme."

The first universities outside Oxford to offer Sprint to their undergraduates were City University and UCL, but the University of Warwick wasn't far behind. According to Anne Wilson, the Head of Careers at the University of Warwick, the university began offering the Sprint programme, from the Springboard Consultancy (SBC), in the summer of 2014.

"It's a great programme," said Anne, "so it was fairly easy to find companies to sponsor the programme here."

These sponsors include EY (Ernst & Young), AXA, Microsoft, Barclays and RBS but other organisations including major financial institutions, a technology giant and a global leader in the habitat and construction market, are investigating becoming Sprint sponsors too.

"From the point of view of helping graduates find the right jobs — and careers — sponsoring Sprint is the right thing for organisations to do and, for the undergraduates on the programme, an appropriate time to do it," said Anne, whose university runs Sprint programmes in the autumn and early in the Christmas holidays. She added, "We've tried running a Sprint programme in the summer term, but the added pressures of the exams has made us think twice about that."

Agreeing that the timing of Sprint is the most challenging aspect of the programme, Kate Llewellyn-Cripps said, "It can be difficult,

given the length of the programme, to make it fit in with a university's timetable. So we tend to run the programmes during 'reading weeks' in November and December, and continue in January before the term begins. We can also make use of time at the end of the summer term when students are off timetable.

"RBS is involved with Sprint for two main reasons," said Kate. "First of all, it's the right thing to do. It helps these women develop and, as a country as well as a bank, we need a more diverse workforce. Second, it helps us with our resourcing and careers pipeline, and it's more helpful to everyone than attending a traditional 'careers fair'.

"However, we're most careful that Sprint is not a recruitment event," Kate stressed. "We're Sprint trainers, not RBS recruiters but one of the key messages of the programme is that you need to build, and then use, your support network. It's in that context that any recruitment might happen, and it happens as a by-product of the programme."

According to Kate, although the Sprint programme is spreading throughout the UK's universities, there is still some resistance because universities tend to assume that Sprint is 'just another event on campus'. Kate continued, "However, once they see what Sprint does for those who are on the programme, and the strides that these undergraduates make, as people as well as students, they soon decide to support it. For a number of reasons, Sprint is an excellent programme. We're certainly very pleased to be supporting it."

"There's no doubt that raising women undergraduates' aspirations and developing their skills, confidence and focus develops their leadership skills and increases the likelihood of them going into leadership roles after leaving university," observed Liz Willis.

Sarah Frame, the Director of Green Onyx Consultancy and a freelance Sprint programme trainer, said: "Delivering Sprint is a highly fulfilling and rewarding experience. Today's undergraduates are under great pressure to get internships, let alone actual jobs. The competition for jobs is intense. Even those who might be considered 'top undergraduates' — from the UK's top universities — feel this pressure. Indeed, they might feel this pressure more intensely because, until now at least, they've always experienced success in their chosen path in life.

"So they need to learn how to present themselves with confidence and to develop the resilience to cope with rejection. Among a number of other things, the Sprint programme helps them do this," said Sarah. **TJ**

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