



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Community Links – placement opportunities for students on Sociology-based programmes

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transition into the workplace

Abstract: This Honours level module offers Sociology, Criminological Studies, Social Science and Media Culture and Society students the opportunity to undertake placement as a part-time volunteer in a voluntary, public or criminal justice sector organisation throughout their 4th year. The aim of this work placement is to facilitate the exploration of the practical applicability of sociological theoretical frameworks and empirical research data to ‘real world’ policy issues and social problems. Work placements can enhance student employability through the acquisition of new skills and competencies thereby enabling an improved engagement with the graduate labour market on leaving university. Students are required to bring commitment, flexibility, enthusiasm and a willingness to learn to the organisations for whom they are working.

Description: This module has been within the Sociology portfolio since 2007 – however, it is now offered to a broader range of programmes and since its inception there have been increased enrolments, aligned with increased number of organisations offering placement opportunities. Module credit and assessments have also evolved as a consequence of evaluation comments from all stakeholders.

By the end of the Community Links module the student should be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to define the learning objectives associated with their placement (in collaboration with the module tutor), and the ability to work independently.
- Demonstrate knowledge of key sociological, political and social policy issues related to their placement in a voluntary, public or criminal justice sector organisation.
- Demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate the relevance of theoretical ideas and empirical research data that they have encountered through their degree programme to the practical issues and social problems they have encountered through their placement.
- Demonstrate the ability to work successfully with an external voluntary, public or criminal justice sector agency.

There are no formal lectures or tutorials for the Community Links module. The Module



enhancement
themes

Tutor and Career team have group meetings with students engaged in placements on four occasions in order to offer advice and guidance. The Module Tutor also meets individually with each student to agree the objectives of the module which are in part dependent upon the type of placement that the student is engaged in. Students are expected to operate autonomously with regard to finding and accessing appropriate reading to support the assessment aspects of this module. Students are expected to negotiate independently with placement organisations (but with tutor support) hours or work and duties undertaken.

There are three inter-related forms of assessment that each student is required to complete:

Coursework 1: Learning Objectives.
Weighting: 25%.

Coursework 2: CV
Weighting: 25%

Coursework 3: Report.
Length: 3000 words.
Weighting: 50%

Relatively small numbers initially enrolled on the module, but those who did normally attained very good grades. B being the modal grade. In 2011/12 a new recruitment drive was initiated with an information meeting held for all potential applicants at the end of the second semester of the third stage of study – the result of this was a surge in numbers in 2012/13 with twenty students taking the module. This model of recruitment has been replicated in subsequent sessions.

Placement Provider Evaluations

'Julie was a terrific, enthusiastic, intelligent and creative temporary member of the team who worked well with colleagues. She went way beyond the initial brief to undertake a scoping study and contact external agencies to access their expertise, and also to provide a framework for us to use to perform our own in-house SROI study.'

'Jane was tremendously helpful to us and carried out the research in a considerate and sensitive manner with the families involved. We have invited her to apply for a full time position which will be advertised in the summer. Many thanks for a very successful placement.'

'Ian was an integral part of the Anti-Poverty Forum's research team that was investigating modern social evils. A courteous and likeable young man, he quickly understood and appreciated the role of the forum in the context of anti-poverty activity both locally and in the broader sense.'

This successful module provides students with the invaluable opportunity to gain employability skills through hand-on experience of part-time internships with local voluntary, public and criminal justice sector organisations. The module enables students to make links between their academic work and real world experiences of workplaces in the sectors where they are likely to be employed in the future. Indeed, several students have been offered employment with the organisations on the basis of their experience. The teaching, learning and assessment strategy embodies the wider university's active enquiry pedagogy, and is clearly oriented towards developing attributes such as independent learning, critical thinking, and collaboration and creative problem-solving.

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