Employability

Enhancing student employability:
innovative projects from across the curriculum
Debra Macfarlane-Dick and Dr Archie Roy,
University of Glasgow

Preface

The approach to quality and standards in Scotland is enhancement-led and learner-centred. It has been developed through a partnership of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland (NUS Scotland) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland. The Enhancement Themes are a key element of a five-part framework which has been designed to provide an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement, supporting learners and staff at all levels in enhancing higher education in Scotland drawing on developing, innovative practice within the UK and internationally.

The five elements of the framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of subject-level reviews undertaken by the higher education institutions themselves; guidance on internal reviews is published by SFC (www.sfc.ac.uk)

- enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) run by QAA Scotland (www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR)

- improved forms of public information about quality; guidance on the information to be published by higher education institutions is provided by SFC (www.sfc.ac.uk)

- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service - student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) (www.sparqs.org.uk)

- a national programme of Enhancement Themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice to enhance the student learning experience, which are facilitated by QAA Scotland (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

The topics for the Themes are identified through consultation with the sector and implemented by steering committees whose members are drawn from the sector and the student body. The steering committees have the task of developing a programme of development activities, which draw upon national and international good practice. Publications emerging from each Theme are intended to provide important reference points for higher education institutions in the ongoing strategic enhancement of their teaching and learning provision. Full details of each Theme, its steering committee, the range of research and development activities, and the outcomes are published on the Enhancement Themes website (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

To further support the implementation and embedding of a quality enhancement culture within the sector, including taking forward the outcomes of the various Enhancement Themes, a new overarching committee has been established, chaired by Professor Kenneth Miller (Vice-Principal, University of Strathclyde). It has the important dual role of keeping the five-year rolling plan of Enhancement Themes under review and ensuring that the Themes are taken forward in ways that can best support institutional enhancement strategies. We very much hope that the new committee, working with the individual topic-based Themes' steering committees, will provide a powerful vehicle for the progression of the enhancement-led approach to quality and standards in Scottish higher education.

Norman Sharp
Director, QAA Scotland

Editor biographies

Debra Macfarlane-Dick

Debra Macfarlane-Dick is the Employability Development Adviser for the University of Glasgow. She joined the University's Teaching and Learning Service as a university teacher in 2002, working with new lecturers and graduate teaching assistants and on educational development projects, before taking up her current role in 2004. She has responsibility for supporting implementation of the University's employability strategy. This entails working collaboratively with staff, students, employers, professional bodies and agencies to encourage and develop initiatives and learning materials to enhance student employability. She has a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice from the University of Glasgow.

Before joining the team at Glasgow, Debra worked in a number of graduate positions in industry, including time spent in graduate recruitment, leadership development and generalist personnel. During this time, she worked to become a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), specialising in training and development. She gained an MA (Hons) degree in Scottish Studies from the University of St Andrews in 1996. This was followed by a year studying liberal arts, including journalism, creative writing and American literature, at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, courtesy of the University of St Andrews/Emory University Robert T Jones Memorial Scholarship. During this year, she also undertook an internship as a production assistant with the documentary department at Turner Time Warner television and travelled widely within the United States. In 1999, she gained a research MPhil in Art History at St Andrews University.

Debra recently co-authored a paper on *Enhancing practice - Reflections on Assessment: Volume II* published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2005) and is co-author of *Enhancing Student Learning through Effective Formative Feedback*, published by the Higher Education Academy (2004). She also has a paper forthcoming on formative assessment and self-regulated learning, co-written with Dr David Nicol at the University of Strathclyde, in *Studies in Higher Education* (2006).

Her current interests include developing opportunities for work-related learning in non-vocational courses, and working on materials to make embedding employability in the curriculum easier for academic staff.

Dr Archie Roy

Dr Archie Roy gained a BA (Hons) degree in psychology from the University of Strathclyde in 1982. His research on the effects of conflict on children's social perceptions then gained him his PhD in social-developmental psychology from the University of Strathclyde in 1987. From 1989 to 2003 he worked throughout Scotland and the UK for the Royal National Institute for the Blind as a Student Adviser and Post-16 Education Officer. Throughout that time, he also worked extensively on European disability projects to raise awareness and develop provision.

Archie has published four books and about 30 journal articles and book chapters. He is also a qualified guidance practitioner and, since 2003, has worked as a careers adviser first at the University of Strathclyde and currently at the University of Glasgow, where he has a departmental caseload in mathematics, statistics, psychology and computing science. He has also recently acted as consultant to a number of organisations such as the Real Choices Social Inclusion Partnership based in Nottingham and the Albinism Fellowship based in Burnley. His main area of consultancy has been in project evaluation.

Archie's latest book, co-written with Robin Spinks, is entitled *Real Lives: Personal and Photographic Perspectives on Albinism*. It is available from www.albinism.org.uk

Contents

Introduction

Enhancing student employability: innovative projects from across the curriculum includes 12 case studies selected from 36 generously contributed from a range of subject areas and institutions across the Scottish education sector. Those we were unable to include here are available via the Enhancement Themes website at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/ and are referred to within this publication.

The steps taken by each project contributor to enhance their students' employability are notably distinctive. The case studies included here illustrate that there are many possible approaches, which succeed not because they follow any one particular 'solution' to embedding employability, but because they approach the subject in a way that suits the particular environment and context. This ensures that students and academic colleagues alike see employability as a valuable, integral part of the student experience.

In fact, a key message of the collected case studies is that no common approach is evident, rather a shared mentality that employability is - and should be - a key focus and concern for students and universities. In addition, the approach taken to it should be serious, considered, robust and academically sound. The case studies also suggest that a prescriptive approach to employability enhancement may turn off students and staff in equal measure. And what might work for one subject, staff member, student cohort or institution might not necessarily be right for another.

However, what the case studies presented here do have in common is that they demonstrate innovative practice that works and can be adapted for use outside of the particular subject discipline concerned. This publication is intended to share best practice across the sector and to give the reader ideas that can be adapted for their own practice and context. With this aim in mind, each case study includes suggestions for introducing and adapting the practice described, along with links and further information where appropriate.

In addition, each case study includes the provider's contact details, for those readers who wish to explore cases in more detail and discuss the experiences providers have had in embedding employability within their institutions. We hope this publication will engender ideas and collaborations across the sector to improve our collective approach to enhancing employability, and provide a supportive network for staff hoping to embark on new ways of working.

The case studies are categorised into three sections according to their primary focus within one of three areas:

- curriculum design
- working in partnership
- work-related learning.

However, the reader may notice that there is some overlap between these categories, as illustrated in the diagram below. Some of the most innovative examples of employability practice contained within this publication operate within all three areas to enhance employability.

To help students to make sense of their experiences in these areas and how they might mesh together, personal development planning (PDP) can be seen as a key tool. This publication does not address PDP, but not because we see employability and PDP as being separate processes - indeed we consider the two to be inextricably linked. Work specifically aimed at exploring the links between PDP and employability is in progress and will be reported on in the future.
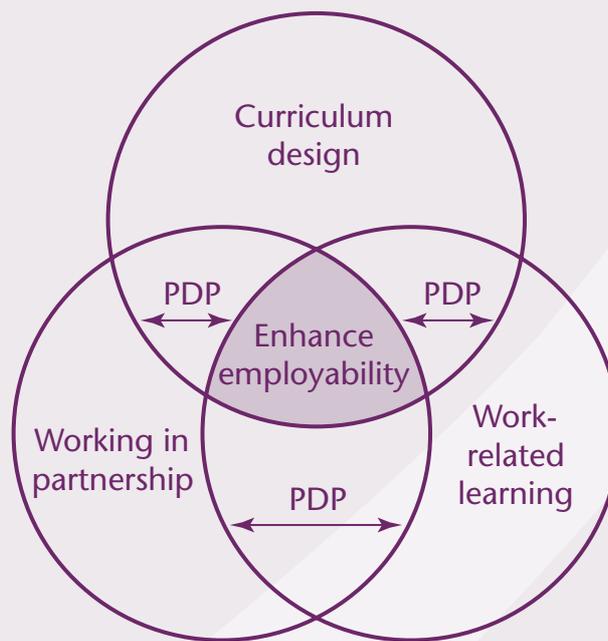
When employability is considered as an element of curriculum design consistent with good teaching practice, all students benefit. Staff comments included in the case studies highlight the benefits they have seen for students. However, if employability is not embedded in the curriculum to expose students to a wider range of skills (through a variety of teaching methods, learning experiences and assessment techniques), many students - sometimes those most in need of help - can miss out. Ensuring that employability is addressed within the curriculum can be achieved in ways wholly compatible with subject disciplines, as the case studies presented here illustrate.

Working in partnership on employability enhancement, both within institutions and collaboratively with other universities, professional bodies and agencies, is also a key element in successful developments. Staff working together cross-functionally often achieve better results than those undertaking projects in isolation. More diverse groups of colleagues are able to capitalise on the wider breadth of skills, resources and experiences available within the group. They can also lend added credibility to developments and spread the workload, benefiting all involved. In addition, projects that include students in their development, implementation and evaluation ensure that the student voice is given its rightful place at the heart of enhancement.

Providing students with opportunities to undertake work-related learning is the third key component in enhancing employability. Developing strategic relationships with employers and professional bodies creates opportunities for students to undertake work placements, become involved in mentoring relationships, and participate in fieldwork and campus-based work-related learning. The case studies presented here explore how this can be achieved both within the curriculum and in addition to it, through a network of employer partners.

We suggest that these three elements are key to developing employability strategies within course programmes and institutions, and that by considering them together employability can be embedded more fully into the student experience. The reader may find it helpful to reflect on this idea while reading the case studies contained in this publication. We hope that the reader's own work on employability can be enhanced by reviewing their own and their institution's activities within the contexts of curriculum design, working in partnership and work-related learning.

Debra Macfarlane-Dick and Archie Roy

Curriculum design

The following three case studies describe ways of developing an approach to enhancing employability within specific courses and discipline areas.

Burt and Mason's case study, though categorised here under curriculum design, also has key elements of working in partnership and work-related learning. The case study illustrates partnership working between the Educational Development Unit and the School of Management at the University of St Andrews, and also partnership with voluntary organisations; the aim is to build discipline-specific work-related learning into the curriculum. The course described is in its pilot stages, but it demonstrates that when employability is built into a developing curriculum, trial and error and the project team's commitment can be important elements in constructing academically robust initiatives. The team at the University of St Andrews expects to build further relationships with voluntary organisations, and to evaluate and develop the course with feedback from students and employers.

Also at the University of St Andrews, Lodge's module on Speeches and Speechwriting: History, Theory and Practice (in the School of English) blends traditional subject matter with an innovative approach, based on the lecturer's experience of working as a speechwriter. By blending the teaching of subject matter, history and theory with the practical application of skills, students are able to better understand the ways in which speechwriting has developed, while at the same time gaining invaluable transferable skills for themselves. A further point of interest in this case study is that the initial focus of this non-vocational module was not employability. Employability has become a key academic component of the course and is actively developed as part of good teaching practice and module design.

The final case study in this category, from Lunt and McNulty in the School of Communication Arts at Napier University, is particularly notable for an approach that considers the progression of skills as a programme rather than a module concern. The programme builds students' skills in communication year on year by having different year groups and stages working together at different managerial levels in a mock communications agency, reflecting the different stages of personal development that would be found in an actual workplace. Lunt and McNulty also work in partnership with employers to provide work-related learning that is of so much value that employers - some of whom are course alumni - actively seek graduates from the degree programme.

Each of these three case studies, although developed in specific disciplines, highlights the benefits of ensuring that employability is seen as a curriculum design issue. By approaching employability in this way, students benefit as they see the relevance of the skills being developed. In addition, the integration of skills means that they are taught to, assessed and experienced by all students.

We can learn from these case studies by:

- introducing a variety of teaching methods, learning experiences and assessment tasks into programmes to give students a wide-ranging learning experience and exposure to skills as a basic building block in the curriculum

- creating links between subject disciplines and the workplace, employers and professional bodies
- ensuring that we can map the progression of students' skills across our programmes, and that students have the opportunity to recognise and reflect on this progression.

List of other curriculum design projects available on the Enhancement Themes website at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/

- Anne Gifford and Jane Robertson, *Integrating employability, PDP and work-based learning within the curriculum*, School of Media, Language and Music, University of Paisley
- David Henderson and Libby Curtis, *Professional foundations in design and craft practice*, Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University
- Phyllis Laybourn, *Using poster assessment to facilitate learning and skill development*, Department of Psychology, Napier University
- Leighton MacDonald, *Integrating project work*, School of the Built Environment, Napier University
- Jack Simpson and Claire Chalmers, *The use of nationally endorsed training programmes in undergraduate nurse education*, Department of Nursing, Bell College

Managing voluntary organisations: integrating theory and practice through the Learning Journey

Institution
University of St Andrews

Discipline (if applicable)
Management

Contact details
Eleanor Burt, Lecturer in Management, School of Management

Colin Mason, Director of Learning and Teaching Development, St Andrews Learning and Teaching: Innovation, Review and Enhancement (SALTIRE)

University of St Andrews
St Andrews
KY16 9SS

Tel: (01334) 462804 (E Burt)
Email: eb19@st-andrews.ac.uk

Tel: (01334) 462588 (C Mason)
Email: cm11@st.andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

The Learning Journey is a reflective placement which gives students work experience in voluntary organisations. It is being piloted in 2005-06 and will enable students to gain actual experience of dealing with management problems within the distinctive voluntary sector as they work alongside managers. Students undertake a strategic analysis of a voluntary organisation. Their work culminates with an oral presentation to representatives of the participating voluntary organisation. The Learning Journey enhances students' employability by providing them with specialist understanding of the voluntary sector, thus positioning them for employment within the sector both in the UK and internationally, and by developing their intellectual capabilities, personal profiles and practical skills. These are all relevant and desirable in applied management, irrespective of sector. The Learning Journey is a compulsory component of a new module on managing voluntary organisations.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The voluntary sector is expanding within the UK and internationally. It is also becoming increasingly professionalised, with management and business skills in high demand. However, simply 'parachuting in' management and business practices that were originally designed for the commercial and public sectors is inappropriate and potentially damaging for the voluntary sector. It is therefore important that students seeking employment within the voluntary sector understand its distinctive characteristics and roles, the particular challenges faced by voluntary organisations, and the need to adapt commercial and public-sector management and business practice to the contours of the voluntary sector.

The students taking part are in senior honours, and the module - Managing Voluntary Organisations: Perspectives, Policy and Practice - is a new option within the portfolio of the School of Management. Taking the module is optional, but the Learning Journey is a compulsory component of it. We ran the module for the first time in 2004-05 with 46 students. The Learning Journey is being piloted in 2005-06 and numbers have been capped at 20 for the pilot year only.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The new module, Managing Voluntary Organisations: Perspectives, Policy and Practice, seeks to enhance graduate employability in three main ways. First, it builds on the intellectual and practical skills developed within the School of management and the University of St Andrews more widely. Second, and importantly, it develops sector specialists who are aware that the UK and international voluntary sectors are different from the commercial and public sectors in important respects. Third, and also of high importance, the module enables students to see the sector through the eyes of practising managers. This third element is the specific focus of the Learning Journey, which is being piloted in 2005-06. The Learning Journey will generate opportunities for students to gain actual experience of dealing with management problems as seen through the eyes of managers.

Initially, the driver for this initiative was the lecturer's desire to provide students with an opportunity to get close to the voluntary sector and to see for themselves the particular challenges of managing these organisations. Employability is a high-profile theme within the University and SALTIRE (the University's central support unit for learning and teaching), and they were very keen to support the initiative when it came before the grant-awarding panel.

How does it work in practice?

Learning from practising managers

Students taking the module are encouraged to read articles by practising managers published in leading voluntary-sector management magazines. This helps students to appreciate the realities of managing voluntary organisations, and enhances their understanding of the problems that managers face at strategic and operational levels. This sensitisation process is underpinned by

opportunities to hear from and question senior managers and volunteers within the sector. Speakers are selected for their ability to synthesise academic theory with practice in ways that demonstrate to students how academic skills and understanding need to be brought to bear in resolving practical problems and maximising opportunities.

The Learning Journey: a reflective placement

In its pilot form, the Learning Journey requires students to undertake a strategic analysis of a voluntary organisation. To do this, they use a combination of academic literature, public policy documents and in-house literature such as strategic plans, annual reports and accounts obtained from the voluntary organisation. Underpinning and cementing the analysis is a period spent within the participating organisation, during which students engage in conversation with senior managers, other professional staff and volunteers, to hear what they have to say and see through their eyes. The Learning Journey culminates with an oral presentation to representatives of the participating voluntary organisation.

Next steps

Once the pilot has been completed and evaluated (and subject to securing further funding), the longer-term aim is to develop a more substantial placement opportunity on an ongoing basis. This will involve developing and sustaining long-term relationships with participating voluntary organisations operating at national, regional and local levels within Scotland.

The proposal is to attach students to a member of the organisation's management team. Students will work with their manager and placement organisation to specify and resolve a management problem, within a particular time-frame. The development of long-term relationships with organisations will allow 'resolutions' to be monitored and evaluated over a period of years by subsequent student cohorts, generating valuable insights for students and managers alike.

Assessment

The Learning Journey is assessed as a component of a reflective logbook. The logbook is worth 60 per cent of the assessed work. There is no percentage allocation to each component of the logbook at this pilot stage. If the project is taken forward post-pilot, the intention is to assess the Learning Journey in its own right. Currently, the remaining 40 per cent of the assessed work comprises an essay.

Resources needed for implementation and sustainability

The Learning Journey pilot has been made possible with a grant of £2,340 from SALTIRE. This has enabled the appointment of a part-time Placement Administrator and is also covering insurance costs and funding reimbursement of students' travel expenses. Host voluntary organisations are invited to attend a pre-placement briefing and a post-placement briefing, as well as student presentations. The funding enables travel expenses to be reimbursed to representatives of the host voluntary organisations, and also funds refreshments.

If the pilot is successful, external funding will need to be sought in order to take the initiative forward longer term; this could be considered as the next main challenge.

SALTIRE has supported the development of this work, and has recently established a development initiative, the Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund. This aims to promote the enhancement of learning, especially through initiatives that engage with the Scottish Funding Council and QAA Enhancement Themes of Employability and Flexible Delivery. Funding from SALTIRE's Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund is enabling the Learning Journey to be piloted.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

The module enhances student employability by equipping students with a specialist understanding of the voluntary sector and positioning them for employment within a rapidly expanding market within the UK and internationally.

The initiative and the pilot have received positive feedback from the University's management:

> One way in which we can equip our students for future careers is by creating an opportunity to bring them face to face with the realities of workplace environments. Such experiences can have a tremendous impact upon students. As a University, we are pleased to support efforts of this kind, and in particular this initiative from the School of Management.
> Professor Ron Piper, Vice-Principal Learning and Teaching

More broadly, and through the Learning Journey in particular, students also have the opportunity to develop their intellectual capabilities, personal profiles and practical skills. These are all relevant and desirable within the applied management context, irrespective of sector. The module enhances employability by developing the following attributes.

Intellectual capabilities:

- generating specialist understanding of the voluntary sector within the UK and internationally
- developing the ability to synthesise theoretical and applied knowledge
- managing complex information.

Personal profile:

● encouraging independence, responsibility in attitude and self-confidence.

Practical skills:

● gaining experience in interpersonal skills and communication skills.

Organisations involved are very supportive of the development of these skills and of our aims:

> Volunteering opens doors, eyes and minds to personal development. It is a two-way process which enhances the individual's life skills while benefiting society. Volunteer Centre Fife believes that a voluntary-sector placement represents 'volunteering in action' and provides a creative context for applying learning in a real-life setting.
> Mary Ray, Volunteering Fife

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

First, this type of initiative - even at the smaller-scale piloting stage - is hugely time-intensive compared with more traditional teaching methods. Unless your management acknowledges this and weights your teaching and administrative loading to take account of it, the initiative will inevitably eat into your research time.

Second, I have been very fortunate to receive funding from SALTIRE to underwrite the pilot Learning Journey and enable the employment of a part-time Placement Administrator. I'd like to thank SALTIRE for the funding which is enabling this initiative to happen. An absolutely fabulous person, Candice Mitchell, took on the role of Placement Administrator, and I don't know how I would have taken this project forward without her. I'd like to thank her for her excellent work and support.

Also vital are help and the establishment of good working relationships. Thanks go to Mary Ray of Volunteering Fife. She encouraged us to take the idea forward and run with it. Recognition must also be given to the voluntary organisations that have so generously agreed to host students.

Key features/strengths of this case study

● Enhanced employability through voluntary-sector placements to develop students' skills and understanding of this sector.

● Establishment of an effective networking vehicle for developing relationships with voluntary organisations, for both students and the discipline.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- discussing the possibility of delivering a similar module in partnership with the voluntary sector, to develop students' understanding of management or service delivery/client needs?

- what sector/employer input would be valuable to students in your discipline (for example, medical students might do part of their coursework as volunteers with the Red Cross or the Scottish Association for Mental Health; students of divinity could undertake placements with faith-based non-governmental organisations such as Habitat for Humanity)?

- designing a project in ways that place the responsibility for identifying a host organisation and negotiating a placement with the student (rather than the module leader or school), thereby delivering additional benefits to students in terms of their personal development?

Links and further information

For information on the School of Management at the University of St Andrews and the Managing Voluntary Organisations: Perspectives, Policy and Practice module see:
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/management/

For further information about SALTIRE, contact Dr Colin Mason or visit
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/saltire/index.php

Curriculum design for employability

Institution
University of St Andrews

Discipline (if applicable)
English

Contact details
Dr Sara Lodge
School of English
University of St Andrews
St Andrews
Fife
KY16 9AL

Tel: (01334) 462641
Email: sjl15@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

In the academic year 2003-04, I launched a new module within the School of English at the University of St Andrews. This module, entitled Speeches and Speechwriting: History, Theory and Practice, grew out of my own experience of working as a speechwriter. I was struck by the fact that although the study of rhetoric was once a lynchpin of the study of English, it had almost entirely fallen out of modern UK university syllabuses. I also wanted to create a course that differed from those at some Northern American universities in that it would offer not only a chronological approach to the history and theory of rhetoric, but also a practical element. Students would discuss rhetorical tropes and strategies, think about the process of planning, researching, structuring and delivering a speech, and then would finally write and deliver their own speeches as part of their continuously assessed work.

Although the initial primary focus of this module was not employability, I think it provides a good example of how elements can be incorporated into a non-vocational course to enhance employability.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The module introduces students to speechwriting and focuses on the historical tradition of eloquence as an educational, political and literary tool, with analysis and practice of rhetorical figures and strategies.

In terms of learning outcomes, students gain an awareness of the traditions and skills of speechwriting and their importance within literary history. They also practise the recognition, analysis and deployment of speechwriting techniques. Students are expected to acquire and demonstrate, in class assignments and examinations, that they have acquired:

1   familiarity with a range of speeches composed and delivered from the Renaissance to the present day. Such familiarity will involve an awareness of differing versions and conceptions of a 'speech', for example, as preparatory script, oral performance and published transcript

2   conversance with historical and critical materials about rhetoric and rhetoricians treated on the course, and the capacity to evaluate and discuss such materials (both in essays and through group presentations)

3   the capacity to identify and analyse a variety of verbal constructions and techniques involved in successful communication

4   the capacity to marshal a written argument, giving consideration to matters such as form, language, logic, ethos and pathos

5   the capacity to plan, script and deliver a speech before an audience of classmates.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

I felt there was a need for a course of this kind and that it would be of interest and value to students.

Rhetoric, speechwriting and public speaking are relatively neglected subjects on the formal curricula of UK universities. Yet since the majority of modern jobs involve selling, and many involve public speaking of some kind, a variety of curricula would, in my view, stand to benefit from including some aspect of these subjects at a practical level.

How does it work in practice?

Module delivery

The module is delivered through a mixture of lectures, seminars and practical classes. A range of lecturers contribute; this seems beneficial in allowing students to hear different voices and become increasingly aware of different rhetorical styles. As one lecturer has commented: 'One outcome of the module is that students become increasingly perspicacious critics of one's own lecture delivery…I tell myself that this can only be a positive sign'.

Module structure

The module is essentially chronological. It begins with an account of Classical debates about the merits and demerits of rhetoric. It then goes on to track issues such as: the place of rhetoric in Renaissance education and in Shakespeare's drama; Milton, rhetoric and republicanism; Edmund Burke and the rhetorical sublime; the posited 'fall' of rhetoric in the nineteenth century considered against the enduring legacy of Lincoln's oratory; and questions of gender, race and class in twentieth-century rhetoric. Along the way, students look at the modern speechwriter's task and consider how they would use rhetorical techniques to prepare a presentation for a job interview. They also write and deliver a speech on a given topic as part of their continuously assessed work.

Module assessment

Assessment for this module has four elements.

- A written pro and contra argumentation exercise. Based on an exercise as old as the Renaissance schoolroom, this asks students to argue, as forcibly and persuasively as possible, in 800 words 'for' and then in 800 words 'against' a given proposition.

- An essay of not more than 2,500 words on one of a variety of questions rooted in the historical and theoretical elements of the course.

- A speech, of not more than 1,500 words, which must be submitted as a written document and then delivered orally before other members of the class.

- A two-hour written examination, in which students complete two essay questions, one of which may be a commentary on a passage from a speech by a well-known orator.

In terms of resources needed for implementation and any issues and challenges in running the course, these were few. Books and audio materials were ordered for the library, but otherwise no special provision was necessary. The course has run very smoothly. However, as it involves several different tutors, periods of research leave may cause problems. My department has been very supportive in allowing me to explore this new area of teaching. I have also received helpful advice and input from friends working in the area of communications consultancy.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

Although many of the skills we teach on a day-to-day basis (writing, analysing, editing, discussing) are highly relevant to the world of work, most of our previous courses have not made formal links between tasks encountered in the classroom and tasks that might be encountered in a work situation. This course is new in making an explicit linkage and drawing it to students' attention. We might, in English departments, consider more generally the possibility of incorporating exercises that relate directly to tasks which occur in the workplace or the job application and interview process. Since studies suggest that students of English, although extremely employable, tend to address job

search later and have less focused and more ambitious employment goals than their peers, our input in their third and fourth years of study can be especially valuable.

Tasks that relate to interview preparation, in particular, not only build confidence and technique, but also enhance students' self-awareness regarding their skills set, their employment goals and the strategies needed to bring them together.

Further enhancements

- I am in the process of compiling a database of work opportunities related to speechwriting that will help current students to think about how they might use and market their skills in searching for jobs. Last year's students have been very helpful in voluntarily contributing details of the work they have found as a direct or indirect result of taking the module.

- Feedback forms suggested that some students would like another hour or two of the module to be devoted to practical speechwriting skills. I am actively considering this possibility.

- Elements of the course have proved popular in a summer school context and might at some point be offered as part of an evening degree.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

Courses that are new in kind require more time and research to develop than those that simply involve teaching new texts. I was fortunate in having a year to research and develop this course before I taught it, and I sought input from many different sources. I would recommend others to devote as much time as is practicable to course design.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Discipline-specific intervention tying the academic and 'real-world' contexts together for students in a practical and demonstrable way.

- Consideration of the needs of a particular group of students in terms of learning and employability - making employability interesting, relevant and academically acceptable to students.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- incorporating exercises that relate directly to tasks that occur in the workplace or the job application and interview process?

- using alumni and/or senior students from your department to contribute to an employer/opportunity database for current students? (your careers service or alumni office may be able to help you with this)

- introducing an assessment task to your course, based on speech writing, public speaking or presentation skills.

Links and further information

For more information on the module see:
http://electron.st-andrews.ac.uk/catalogue/course.cgi?code=EN4203

The Professional Communication: Full Service Agency modules

Institution
Napier University

Discipline (if applicable)
Communication, but could be transferred to other disciplines

Contact details
Gary Lunt, Lecturer in Communication
Paula McNulty, Lecturer in Communication

School of Communication Arts
Napier University
Craighouse Campus
Edinburgh
EH10 5LG

Tel:(0131) 455 6159 (G Lunt)
Email: g.lunt@napier.ac.uk

Tel:(0131) 455 6177 (P McNulty)
Email: p.mcnulty@napier.ac.uk

Abstract

The Professional Communication: Full Service Agency (FSA) suite of modules is intended to provide students with real experience of professional communication contexts, situations and related industries (public relations, advertising, corporate and organisational communication, employee communication). Students form part of a real communications consultancy with 'live' clients. They engage with a wide variety of professional-level communication issues and/or problems, and are expected to offer appropriate solutions while working towards agreed objectives in negotiation with the client.

Project teams within an FSA comprise four to six students from each year group in years two to four. Each team works on a project provided by a real organisation which is seeking help and advice on genuine communications issues. There is progressive development of individual and group roles and management responsibilities through the year groups, with:

- year two students acting as account executives, providing communication and administrative support for year three

- year three students acting as account/project managers responsible for managing the project outcomes and client liaison, and for managing (briefing and supervision of task allocation) the year two account executives

- year four students acting as account directors, charged with overseeing, supporting and directing the group as a whole.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

All students on the BA (Hons) Communication degree take these compulsory Professional Communication: FSA modules (each worth 15 credits) as part of their programme, running at one per semester during years two to four.

The programme philosophy underpinning the FSA modules is to develop students' knowledge and experience of the professional communication industries. Students develop a practical approach to professional problems and issues, working in cross-year project groups, and cultivate theoretical analysis, application and critical reflection skills relative to the professional communication context/situation.

Work on client/project criteria, goals and objectives is supported through a lecture programme at each level. Module staff fulfil the role of managing directors within the agency structure. Weekly workshops provide support and guidance from the FSA programme team specific to individual projects.

The academic focus within the suite of modules is professional communication and project management. In addition to developing practical and transferable skills, students are expected to develop their understanding of communication in a theoretical context. Having an understanding of communication and an ability to manage situations and issues effectively requires a balance of practical skills and a developed knowledge and understanding of the theory which underpins said practice.

Student learning is focused on this balanced approach, with assessments structured to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge. For example, the scheme includes an innovative peer-assessment scheme. In this, each student group for each semester designs a peer-assessment contract which defines their attitude and approach to the team and to the project. It should outline a proactive stance and culture within which they will engage with the project, defining the values and norms. While the focus of the contract is centred on the values, norms, attitude and approach to the project, it also provides for a series of penalties that may be incurred should this be necessary. These are negotiated between year-group members and signed off under supervision of the programme team.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The programme was designed to engage students in the practice of professional communication and to develop their transferable skills and application of theory to practice. The rationale was to help students in the increasingly competitive graduate employment market. The FSA suite of modules was intended to address the academic concerns relative to the BA (Hons) Communication

degree, while also providing students with three years of practical experience (two if graduating with the ordinary degree) within a 'real' consultancy framework and context.

Within a saturated graduate market, it was hoped that this programme would enable our students to distinguish themselves among applicants, giving them the ability to sell their transferable skills and demonstrate practical knowledge and experience in addition to the degree. It was born out of one or two single modules that provided a much more limited and less well-integrated experience.

How does it work in practice?

The teaching and academic support are provided by the communication programme team. For stages/years two and three, this comprises one hour-long lecture per week (separate for each year) and one two-hour workshop when all group members across all years attend. Stage/year four has a guest lecture programme, with industry practitioners coming in to discuss directorial-level management situations, issues and contexts.

New projects are needed for the start of each semester. These generally come from professional networks established with the relevant industries (for instance, members of the programme team are currently on the Communicators in Business and Chartered Institute of Public Relations Scotland committees). While the consultancy does not fall short of projects, at times this task requires a degree of time and negotiation.

Feedback from clients is very positive. They are pleasantly surprised by the professional attitude of the students and by the problem-solving and/or solutions presented.

> The team had a very professional approach. They met deadlines, kept us informed, were good timekeepers and produced good reports. We are sorry we don't have five communications positions to offer! We really enjoyed being part of this project.
> Louise MacDonald, Deputy Chief Executive, Young Scot - The National Youth Information Agency for Scotland

> The group worked well and met the original brief. Their professionalism was excellent.
> Denise Boyle, Press Officer, Renfrewshire Council

> The group was always very pleasant and confident in their knowledge and skills. We were always impressed with their ideas/designs. They have done great work which we are using.
> Transport Research Institute

> The group adapted to our needs in a positive way, taking our comments on board. Very professional.
> John Hollingsworth, National Trust For Scotland

As a result of these projects, some clients have offered or specifically created full and part-time jobs for several students. In addition, previous students are now in positions where they are contacting us with projects on behalf of their employers (and they are always the best ambassadors).

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

The vocational focus, development of transferable skills and autonomous learner are fundamental within the graduate employment market. Napier University has promoted this employability focus, and the BA (Hons) Communication programme provides real work experience to advance it. The balance between the practical, vocational focus and theoretical underpinning and its application in analytical and critical reflection is intended to develop a rounded graduate able to employ transferable skills and understand how and why approaches and solutions will be effective.

The BA (Hons) Communication degree therefore develops the employability agenda in a very real and practical way. The philosophy underpinning the FSA programme is to develop graduates who appeal to employers within a highly competitive marketplace. Staff in the school are as positive as clients about the FSA programme.

> The students showed high degrees of competence in applying ideas to real-life industrial situations, and their enthusiasm showed in their undoubted ability to communicate their ideas and proposals. I got a real sense that the three years of students were working together productively, cooperatively and with much commitment.
> Dr Chris Atton, Reader, School of Communication Arts, Napier University

> This was the first year of a fully operational FSA suite of modules across years two, three and four of the BA (Hons) Communication programme. This suite of modules has proved successful on many levels: working in groups/teams, developing professionalism, working for 'live' clients, and the unique experience of peer learning within an agency/consultancy setting. The increasing interest from potential clients and the positive feedback from employers of recent graduates demonstrate the immense value of this method of teaching Professional Communication in higher education.
> Paula McNulty, Module Leader, Professional Communication, Napier University

After dissemination within the University through poster presentations, other departments have shown interest in developing a similar scheme for their students. Particular interest has been shown in some specific aspects of the scheme, such the unusual peer-assessment scheme mentioned above.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

Concentrate and focus on the professional aspect right at the start. One of the challenges at the start of any year is encouraging students to develop a professional attitude and approach early in the module. This requires a degree of debate and the use of case examples and/or situational analysis. Time must be given over to this situational context so that application to the project/tasks progresses at the appropriate pace. It takes a while to get across to students that they cannot treat this as just another academic module, but are required to have a professional approach to the whole issue and context.

It is also important to mix up the student groups each semester to avoid friendship groups. This reflects the professional world where people don't just work in safe groups.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Progression of skills development across the degree programme.

- Effective partnerships with employers.

- Self and peer assessment of skills development.

- Successful merging of academic discipline and 'real-world' contexts.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- using a cross-year group project to ensure skills progression across your programme as a whole?

- adopting a peer-agreed assessment contract to develop your students' negotiation, teamwork and independent learning skills?

- approaching relevant employers in your discipline to see what live issues they have that could be built into the curriculum as anything from case-study examples to a suite of modules like those described above?

Links and further information

School of Communication Arts: www.napier.ac.uk/sca

British Association of Communicators in Business: www.cib.uk.com/

Chartered Institute of Public Relations: www.ipr.org.uk/

Working in partnership

The following five case studies demonstrate the extent to which working in partnership can enhance student employability. Collectively, these case studies illustrate the achievable outcomes for academic staff and their students when different combinations of partners come together: disciplines, year groups and universities; teaching staff and university services, including careers services; and teaching staff, employers and professional bodies.

Macrae's Interact project details a formidable and long-standing interdisciplinary collaboration, one which has withstood the test of time and has the recognition of employers in fulfilling their recruitment needs. Interact develops the soft skills that students require by using interdisciplinary teamworking. Black and Curtis's project, the result of an innovative institutional partnership, is similarly placed within the curriculum and focuses particularly on creativity and entrepreneurship. Connon et al's project illustrates a slightly different focus. Students develop employability skills in the workplace through a network of employers.

University careers services feature strongly in two of the five projects. Tierney and McColl have collaborated closely with the University of Glasgow's Careers Service to develop and deliver their employability project to students across three science faculties. Perkins and Fantom have also developed this type of partnership, detailing here the 'finding your fit' and skills auditing programme developed at the University of Aberdeen, again for science students.

Although the primary focus of these five case studies is working in partnership, they demonstrate several additional key strengths. For Connon et al and for Tierney and McColl, the innovative use of mentoring features strongly. Mentoring works on a number of levels for Connon et al, allowing their students to enter into mentoring relationships with professionals who are able to share their business knowledge and experience with them. For Tierney and McColl's students, staff mentors and student mentors have become part of the project, with the latter able to share their own experiences of work placements, internships and fieldwork.

A further strength is in the creative and strategic use made of universities' alumni networks. The focus is on enhancing students' skills in the workplace (Connon et al), or on enhancing the curriculum and the skills development facilitated by it (Black and Curtis).

Together, these case studies help us to consider the benefits to students of different types of creative partnering. Students' employability can be particularly enhanced if we:

- harness 'real-world settings' developed either within the curriculum or tapped into through partnership working with employers and/or professional and business organisations
- use professional or student peer mentors
- jointly develop and deliver initiatives to students as part of university teams that include academic staff, support staff (including careers services) and students
- collaborate in interdisciplinary partnerships.

List of other partnership projects available on the Enhancement Themes website at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/

- Lesley Diack, *Shared learning for all health and social care undergraduates and the development of interprofessional practice*, School of Pharmacy, The Robert Gordon University

- Helen Godfrey, *Effective Learning and Career Development module*, Arts and Social Science Faculty, Napier University

- Locker Madden, Bryan Snelling and Regina Styles, *Supporting Local Graduate Employment*, Careers and Appointments Service and Students' Association, University of Aberdeen

Insight Out Learning: a resource to embed creative business models within the art and design curriculum

Institutions
The Glasgow School of Art
Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University

Discipline (if applicable)
Art and design

Contact details
Lesley Black
Student Support Services
The Glasgow School of Art
30 Hill Street
Glasgow
G3 6RN
Tel: (0141) 353 4482
Email: l.black@gsa.ac.uk

Libby Curtis
Gray's School of Art
The Robert Gordon University
Garthdee Road
Aberdeen
AB10 7QD
Tel: (01224) 263635
Email: e.curtis@rgu.ac.uk

Abstract

Insight Out is a joint initiative between the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA), the Lighthouse (Scotland's Centre for Design, Architecture and the City) and The Glasgow School of Art. It is designed specifically to help Glasgow-based creative graduates to develop new businesses. The Insight Out approach explores and develops business strategies sympathetic to the mindset of the designer.

The Insight Out project was designed to have two main benefits. First, it was designed to give graduates the opportunity to develop a bespoke creative business initiative. Secondly, the plan was to give The Glasgow School of Art an exciting opportunity to examine and capture the learning gained from this initiative and embed it within the undergraduate curriculum. This latter aspect of the programme, using learning to inform the undergraduate curriculum, is called Insight Out Learning. It has been funded by the Scottish Institute for Enterprise.

Insight Out Learning is a collaborative project between The Glasgow School of Art and Gray's School of Art. This collaboration sought to combine the curriculum development experience of Libby Curtis from Gray's School of Art and the strong design and enterprise practices, facilities and research available at The Glasgow School of Art.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

From 11 completed applications received, nine recent Glasgow School of Art graduates were selected to participate in Insight Out. They took part in an intensive four-day learning academy called Insight Out Uptime, delivered at the Lighthouse (4-9 November 2004). This was facilitated by Joanna Woodford, consultant for NESTA, and Piers Roberts from Designersblock. Designersblock is a design and events consultancy which has developed seminars and workshops aimed at supporting design businesses, especially using models of best practice. The learning academy was followed by a four-week 'virtual incubator' programme which provided coaching from accountants, lawyers, business advisers and manufacturers. It concluded with the graduates presenting the business plans they had developed over this period to a panel of potential investors, including NESTA. Those plans deemed to be viable received some modest investment from the programme and were guided to other investment sources.

The Insight Out Uptime sessions were a central aspect of the whole programme. They provided an opportunity for the Insight Out Learning development team to capture the most beneficial and relevant learning gained by the participating graduates.

Information from the two initiatives described above (Insight Out Uptime and the 'virtual incubator' programme) was then used in the Insight Out Learning project to develop innovative enterprise materials which could be embedded within the curriculum for undergraduates. These materials were piloted in two departments at The Glasgow School of Art in the 2004-05 session (see below).

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The rationale behind the use of the business materials is to encourage undergraduates to reflect on and assess their planning strategies and development needs for the future.

How does it work in practice?

The Insight Out Learning pilots took place in two departments: Product Design Engineering and Textile Design. The pilot materials that were used with undergraduates are outlined below. They were selected from the most relevant models gleaned from the graduates' experience on the Insight Out Uptime programme.

The models selected and implemented were:

- **Motives and Values** - a tool to help students to understand personal motives in everyday life, work, creative pursuits and social activities

- **Future History** - a model for visualising the next five years and planning the steps to achieve specific goals

- **RISKIT** - a business model which looks at the relationships between idea, production and delivery

- **Business Blueprinting** - a model that can help to identify all the operational elements of a business

- **Reflection** - a questionnaire, discussions and a reflective diary exercise.

The sessions were delivered in a facilitated group environment where discussion by participants was encouraged. Sessions mainly focused on flipchart work, supported by handouts. A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation was developed to highlight the models, and facilitators were encouraged to expand and embellish the models by using their own experience of enterprise and industry knowledge. The sessions were delivered in half-day slots, though the duration depended very much on undergraduates' engagement with the material and how it was embedded into the pilot departments' curriculum.

Creating professional enterprise materials which could be embedded into the curriculum presented some challenges. The materials had to be usable, relevant, flexible and easily translated across art and design disciplines. There was also a worry that the materials could exclude undergraduates who had no interest in starting a business, by being too prescriptive and irrelevant to that cohort.

These challenges were addressed by creating small-group sessions that encouraged strong group debate. The Insight Out Learning development team recognised that the sessions needed to be facilitated by experienced academic staff who could demonstrate and enhance the models with examples drawn from graduate and personal experiences.

Evaluations suggested that students engaged with the materials more fully when they were able to relate their content/application to someone's business experience. To help with this, the Insight Out Learning team also developed graduate entrepreneurial case studies and captured these in written examples and video testimony. These case studies enabled the models to be applied to 'live' creative business contexts.

The initial evaluation from the students who participated in the pilots was encouraging.

The sessions were good at increasing my knowledge of the business.

Working out a RISKIT model concentrating on one person made it seem like a real situation, easier to get your head around, and the input of different opinions was really useful because no

two people think exactly the same, meaning you heard and discussed things you wouldn't maybe have considered yourself.

I felt that I gained a lot out of listening to other people's goals and their individual ways of reaching them.

Other people's opinions and aspirations can make you think more about your own.

The material has been useful in developing undergraduates' understanding of business. Students have acknowledged the need to look more deeply at issues that affect the success of business ideas, such as understanding personal motives within a working context; knowing where the business is going; applying the right production and distribution methodology; and clearly identifying and structuring the operational side of any business. Insight Out Learning addresses all these critical issues and stresses the need to deal with such topics before writing a business plan.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

The project has obvious links with the employability agenda as well as developing some of the key processes of PDP. For example, the Motives and Values model, where students explore their personal motives and values, and the reflective diary/log could be directly embedded into the personal progress file of an undergraduate. The Future History model supports undergraduates in visualising their business/career/life plan five to 10 years in the future. This activity not only challenges undergraduates in terms of their personal plans, but also requires them to map and record all the development activity that will be required to achieve their career aim. This model develops undergraduates' self-awareness and ownership of their future.

The project's future is to create a web-based academic teaching resource which will feature the piloted models and further resources, such as entrepreneurial case studies. The website, hosted by The Glasgow School of Art, will progress the agenda at The Glasgow School of Art and hopefully elsewhere. The website will be innovative and flexible and will include video case studies and audio 'talk through' of the models, which can be downloaded and used by academic staff.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

It is important when piloting enterprise materials that academic staff members delivering the material have good insight into industry issues and how to develop business enterprise. It was also helpful in this project that the facilitators were able to embellish the models with relevant examples from the experience of previous graduates and their business practices. This often allowed the models to become 'live' and achievable within undergraduates' own design practice and experience.

When developing the sessions, it is also helpful to pay particular attention to undergraduates' current work and use it as a vehicle to embed the models. A good example of this in our case was

to use the Business Blueprinting model as a tool to develop professional practice for the annual degree show exhibition. This was a win-win situation, as the undergraduates were exploring and using the model for a relevant, real situation they were going to experience.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Use of graduate experience and issues to inform undergraduate curricula.

- Partnership between graduates, businesses and enterprise organisations to pool resources and develop new initiatives.

- Focusing on the concerns of the specific student group, thus ensuring a targeted and relevant response.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- exploring potential partnerships with businesses and enterprise organisations (eg the Scottish Institute for Enterprise or Scottish Enterprise) in your area?

- contacting your Higher Education Academy Subject Centre to see if they have any teaching materials on enterprise and entrepreneurship in your discipline?

- piloting some enterprise materials in your course?

Links and further information

Designersblock: www.designersblock.org.uk/

Higher Education Academy: www.heacademy.ac.uk/

The Lighthouse: www.thelighthouse.co.uk/

NESTA: www.nesta.org.uk/

Scottish Institute for Enterprise: www.sie.ac.uk/

Developing successful mentoring partnerships

Institution
The Robert Gordon University

Discipline (if applicable)
Human resource management (HRM)

Contact details
Jackie Connon, Course Leader, MSc in HRM
Anne Stevenson, Scheme Co-ordinator
Debbie Cruickshank, student, MSc in HRM

Aberdeen Business School
The Robert Gordon University
Garthdee Road
Aberdeen
AB10 7QE

Tel: (01224) 263815 (J Connon)
Email: j.connon@rgu.ac.uk

Tel: (01224) 263018 (A Stevenson)
Email: a.p.stevenson@rgu.ac.uk

Abstract

The Aberdeen Business School mentoring scheme allocates full-time postgraduate students enrolled on the MSc in HRM to mentors who are experienced human resources (HR) practitioners. Student participation in the scheme is voluntary, and allocation to mentors is largely on a random basis. The mentoring pairs communicate face to face and/or by email, and students reflect on their learning in a continuous professional development portfolio. Mentoring relationships enhance students' employability by allowing them to access real organisational case studies and to share business knowledge and experience through exposure to HRM activities. The scheme links students to the reality of their profession throughout their course.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The MSc HRM course already has a very successful placement scheme during which full-time students gain exposure to HR practice midway through the course. The mentoring scheme is a separate process. It has operated since September 2002 with support from the local Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) branch.

The aim of the mentoring scheme is to ease the transition from being a full-time student to working in a professional HR role. This is done in ways which enhance students' employability.

Participation by students is voluntary. Those who take part - over 90 per cent - are expected to be proactive in developing their relationships with their mentors, beginning by taking responsibility for initiating a first contact and setting the agenda for the first meeting.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The mentoring scheme resulted from the recognition that full-time students could enhance their employability if they had a link to the 'reality' of their profession throughout their course of study. It was seen as an opportunity to:

1   develop mutually beneficial partnerships between students and local HR practitioners

2   link coursework assignments to live organisational case studies

3   make mentoring a distinguishing feature of our CIPD-accredited programme.

Mentoring is defined within the scheme as: 'a method of assisting another person to move effectively and efficiently through a system by sharing short cuts, contacts, technology, methods and skills. It involves a willingness to share experience and knowledge, success and failures by both parties - mentor and mentee'.

How does it work in practice?

Recruitment and training of mentors and mentees
Mentors are local HR practitioners identified via three networks:

1   the placement network at the Aberdeen Business School

2   the local CIPD branch network

3   the University's alumni network.

Almost all mentors are CIPD qualified and have a minimum of three years' industry experience. Many have experience of organisational-based mentoring schemes.

The mentors were initially invited to attend an informal briefing session, which outlined the benefits of the scheme and the commitment required of mentors. This resulted in almost 60 mentors participating in a series of one-day training workshops (the local CIPD branch sponsoring the catering) designed to develop professional mentoring skills transferable to their own workplaces. A number of clearly defined outcomes for the mentor workshop were identified, such as defining the roles and responsibilities of mentor and mentee in the mentoring relationship; identifying the key skills, qualities and attributes of a successful mentor; and developing learning and communication

strategies that match the level and communication styles of the mentee.

Students attend a briefing session during their induction week to clarify expectations of the mentoring scheme, after which they are invited to join the scheme. Mentees also attend a one-day training session to clarify their roles and responsibilities.

Operation of the scheme

Students are allocated to mentors largely on a random basis. At their first meeting, mentor and mentee sign a mentoring agreement clarifying their roles and commitment. Students then meet with their mentor at least four times during the academic year (October-May), but experience has shown that successful mentoring pairs tend to meet several times during each semester. Mentors and mentees may meet face to face, but equally they may opt for email communication. This allows the mentee to define a problem in writing - a necessary skill for practitioners - and the mentor may respond when it is suitable to do so.

Mentors are issued with a copy of the course handbook, including assessments and timetables, to enable them to identify what issues the mentee may wish to discuss. Mentees are required to reflect on their learning within a continuous professional development portfolio which is reviewed by their academic tutor on a regular basis throughout their studies.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

Some of the specific benefits we have identified in terms of student employability are as follows:

- sharing of business knowledge and experience to enable students to apply theories to practice and realistic context
- access to real organisational case studies for course assignments
- exposure to and practical experience of HRM activities
- development of personal effectiveness skills such as self-confidence to undertake a management report on placement
- reflecting on learning during placement to clarify transferable knowledge/skills
- access to careers advice, job-hunting skills and a professional network
- enhanced motivation and determination to complete a very demanding course
- experiential learning of a topical developmental tool.

Two students from the 2004-05 session successfully obtained a job with their placement organisation. One highlighted the support she received from her mentor in terms of writing an effective CV, coaching in interview skills and the specific knowledge and skills sought by employers:

Drawing from my mentor's experience was invaluable in terms of my own professional development, from completing coursework through to gaining an insight into what the professional world of human resources is like. During my placement, I applied for and was offered the job of Human Resources Assistant and I feel my mentor contributed to this process immensely. I contacted my mentor for advice throughout the whole process and he emphasised including my transferable part-time supervisory work skills in my CV. This I feel was one of the main factors which led to me being considered for the human resources role. In achieving my ambition of being in human resources much earlier than I could have ever imagined, I feel I could not have progressed in terms of confidence and realised my ability without this mentoring relationship.
Debbie Cruickshank, full-time HRM student, 2004-05 session

This case study illustrates only one of a number of current mentoring initiatives within The Robert Gordon University. To build strategically on the learning derived from the case study, the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching has organised a mini-conference to share experiences and good practice.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

An effective mentoring programme requires ongoing evaluation and review to monitor progress against its stated aims. We are undertaking a mid-term review of the mentoring process through a questionnaire survey to mentors and mentees. At the end of the academic session, data will be collected from both partners in mentoring pairs. This will elicit more in-depth information about participants' experiences and explore the key success/failure factors and outcomes for both mentor and mentee, to determine the extent to which the scheme has achieved what it set out to do.

We have been able to set up this scheme successfully because of our strong network of employer support within the local HR community. The majority of our mentors are former students who want to give something back to the University, and who wished they had had a mentor to support them in their transition from student to practitioner. The free training days are another pull, as mentors develop knowledge and skills that can be applied in their day-to-day role and therefore enhance their continuous professional development. As a result of increasing numbers of students in recent years, some mentors have agreed to mentor two students during one academic session. These relationships have proved as successful as the one-to-one pairings.

A key challenge has been to solicit students' commitment to the mentoring process. Students like the idea of a mentor, but in reality not all of them are proactive in developing their relationship with their mentor. We have learnt that joining the scheme needs to be perceived as voluntary, the matching process needs to be carefully managed, and that both parties (mentee and mentor) need to explore their expectations of the relationship at the start. It is also important to appoint a scheme coordinator who can offer support to participants and monitor how the relationships are developing over time.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Postgraduates' employability being enhanced through mentoring by professionals, networking and skills development in the workplace.

- Effective partnerships with employers.

- Use of the alumni network to enhance postgraduates' skills.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- exploring potential partnerships externally with professional and business organisations and internally through your alumni office?

- the benefits to your students of one-to-one mentoring in 'real-world' settings?

Links and further information

Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching:
www.rgu.ac.uk/celt/home/page.cfm?pge=3371

CIPD: www.cipd.co.uk/

Clutterbuck D (2004) *Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent in Your Organisation*, fourth edition, London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

The inter-institutional Interact student competition

Institutions
The Glasgow School of Art
University of Paisley
University of Glasgow
Glasgow Caledonian University

Discipline (if applicable)
Architecture, engineering and quantity surveying

Contact details
Ken Macrae, Studio Tutor
Mackintosh School of Architecture
The Glasgow School of Art
177 Renfrew Street
Glasgow
G3 6RQ

Tel: (0141) 353 4665
Email: k.macrae@gsa.ac.uk

Abstract

Interact is a cross-institutional, multidisciplinary student competition in which third and fourth-year student architects, engineers and quantity surveyors design and deliver solutions against a client brief. The three-member design teams develop their design, structure and costings through a collaborative process which respects and takes account of their different professions. They present their solutions to a judging panel of independent assessors. The experience applies students' learning to a workplace scenario. It focuses on the interdisciplinary approach essential to meet clients' needs, and develops the soft skills such as teamwork, communication and leadership that these young professionals need.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

Since 1995, design teams of students have been formed from the Mackintosh School of Architecture in The Glasgow School of Art (third year), the University of Paisley's Department of Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering (fourth year), the University of Glasgow's Department of Civil Engineering (third year), and Glasgow Caledonian University's Department of Building and Surveying (fourth year).

Between 60 and 70 teams regularly take part in Interact. In 2005, there were 63 architecture students from the Mackintosh School, 27 engineering students from the University of Glasgow, 24 engineering students from the University of Paisley and 30 quantity surveying students from Glasgow Caledonian University.

Participation in Interact is a compulsory part of the curriculum in all of the disciplines. However, an academic assessment of the interaction is not included in an individual student's academic grades, relying as it does on the performance (or lack of performance) of others. It has to be seen as highly important preparation for life and employment skills, and is recognised and valued by many potential employers. Past participants in Interact now hold senior positions in professional architectural, engineering and quantity surveying practices in Scotland, and vouch for its relevance in their career development.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The rationale was twofold. First, the initiative was introduced to dissipate inter-industry prejudices created partly by the separate teaching of architecture, structural engineering and quantity surveying to undergraduates. This teaching norm in the UK had created schisms within the construction industry. Interact aimed to show students that the best design solutions for a client's brief can be collective ones, achieved through multidisciplinary teamwork. Through Interact, students observe and take account of the reasoning and decision-making processes of their colleagues as well as their own.

The second factor was the employability value in using the competition as work-related learning. It is the nearest experience within the academic curriculum to being in the workplace. No other part of the curriculum prepares students as realistically for the collaboration and performing challenges they will face after graduation.

How does it work in practice?

Running a competition of the calibre of Interact requires considerable commitment by the educational institutions involved in setting up the inter-institutional relationships. Possibly the greatest challenge lies in coordinating timetables and finding space for both student and staff interaction to take place, and including it in the curriculum of each institution. Interact is a constantly developing programme, with every year raising new variants, problems and solutions. The continued commitment to it is testimony that those involved understand the benefits for students.

Assessment and presentation

Each of the participating four academic institutions is responsible for the first-stage assessment of their respective students' submissions, independent of team interaction. The three discipline assessments are then collated, together with an assessment for the interaction and the team performance at the second team review. The assessment of the interaction is based on the Interact Diary, which records details of meetings, items discussed and decisions made. Each member of the team has to submit their diary individually in a standard format. From all this evidence, a decision is made on the finalists, now usually nine teams, for presentations to the independent judging panel at the competition final.

It is difficult to put into percentage terms the extent to which Interact counts towards the architecture course as a whole, as the summative assessment of architectural students is on their full-year studio portfolio. Engineers and quantity surveyors have a credit allocation set for Interact (about 10 out of 120 credits).

The final presentations to the judging panel take place before an audience. Each team makes a 10-minute audiovisual presentation of their proposals and the design team process, using Microsoft PowerPoint. As part of their deliberations, the judges have access to an exhibition of drawings, models and reports by the teams, both before and after the audiovisual presentations. Decisions are made on the night, a winning team is announced, and the judges comment to the assembled audience on their views, both general and particular. This is a valuable contribution to the learning process and experience for all student participants, not just the finalists.

After each Interact final, staff from the four participating institutions meet to debrief and discuss that year's competition as part of continuous review for the next year.

Peer feedback

There is a team self-selection procedure which involves a deceptively simple process whereby student architects display their initial ideas, as sketches and models, for student engineers and quantity surveyors. A 'trading fair' of up to 150 students from the three cognate professions then opens. Despite some initial anxieties and opening-night nerves from some students, the teaming-up of students with similar interests takes place within an hour or so.

Academic staff had observed and discussed that some teams were able to function more quickly and effectively than others. As team performance is a key aspect of Interact, it was desirable to introduce some input in team dynamics to help student participants to understand that this is an essential part of the whole learning experience. So a management consultant was introduced to make a presentation, immediately prior to the teaming up, on the classic stages in team formation (after Tuckman, 1965) of forming, storming, norming, performing. The consultant uses extracts from Sydney Lumet's 1957 film 12 Angry Men, set in the jury room of a murder trial, to illustrate the four stages in reaching consensus. Student response to this input has been highly positive, with the recognition that an effective team is something that has to be worked at, and that reaching the performing stage is the benchmark to be attained as quickly as possible.

After the self-selected teams are formed, responsibility for the interaction on a day-to-day basis lies collectively and individually with the team members. The key to success lies in the management and communication processes, visual, oral and written, which are recorded in the Interact Diary. They become a vital component in the assessment of the team performance, their reasoning and the decision-making processes.

Working with a pro forma, the opportunity is established for personal and peer reflection. The notes are agreed as a true record of events and should be signed by all team members.

Students are encouraged to reflect on their own practice in an overview of the progress made and challenges faced by the team. This can then be discussed and reviewed with the tutors in terms of team dynamics and reasons for progress.

Tutor feedback

The tutoring of student participants in terms of their individual discipline and academic marking clearly remains with the respective academic staff. However, twice during the interactive phase timetabled reviews of the Interact teams' performance take place, when presentations are made to a panel of academic staff from each of the four participating institutions.

The format has evolved to reach its present state, where for the first team review the teams present their combined efforts for a table-top discussion, in an integrated cross-discipline instruction session. This takes the form of an informal 'surgery' on the initial teamworking process, and is designed to ensure that communication and collaboration are clear and that each team member is fully aware of their respective role and responsibilities. The surgery format has been found to be less intimidating than the 'crit' (critique) style of review; while the crit is common practice for student architects, it is much less familiar to student engineers and quantity surveyors.

The review procedure is vital for monitoring team progress and identifying any problems arising from either the individual members or team communications. From the inter-institutional staff point of view, it is seen as a time to encourage and support personal learning and development, rather than exposing the team to intense critical comment. It also provides the opportunity to address the importance of teamworking and collaboration.

The second team review is more formal, with each team allocated a fixed period of 10 minutes for their presentation, as if they were finalists in the competition. The panel of academic staff makes an assessment of team interaction, collaboration and presentation technique, both visual and oral.

Both sessions are treated as workshops rather than critical reviews. The roles of the tutors are adjusted to avoid focusing on profession-specific elements, and feedback is kept relevant to the team as a learning experience. Feedback on the effectiveness of the design and teamwork should encompass the collective team performance and their ability to meet the client brief.

Issues and challenges

For the past number of years, we have run the competition on funding from each institution of £400 (ie £1,600). This covers prizes and certificates, fees for specialist input, and refreshments at the launch and final. In the past, we have been sponsored (eg by British Gas and Scottish Power) and recently secured sponsorship from an international building contracts management company, who

would like to see matched funding coming from architectural and engineering practices. This is currently being sought.

An important aspect of Interact which was affecting team performance was the variable skill levels in presentation techniques at the second team reviews. The academic staff rectified this problem by introducing a seminar presentation and coaching sessions by Gordon Gibb, a practising architect and keen amateur actor. Improvements were dramatic, with students responding to the training by demonstrating both practical skills and self-confidence at the presentations.

Another contributor who has helped is Neil Baxter of Neil Baxter Associates. He has given his time freely to promote Interact and to act as master of ceremonies for the Interact launch and final.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

By drawing on the skills and learning of the Interact programme, students can demonstrate a language and understanding they can use at interviews. They are able to show that they are skilled individuals, team players and job ready, all more than the academic curriculum alone can provide.

Interact has a profile, certainly in Scotland, which is meaningful when it appears in a CV or job application. The cycle has now turned full circle, with former student participants becoming Interact judges, supporters and even financial sponsors of the competition. Some local employers value Interact highly and regularly seek out for employment the winners and finalists at the competition final.

We have also devised a number of indicators which we use to determine and show evidence of skills development. The areas covered include teamworking (eg is there evidence in diaries which reflects effective personal contribution to the team performance?), problem-solving (eg can team members respond to the challenge and refine their work quickly?) and communication (eg what roles are assigned for the presentation and how do students gel through written, oral and body language?).

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

It is essential for academic staff at potential participating institutions to be flexible in their approach and willing to give and take on their respective timetables and course structures, to allow interaction between the cognate professional disciplines as an example to students.

The Interact process uses assessment and feedback to measure and manifest the development of employability skills. In particular, the learning experience in Interact is designed to develop students' employability skills through experiential learning.

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The self-assessment process encourages students to take ownership of their personal and professional development. Using self-assessment and effective feedback is integral to the Interact process and is not an add-on. This is its key strength and why it is valued so highly by students, academic staff and employers.

Although it is hard to measure the success of employability skills development, we make use of indicators as part of our evidence base, which we then use for continual enhancement.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Interdisciplinary collaboration and simulation of 'real-world' teamworking.

- Peer and tutor assessment of skills development.

- Successful partnership working across disciplines, student year groups and universities.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- whether you could design a student competition to suit your discipline which would seek to apply your students' learning to workplace scenarios, or apply problem-solving to clients' needs?

- how interdisciplinary or inter-institutional collaboration could mutually enhance employability in your context?

Links and further information

Egan J (1998) *Rethinking Construction: The Report of the Construction Task Force*, London: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Lumet S (director) and Rose R (screenplay) (1957) *12 Angry Men*, Arvato Services Ltd - MGM

Tuckman B (1965) Developmental sequence in small groups, *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384-399

The Working Out? Placement and Career Skills module

Institution
University of Aberdeen

Discipline (if applicable)
Molecular and cell biology

Contact details
Dr Joy Perkins, School of Medical Sciences
Peter Fantom, Careers and Appointments Service

School of Medical Sciences
Foresterhill
Aberdeen University
Aberdeen
AB25 2ZD

Tel: (01224) 551934
Email: j.perkins@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract

The Working Out? Placement and Career Skills module was introduced at the University of Aberdeen in 2004-05. The module is worth five credits and is run during the first half of the academic session. It aims to provide support and guidance to help level 3 molecular and cell biology students to secure a year-long industrial placement, and give undergraduates in their penultimate year essential careers information.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The Working Out? Placement and Career Skills module is a prerequisite for all students wishing to undertake an industrial placement year, and is strongly recommended as part of career development for all other molecular and cell biology students. Students who secure a placement during level 3 spend the fourth year of their degree on placement and then return to the University to complete the fifth and final year of their degree programme. Approximately 50 per cent of students registered on the module secure a placement.

The module runs for 12 weeks and is taught jointly by the School of Medical Sciences and the Careers and Appointments Service. The module provides an example of how an existing curriculum may be fine tuned to enhance students' employability.

Prior to the introduction of the module, the School of Medical Sciences offered students the opportunity to undertake a placement as part of their degree programme. However, limited support

was available to help students in securing a placement. The new module helps students to market themselves effectively to potential employers, and the number of students undertaking a placement has now increased.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The rationale was to extol the benefits of work experience to students, and to enhance the employability of molecular and cell biology students.

How does it work in practice?

The module was designed and is delivered jointly by an academic staff member and a member of the careers service. It consists of 12 one-hour weekly sessions. The module covers the necessary skills to complete placement applications by exploring CV preparation, effective covering letters, completing application forms, skills identification and good interview techniques. The aim is to help students to get the most from a placement and also to aid their career planning. A part of each scheduled teaching session is dedicated to promoting current placement opportunities, and application advice is also provided. The programme content, session by session, is outlined below.

1   Introduction to the course - aims, assessment and administration.

2   What makes a good CV? CV selection exercise.

3   Application forms - how do you sell yourself to an employer?

4   Good interview technique - why ask me that?

5   Preparation for assessment centres.

6   Teamwork - Belbin, a self-assessment inventory.

7   Employability exercise/skills audit.

8   Psychometric testing - Why use aptitude tests?

9   Working as part of a team - the DNA model exercise.

10 Previous placement student presentations.

11 Recruitment and selection processes.

12 Course review.

The programme also includes an afternoon of mock videoed interviews and a visit by an external speaker from a human resources department. In the next academic year, the module will be revised to include a session on entrepreneurial skills.

Students are not guaranteed a placement by completing the module, but material covered during the module assists them to submit high-quality placement applications and perform well during any interview, to maximise their chances of success.

Staff time has been the main resource required to develop and deliver this careers module. Writing the module handbook and preparing the assessment criteria for the assignments were particularly time-consuming activities, and the module also required the approval of the University's Academic Standards Committee.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

During a recent internal teaching review in the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, the module was highlighted as an example of best practice for wider dissemination. Also, as part of the University of Aberdeen's annual statement of the progress on internal subject reviews, it was stated that: 'Molecular and Cell Biology's emphasis on transferable skills, placements and employability, including its new level 3 course on careers education developed in conjunction with the University Careers Service' is an exemplary feature of provision, worthy of wider dissemination.

Additionally, the module promotes the value of work experience to students. Following the module, students are more aware of general employment skills and how to market themselves effectively to potential employers. Recent comments from the end-of-module questionnaire include the following:

> …interview simulations are a great idea.
> Student course evaluation form, 2004-05

> External speakers and previous placement student presentations were useful.
> Student course evaluation form, 2004-05

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

The enthusiasm of the teaching staff is essential and certainly contributed to the success of this initiative. Academic presence also encouraged students to consider the course valuable and promoted attendance.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Partnership between academic staff and the Careers and Appointments Service.
- Provision of preparation for placements that allows students to gain valuable skills and get the most benefit from work experience.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- discussing the possibility of delivering a similar module or some key sessions for your students in partnership with your careers service?
- what employer input would be valuable to students in your discipline?

Links and further information

Herbert I and Rothwell A (2003) *Managing Your Placement - A Skills-based Approach*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd

The National Council for Work Experience: www.work-experience.org

Scottish Institute for Enterprise: www.sie.ac.uk

Science Faculties' Employability Project

Institution
University of Glasgow

Discipline (if applicable)
Science Faculties

Contact details
Anne Tierney
Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences
Boyd Orr Building
University of Glasgow
Glasgow
G12 8QQ

Tel: (0141) 330 8480
Email: A.Tierney@bio.gla.ac.uk

John McColl
Department of Statistics
Mathematics Building
University Gardens
University of Glasgow
Glasgow
G12 8QW

Tel: (0141) 330 5024
Email: john@stats.gla.ac.uk

Abstract

The University of Glasgow's Science Faculties (Biomedical Sciences, Information and Mathematical Sciences, and Physical Sciences) jointly piloted an employability project with level 1 science students during the academic session 2004-05. The project aimed to enhance students' awareness of their skills and the opportunities available to them at university and beyond, and to begin the process early on with them of career management and PDP. This was achieved through a series of three two-hour workshops. The pilot is continuing into level 2 with the same students in 2005-06, while simultaneously rolling out to all level 1 science students in 2005-06 and all level 2 students in 2006-07.

In all, 120 level 1 students participated in the pilot study. They were recruited from selected laboratory groups in the level 1 biology class, where students were strongly encouraged to get involved through personal invitation by staff, and from among volunteers from all science subjects. The pilot was publicised in laboratory classes and lectures, and students were given a leaflet when

they visited their designated adviser of studies in November 2004. Students expressing an interest enrolled on the internet and were then assigned to a workshop group.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The initial pilot relied on volunteers from level 1. For the 2005-06 session, all level 1 students are being encouraged, through advisers of studies, posters, student talks and other opportunities, to attend sessions scheduled within their normal academic programme, although they can opt out. The pilot level 2 sessions will rely on volunteers before rolling out to all in level 2 during 2006-07. Students who attend the classes will have this recognised on their academic transcript.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

First-year students enter the faculty system, making them students of the Faculties of Science, rather than a particular department, until they reach level 3. On entering level 3 and beyond, students already have well-established career management input and programmes delivered by, and specific to, their department.

The Faculties of Science have an Employability Steering Group, consisting of academic and support staff. This group was set up to look at enhancing employability for students in the Science Faculties, respond to the University's Employability Strategy and lead this project. Members of the group are: Dr Iain Allison, Principal Adviser of Studies to the Science Faculties; Professor Roger Downie, Director of the Undergraduate School for Biomedical and Life Sciences; Mrs Ann Duff, Careers Adviser; Dr Bob Hill, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Physical Sciences; Mr John McColl, Vice Dean, Faculty of Information and Mathematical Sciences; Mrs Debra Macfarlane-Dick, Employability Development Adviser; Mr David Martin, Clerk to the Faculties of Science, secondment; Dr Geoffrey Moores, Convenor, Science Undergraduate Studies Committee; Ms Anne Tierney, University Teacher, Biomedical and Life Sciences, and Project Officer; and Ms Eleanor Waugh, Clerk to the Faculties of Science, seconded to Student Recruitment and Admissions Service for 2004-05.

It became obvious to the group that we needed to start career management input for our students earlier in their academic life, especially if we were to embed the ethos of PDP and allow students time to get used to it and develop their thinking. If the three faculties or individual departments delivered this input without working together, we ran the risk that students who could be studying three science subjects in their first year would encounter the same type of employability training and PDP input from each of the departments they were affiliated with. We felt that this could increase the chance that we might overload students with the subject, confuse them and even turn them off the whole idea of employability. As a result, the Faculties of Science began to devise and develop a way to work together to embed employability training faculty-wide.

How does it work in practice?

A pilot study carried out in biomedical sciences in 2003-04 identified three intervention points where it was felt that level 1 students might gain the most benefit from employability training. These were:

- after return of the first coursework assignment (November)
- after the first exams (January)
- before making level 2 module choices (May).

The topics chosen for the three training sessions planned tried to reflect the situations in which students would find themselves at various points in their first year. They were presented at the time of need, as it was felt that giving students all the information at once, for example at induction, could again cause overloading. The training topics are outlined below.

Taking Control (November)

Students discussed the differences between school/other study and university, how they were coping with them, and how work and outside commitments can have an influence - both positive and negative - on their studies. Students then reflected on their performance in their first piece of coursework and how they could improve in subsequent assignments. They went through the process of devising SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) goals to improve their study techniques and habits.

Opportunities (January)

In this second session, students started to identify how their experiences could be used to demonstrate their skills. They were encouraged to analyse, as a group, the skills involved in each other's jobs, outside activities and academic work so far. This allowed students to recognise that they shared some common skills in addition to those that were unique to each individual. Students then attempted to answer the experiential questions posed by the graduate Standard Application Form. This was to show them that, even at this early stage, they still had enough experience and skills to attempt to complete a graduate application form, though they would need to use the next three years to acquire an even richer set of skills and experiences to catch the eye of potential employers. There was a discussion as to how these questions could be used to form the basis of a CV. Students then wrote a short CV and emailed it to their tutor.

In addition, this session looked at opportunities available for part-time work and summer vacation work and how to secure this employment, identified resources and allowed students to share their own contacts and advice.

Making Choices (May)

Students discussed their level 2 module choice and the implications of this on the degree choices they would have at the end of level 2. Most students aim for entry into an honours course, but there is also the possibility of a three-year designated degree, or a five-year master's course (some with integrated work placement). This session was especially valuable for students who might have had more than one choice of career in mind, or for those whose choices might be limited for whatever reason.

All of the sessions were designed by academic staff working in conjunction with the Careers Service. The sessions were run by staff mentors from all three Science Faculties who already had an interest in employability.

Each staff mentor identified a student mentor from level 3 and level 4 classes to work with them. Although the student mentors came from a variety of backgrounds, they shared an enthusiasm and commitment to the project. They were highly motivated and had their own experience of work placement, fieldwork and internship, which they readily shared with the level 1 students. As one staff member commented:

> The final-year student mentors were a huge asset to the project, inspirational but 'normal' - and talking to 'real' students seemed important to the first years.

The student mentors had similar views, as one of them indicates here:

> I felt that I could talk to the students as a peer and got more out of them than perhaps a lecturer alone would have.

Each staff/student pair of mentors was then assigned two level 1 groups, each of around 10 students. The staff/student pairs met individually before each session and were also given the opportunity to go through the session with other pairs, working in small groups facilitated by the Project Officer and careers service staff. Each group was asked to give input to and feedback on the session; any improvements were then incorporated into the material for the 'live' sessions with the students.

The sessions were supported by a project website containing the session materials, tutor information, useful sites and additional resources. A Moodle site, the virtual learning environment (VLE) used by the University of Glasgow, has replaced the project website in the 2005-06 session to facilitate easier communication between participating staff and students and those delivering the programme. The new Moodle site will also be important in developing the PDP aspect of the project - a student portfolio made up by collecting exercises, reflections and activities related to the course, which can be maintained online by each student and accessed by staff tutors. The VLE is a potentially powerful tool which can be developed in the coming years to include journal entries and reflective documents written by the students themselves.

Further enhancements

The level 1 sessions in the 2005-06 academic year are split into five one-hour sessions which build on the areas students found most useful in the pilot. This also helps to maintain momentum across the academic year, as does the introduction of Moodle materials and background information and activities. Sessions are also being integrated more directly into the curriculum by using free lecture slots that exist in the timetable.

In addition, group sizes are larger. In the pilot, sessions with poorer attendance hindered the progress of the group and meant that staff were running sessions for small groups when it would have been a more sensible use of time to merge or cancel them. By switching to larger groups - facilitated in sub-groups by more mentors - if attendance is poor in a particular session, not all staff need to stay to run the workshop and the atmosphere of the group remains lively for the students. This allows for the benefits of small-group training while ensuring the best use of staff time.

Level 2 sessions are being piloted, covering internships (preparing students for our annual Internship Fair held in November), placement opportunities, networking and making choices for level 3. These sessions build on level 1 materials.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

The project has raised awareness of the employability agenda and the need to look at employability and PDP as inextricably linked processes and tackle them at an early stage in students' time at university. In addition, it highlights the need for departments, services and students to work together to get the best results.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

It takes time to build up a project like this and get staff and students engaged. In such a project, or any initiative of this kind, committed staff and student mentors are a must, to keep the momentum of the project going. At Glasgow University, the hard work of the Science Faculty Office in photocopying and so forth has also been of great support.

Initially, it was hoped that 350 students would take part in our pilot. In the event, 260 students originally expressed an interest, 120 took part in the first session, and 53 in the second session. Attendance was the biggest issue for us. Take-up figures were quite low compared to the initial expression of interest, but the students who took part were enthusiastic about the pilot and its roll-out. Staff and student mentors were committed and remained so, but level 1 students seemed reluctant to set time aside. Those students who did attend gave excuses for the others: too busy, too many other commitments; couldn't be bothered.

This project was always going to attract a small number of students, most of whom were interested in or savvy about the employability agenda anyway. We now have to look closely at the project in the longer term to see how we can attract the students who need more help, as it seems they can sometimes be so bogged down in the core curriculum that they cannot attend anything extra.

This is especially important, as feedback from those who attended was positive:

> I didn't really have any expectations, but it seemed to have a wider approach than just about jobs, which was great!

> I discovered other things I could do besides my degree to get a career I want.

> The sessions really helped put things in perspective and were informative.

> I realised that there's more opportunities after university with a particular degree than I thought.

> I got a lot of good ideas on how to build a CV and sell myself better by going out and doing work to gain skills.

> (Student evaluation quotes from the 2004-05 level 1 pilot)

We hope that this positivity will filter down through the years, and that numbers attending the course will grow. It is also hoped that some students who go through the programme and obtain appropriate experience (eg through a summer internship or a work placement year) will then return as student mentors.

We will build on the achievements of the pilot in future years. Any similar project starting up needs to recognise that it will take time to bed in and that evaluation will engender changes to the format and content of the training.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Partnership between academic staff and the Careers Service.

- Commitment of staff and student mentors.

- Ability of student mentors to share their own experiences with more junior students, encouraging them to take advice on board.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- discussing the possibility of delivering a similar module or some key sessions for your students in partnership with your careers service?

- how you might use student mentors to share their career management and PDP experiences with more junior students?

Links and further information

Moodle - University of Glasgow VLE: http://moodle.gla.ac.uk/moodle/

University of Glasgow Careers Service: www.gla.ac.uk/services/careers/

University of Glasgow Employability Strategy: www.gla.ac.uk/services/careers/employstrat.doc

University of Glasgow employability website: www.gla.ac.uk/employability/

Work-related learning

In recent years, there has been a marked trend for the majority of full-time students in higher education to participate in work experience during the academic year and during vacations. Yet some institutions have been relatively slow to encourage students to learn from this experience and reflect on the key skills and competences they acquire in the world of work. As the following four case studies on work-related learning illustrate, however, developments in course design and assessment have occurred across the curriculum, allowing students to make sense of their learning at work and link it explicitly with their learning on campus. This must surely enhance students' employability. Employers place importance on work experience itself, but they also give considerable weight to being able to reflect on learning, discuss it and transfer it across to new contexts.

Bringing work-related learning that may be initially ad hoc into the curriculum - recognising, valuing and accrediting it - is a significant feature in the case study by Graham. Her part-time employment module harnesses this type of working and gives it a learning and personal skills focus. By using a reflective learning log, the module enables students to reflect on and develop their employability skills as they apply them in the workplace.

The case study by MacLeod complements Graham's initiative nicely since it harnesses students' volunteering experiences. It also encourages students to pursue this option and find suitable placements. Again, the module helps students to build links between curriculum areas and their work-related learning and, by means of a reflective learning log and a series of tasks, encourages them to reflect on their experience and develop key skills. Both of these modules turn a potential weakness into a major strength. They transform types of work-related experience which could impinge negatively on students' other learning (because of the hours per week typically taken up) into an assessed activity that enhances students' on-campus learning and employability.

Verweij and Barclay's distinctive case study enhances employability by enabling postgraduate students to enter the world of e-journal publishing as authors, editors, reviewers, conference organisers and managers. It is student-led and managed and facilitates interdisciplinary and national/international networking. This is likely to greatly enhance the skills and interdisciplinary awareness of the postgraduates, many of whom are destined to be tomorrow's academics and researchers.

The fourth case study uses a residential location off-campus to maximise students' focus and commitment. Walkden's Oil Business Game is a unique, week-long residential field activity. Its exercises develop employability skills such as teamworking and interview techniques as well as practical awareness of discipline and business-specific processes.

These four impressive case studies are diverse in their scope, the curriculum areas they cover and the employability skills they develop. However, they all describe innovative approaches to work-related learning in ways which help us to consider their possible application or adaptation for the benefit of the students we work with. Students' employability can be enhanced significantly if we:

- develop modules and initiatives that draw on and recognise students' paid or voluntary work in order to harness and accredit learning

- can simulate work contexts in the classroom by means of games, projects or case studies that complement discipline areas and relevant business contexts

- initiate e-journals and/or conferences for postgraduates where they can practise the skills needed for academic life or beyond in a safe, supportive environment

- contact organisations such as UK GRAD and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres to draw on their ideas and expertise.

List of other work-related learning projects available on the Enhancement Themes website at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/

- Douglas Forbes and Mike Wrennall, *A Voluntary Work and Mentoring Scheme for Undergraduate Psychology Students*, Department of Psychology, Glasgow Caledonian University

- Judy Goldfinch, *Elective Modules*, Centre for Mathematics and Statistics, Napier University

- Amy Gradwell, *Industrial Placements within Degree Programmes*, School of Chemistry, University of St Andrews

- Jennifer Graham, *Live Projects: a Module to Allow Students to Research Elements of Business Activity within an Organisation*, School of Marketing and Tourism, Napier University

- Dr Linda Juleff, *Enhancing Employability Skills - Placement Portfolios*, School of Accounting and Economics, Napier University

- Lucy MacLeod, *Communication Skills for Programme Representatives*, Napier University

- Robert Mason, *Project Evaluation*, School of the Built Environment, Napier University

- Catherine Ogilvy, *Right Skills at the Right Time*, The Robert Gordon University

Developing Skills from Part-time Employment module

Institution
Napier University

Discipline (if applicable)
Any

Contact details
Module team: Jennifer Graham, Module Leader; Lynn Waterston, Placement Coordinator; Graeme Drummond, Senior Lecturer

Jennifer Graham, Senior Teaching Fellow
School of Marketing and Tourism
Napier University
Craiglockhart Campus
Edinburgh
EH14 1DJ

Tel: (0131) 455 4392
Email: j.graham@napier.ac.uk

Abstract

This module enables students to gain credit for developing skills, attributes and understanding from any area of part-time work agreed and verified with their employer and the University. The module is student-led and focused and provides a mechanism for students to reflect on and investigate the world of work, and to solve work-related problems. It gives students an opportunity to assess the skills they use in the workplace. It also enables them to develop a range of skills and attributes that employers look for in graduates, including teamworking, problem-solving, communication, giving and receiving feedback, negotiating, reflection and taking responsibility for their own learning.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

Any student at Napier University who is in appropriate part-time employment can choose this module as an elective or prescribed option on several of the Business School's programmes. It is seen as one way of helping students to take responsibility for their own learning, self-evaluate, develop and practise problem-solving and critical reflective skills, and plan for their future personal and professional development.

The programme provides a mechanism through which students can reflect on their employability and investigate the world of work and business practices through their part-time job. Students work towards a range of academic and personal work-related outcomes by undertaking a number of tasks, including keeping a reflective learning log. Examples of learning outcomes are: relating

selected/appropriate academic theory to practice; reviewing and proposing solutions to a workplace issue or problem; and critically reflecting on their personal development in their workplace.

Following the success of the pilot programme with 15 students, and subsequent great interest in it, the module is now being offered to 40 students in each of the two semesters this year.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

Research has indicated that a substantial and increasing number of students have part-time jobs (Harvey et al, 1998), and that this could contribute to their learning if 'harnessed' and given focus (Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, 2005).

From internal and external discussion, it was also clear that innovative ways had to be found to assess students' employability skills and attributes and introduce student progress files. It was felt that this new module would contribute by enabling students to develop high-level skills needed both as part of their lifelong learning and in line with industry's requirement for continuous learning from, and in, the workplace. The module could also facilitate collaboration with business, especially small and medium enterprises and not-for-profit organisations, who might not normally take students on full-time placements.

The module also enhances the suite of industry-related modules offered in the University, though it is not seen as a substitute for existing full-time vocational placements, nor is it subject specific. It focuses entirely on developing personal skills, but could be seen as a stepping-stone to a full-time subject-specific work experience placement. As anticipated, and as the pilot programme confirmed, the majority of student employment is in retail, food service, bar work and call centres.

The ability to cope with change, address issues and solve problems is also particularly relevant at a time of technological, economic and social transition. Those who want to make progress within their chosen careers and take advantage of different opportunities must be able to demonstrate their ability to learn new skills, adapt quickly to new ideas and take a creative approach to their work. This module gives students an opportunity to develop transferable skills which can be used in continuing personal and professional development planning.

How does it work in practice?

Before they enrol on the module, students must have a regular part-time job that is agreed and verified by the employer and can contribute to the module learning outcomes. The employer must return the University's health and safety checklist and confirm that they will complete the assessment and support the problem-solving exercise.

Students are expected to attend four two-hour workshops in weeks one, two, eight and 14 of the semester. Students' self-directed study makes use of a workbook and a problem-based learning exercise.

The first two workshops focus on the nature and structure of the module, introduce the concept of work-based learning and the reflective practitioner, explore a range of employability skills and attributes that students should develop, and highlight how this module requires a different approach to their learning. Time is given to clarifying the focus of the learning log. Problem-solving theory and techniques are discussed, along with the criteria for selecting and agreeing a workplace initiative or problem.

At the third, mid-module workshop, students outline and review their problem-solving initiative, discuss the assessment criteria for the poster presentation they will make, and critically reflect on one of their learning experiences from their log. In the final workshop, students present for assessment their problem-solving poster to tutors, peers and invited guests with an interest in this area.

The workbook introduces the concept and theory of independent learning and a range of tools and resources for reflective practice as well as problem-solving techniques and skills analysis. It sets out a range of structured tasks to be completed, including a review of skills used at work, channels of communication in the workplace, working in teams, what makes a good manager, giving and receiving feedback, and keeping a reflective learning log.

Students are expected to be objective in relating theory to practice in the tasks. They are required to identify and justify the development of a range of skills. They also complete a skills analysis matrix, giving examples of how these skills have been developed from the tasks and their reflective logs and summarising how they could be presented in their CV.

Students also receive weekly email bulletins from the module team. These support the critical reflective learning log and provide 'helpful hints' on completing the tasks. They also act as general reminders, especially for students who are not used to flexible learning and for those whose tendency is to leave work to the last minute. This module requires regular work.

Assessment consists of four elements.

1   A portfolio of activities and a reflective learning log (60 per cent) aimed at demonstrating an ability to reflect on and analyse experiences within the workplace and identify the development of employability skills and attributes.

2   The employer's assessment of performance in the workplace, completed on a structured appraisal form (10 per cent). It is the student's task to ensure that this is returned in good time to the University.

3   A problem-solving assessment in two parts, involving:

    a   the ability to identify and outline an issue, new initiative, task or problem from the workplace (10 per cent)

    b   a problem-solving application and poster presentation (20 per cent) designed to summarise and apply problem-solving theory to practice, with recommended solutions.

In the pilot, the poster assessment exercise exceeded the teaching team's expectations in terms of learning and students' enthusiasm. Using the formal assessment marking criteria, students assessed their own poster and one other on display. Their comments were constructive and showed insight and learning of the problem-solving process, and their marks were very close to those of the teaching team.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

This module adds to a suite of employability-focused elective modules which have been developed to widen student choice and enable students to link work and study and appreciate that they can enhance their profile through self-assessment. Feedback supports this view:

> I have learnt the importance of self-assessment in the development of skills, and how critical reflection on key events or experiences can take this development even further.
> Student

> The learning log has allowed me to look back at how I dealt with things earlier in the module and how I now deal with them. I can clearly see the improvements I have made throughout this module and how it has helped me in my employment. With the aid of reflection I was able to see what areas still need improvements.
> Student

> The poster presentation session was an exciting place to be. Not only were the students telling me how much they had learned in preparing their posters, they were now showing me how much they were still learning - as they compared their posters with those of others and were buzzing with 'what I'd do next time'!
> Educational Development Adviser

> I was impressed by the students' ability to talk about what they learnt from doing the module and how it had made them think about what was going on in their workplace.
> Dr Judy Goldfinch, guest appraiser at poster assessment

The feedback from employers has also been very positive. They have been interested in, and supportive of, the programme and the students. In some cases, employers see scope for further internal development.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

Administrative procedures need to be in place to process the employer aspects quickly and effectively. You also need to ensure that students have appropriate and confirmed jobs, as there is not time to seek and start new jobs within the academic timeframe.

The weekly emailed bulletins are useful in providing informal help and a reminder that there is regular coursework to complete.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Facilitates student learning and employability by tying the academic and 'real-world' contexts together to emphasise personal skills development.

- Enables students to reflect on and investigate business practices through part-time working and self-directed study.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- discussing the possibility of delivering a similar module as a core or elective option, depending on students' programmes?

- whether your course could harness and accredit any activities that students usually perform alongside but not within the curriculum, particularly part-time work and volunteering?

Links and further information

Harvey L et al (1998) *Work Experience: Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduates*, Birmingham: The Centre for Research into Quality (supported by the Department for Education and Employment and the Council for Industry and Higher Education)

Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education (2005) *Learning to Work: Enhancing Employability and Enterprise in Scottish Further and Higher Education*, Edinburgh: Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

Volunteering in the Community module

Institution
Napier University

Discipline (if applicable)
Any

Contact details
Lucy MacLeod, Head of Wider Access Development
East Craig
Napier University
Craighouse Campus
Edinburgh
EH10 5LG

Tel: (0131) 455 6145
Email: l.macleod@napier.ac.uk

Abstract

This elective module offers students the opportunity to gain academic credit for their learning from work in the community. Students are expected to complete about 45 hours of volunteering over one semester. They are assessed through a logbook containing a reflective diary and a series of tasks which ask them to relate theory to their volunteering experience. Students make a final oral presentation to staff. As well as tackling skills development, especially teamworking, the module considers the role of voluntary organisations and the concept of active citizenship. Students also explore how the skills they develop as volunteers are relevant to their future career aspirations. The module has been running successfully for 13 years.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

This is a compulsory (core) module for BSc Health Sciences students in year one; in each academic year, between 10 and 15 BSc students would take this as a core unit. Other students at Napier mainly take it as an elective, optional module in years one, two or three. As such, it is a 15-credit module and one of many free choice options; all programmes are required to build in space for 30 elective credits (usually two 15-credit modules). Students' free choice spans the range of modules offered by the University, as long as modules can be fitted into their timetables, meet any module prerequisites and do not duplicate core material.

The volunteering module runs in the second semester of each year to allow students time to arrange their volunteering during the first semester.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The module was introduced as part of the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative in 1992, looking at offering students an opportunity to explore skills in the context of the voluntary sector. It has been so successful that it has continued every year since then. The module built on the University's experience of giving credit for work-based experience, recognising that volunteering can be a similar preparation for the world of work to that of a paid sandwich placement.

There is strong evidence that employers value voluntary work on students' CVs. But in a climate where most students have to do part-time paid work to support themselves, they have less time for voluntary work. This module allows them to do the voluntary work as a part of their normal studies.

How does it work in practice?

Initially, the Module Leader received a lot of support from the Volunteer Centre in Edinburgh in helping students to find placements. She still has close links to the Volunteer Centre, which provides an external contributor for one of the module workshops. However, the Volunteer Centre now has an excellent website which helps students to identify the type of volunteering that would suit them. The Module Leader sees students before the module starts, to help them sort out what they want to do, but it is largely students' own responsibility to arrange the volunteering.

Students are given a detailed handbook containing reading and other tasks and attend a series of five workshops (three at the beginning of the module, one in the middle and one at the end). The workshops cover:

- introduction to the module - personal reflection, goal setting and reflective writing
- volunteering and the voluntary sector in Scotland
- teamwork and roles in teams
- thinking about citizenship
- presentation skills.

Only one member of staff is needed as only about 20 students a year take the module.

Issues and challenges we have faced include the following.

- Occasionally, a student has a negative volunteering experience which the Module Leader has to find a way of reassigning or supporting, though sometimes the best reflective diaries come from students who have found their experience challenging.
- How to assess a reflective diary was an issue at the start, but there was a sharing of experience and many opportunities to learn from other people working in this area.
- How to get men to pick the module - it is mostly chosen by women!

Enablers which have helped the module to become so successful are:

● the partnership with the Volunteer Centre, especially in the initial stages

● the University of Napier's elective system, which allows the University to offer this module to students in all disciplines.

A further module, Community Action Project, enables students to follow up this experience by carrying out a 'live' project (often a mini-research assignment) for a community/voluntary organisation. This module can be taken by BSc Health Sciences students in year two.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

The module adds to the range of opportunities available to students to develop their employability within the curriculum. Its success has led to the development of other elective modules which take a similar approach. These include Developing Skills from Part-time Employment (see previous case study), Communication Skills for Programme Reps, and Student Peer Mentoring.

Other feedback which supports the value of the module includes the following:

Students gain in confidence from learning that skills like working in uncomfortable group situations are something that you can learn to understand and improve.
Staff member

I found it great that we were able to do this as part of a university course.
Student

I really found that this module allowed me to gain first-hand experiences that were relevant in everyday life. Overall I found this module enjoyable and worthwhile. It has given me an insight into certain career pathways.
Student

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

It is important to contextualise the experience and look at some of the wider issues that working as a volunteer raises, as well as focusing on the skills. For example, as one student has said, 'I became part of a community and gained career insight by witnessing first hand what it takes to plan an event'. This allows you to give students a range of voices in which they can react to the experience, both academic and from a personal skills angle.

Also, you need the first semester lead-in to give students time to get set up as a volunteer ready for the second semester, particularly with the new disclosure regulations if they are working with children or vulnerable adults.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Encouragement of volunteering and reflection on experience by means of an elective module.

- Integration of student volunteering with employability skills and discipline-specific contexts.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- discussing the possibility of delivering a similar module for your students to enable them to explore their developing skills in the context of voluntary/paid work experience?

- exploring potential partnerships with organisations linked to the voluntary sector that promote student volunteering, eg on campus (the Student Union's community action office) or nationally (eg Volunteer Development Scotland)?

Links and further information

Boud D, Keogh R and Walker D (1985) *Reflection: Turning Experience Into Learning*, London: Kogan Page

Cottrell S (2003) *Skills for Success*, Houndmills: Palgrave

Gibbs G (1998) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Further Education Unit

Johns C (1999) Reflection as empowerment, *Nursing Inquiry*, 6, 241-249

Volunteer Centre Edinburgh: www.volunteeredinburgh.org.uk

Volunteer Development Scotland: www.vds.org.uk/

eSharp: electronic social sciences, humanities and arts review for postgraduates

Institution
University of Glasgow

Discipline (if applicable)
Social sciences, humanities and arts

Contact details
Sebastiaan Verweij, Editor
Fiona Barclay, Executive Editor

eSharp
16 University Gardens, Room 301
Glasgow
G12 8QL

Tel: (0141) 330 4597
Email: sharp@arts.gla.ac.uk

Abstract

eSharp is an online journal, created as both an e-publishing and training vehicle. It can be found at www.sharp.arts.gla.ac.uk/ A peer-reviewed journal for researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences, run by postgraduates for postgraduates, *eSharp* aims to provide a critical but supportive entry into the world of academic publishing for emerging academics the world over. It also trains postgraduate students in the various tasks that running an academic journal requires. From editing to project management, enhancing employability for those involved with the journal is a key aspect of the aims and objectives.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The nature and aims of academic postgraduate study and the make-up of the postgraduate body have changed much over recent years. The need for students to enhance their employability through skills which are embedded in the postgraduate experience is greater than ever if they are to succeed in the academic job market or in industry. *eSharp* is both an indicator of these changes and a leading example of how positive the response to them can be. As a student-led initiative, the success of *eSharp* continues to hinge on the efforts of those it serves and aids - the postgraduates of the academic world.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

The idea for *eSharp* came into being in July 2002, from the first University of Glasgow School of Arts and Humanities postgraduate conference. Such was the success of the conference that the

organisers felt that a journal not only could be established, but was also well overdue. As a result, a group of postgraduates formed the first editorial board and embarked on creating a new e-journal, with the aim of engaging the energies and creativity of their peers. The field of e-publishing, itself a relatively new concept, was a perfect avenue for a new idea. Since then, *eSharp* has published six issues and the next is underway.

How does it work in practice?

eSharp exists to provide a permanent publishing organ for postgraduate students of the University of Glasgow and beyond - submissions have been accepted and published from UK and international students. An increasing number of those directly connected with *eSharp* have found that it has brought with it challenges which extend well beyond the bounds of publishing.

> Joining *eSharp* opened up many more possibilities than I had expected when coming to Glasgow University. Apart from the many skills I gained (in web and publication), *eSharp* provides a stimulating environment for students that is vital to postgraduate student life, but often lacking. It is a shame I have to leave the project soon to commence my PhD in Helsinki; however, I fully plan to get a similar project off the ground there!
> Fabian Schuppert, research MPhil student

Now into its sixth 'generation' of participants, the editorial board currently consists of around 20 postgraduate students who manage a range of activities. To enable these postgraduates to gain skills and experience in the areas of greatest interest to them, the editorial board is structured into five departments, as follows:

- **publishing** - coordinates submissions and the editing process, including the crucial responsibility of managing the relationship with *eSharp*'s pool of 100 peer reviewers

- **web management** - maintains our 'shop window' and the gathering and analysis of data on our readership

- **events/promotion** - organises events to launch our new issues, and coordinates publicity both within the University and outside it

- **finance** - seeks to attract financial support and recognition for the work of the journal

- **training** - has the threefold responsibility of identifying and supporting the editorial board's own training needs; running training sessions for new *eSharp* peer reviewers; and sharing best practice with academics through bespoke training sessions and attendance at conferences on employability.

In addition to the specific skills required by each department, editorial board members also gain experience in using the 'softer' skills of teamwork, negotiation and influencing, presentation skills and time and people management - valuable preparation for life beyond the graduate experience. Although these essential skills are much sought after in industry, they are generally not directly promoted by academic departments or faculties. With this in mind, *eSharp* aims to provide a bridge

into a professional career by supplying an easily accessible training forum to all who are interested. Feedback has been positive.

> Working on *eSharp* has been a great experience. The process of peer reviewing submissions has helped me to develop critical judgement about my own writing, and I've learnt a lot from reading the research produced by other postgraduates. The training and events which *eSharp* organises have also helped me gain new skills, and working with other postgraduates has been a lot of fun! It's been great to see ideas being turned into reality and I think the experience will stand me in good stead in the future.
> Fiona Barclay, PhD student in French

The skills gained by postgraduates involved in the journal have already proved invaluable by its recent history. In the academic world, where the ability to attract funding awards is becoming increasingly important, *eSharp* was successful in attracting the maximum award of £2,000 for collaborative research projects, offered by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, to hold a one-day conference on the subject of Borders and Boundaries. This international conference, which ran with six parallel sessions and 100 delegates, also provided the *eSharp* board with the opportunity to gain further experience in event management, publicity and other skills.

eSharp is financially supported by the University of Glasgow's Arts and Social Sciences Faculties. Together with a significant grant successfully obtained from the Learning and Teaching Development Fund at the University, this means that the journal now has sufficient financial backing to allow it to expand into new areas.

During 2005, *eSharp* was able to increase the number of journal issues published from two annually to four, with the addition of two special editions highlighting selected conference proceedings. The first proceedings were from its own Borders and Boundaries conference and, encouragingly, the second came from a conference run by another group of postgraduates at Glasgow University, on the topic of Masks and Masquerading. *eSharp* also offers a range of training workshops to postgraduates in the University on a range of subjects, from academic editing to conference organising.

eSharp plans to continue encouraging the creation of similar ventures by sharing best practice with students from other institutions. It has recently been approached by other postgraduate communities (Edinburgh University, Queen's University Belfast) for advice and support in organising similar projects. In July 2005, *eSharp* organised and hosted a one-day conference on the future of postgraduate journal publishing. It was attended by representatives of 10 other postgraduate journals based throughout the UK, and featured a keynote address from Clare Morton, Senior Journals Editor at Oxford University Press. This successful day was a first step in building a nationwide network of students dedicated to high-quality postgraduate publishing and a strongly enhanced graduate experience.

The range of activities undertaken by *eSharp*, and the fact that the initiative is ongoing and requires particular attention to ensure successful continuity, was recognised recently by the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) awards. These are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and held in collaboration with the Higher Education Academy. *eSharp* was delighted to be highly commended by ESECT, in recognition of its success in embedding employability into the postgraduate experience, and looks forward to building on this recognition in its future activities.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

The *Joint Statement of the Research Councils'/Arts and Humanities Research Board's Skills Training Requirements for Research Students* (2001) stresses the need for universities to embed widely applicable employability skills into the graduate experience. *eSharp* is a prime example of just such a student-led initiative. With support from the Graduate Schools of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow, it offers an ongoing model of how to develop student employability without the requirement for significant resources in terms of finance or staff time. The opportunities for gaining a range of skills, from project and budget management to reviewing and editing, have already helped to prepare former *eSharp* members for the challenges of careers in academia and industry. As such, its success anticipates future developments in the postgraduate environment.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

In an increasingly resource-scarce environment, student-led initiatives such as *eSharp* are proving to be a significant asset to their institutions. With initial support and vision from staff, students are able to develop their own direction and, with encouragement, will embed fulfilment of their own training needs within the delivery of the project. Some limited financial support, together with access to dedicated facilities, is required if the initiative is to be sustained beyond the initial group of students involved.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Student led and managed.
- Employability enhanced in a way that respects and complements the disciplinary and interdisciplinary educational context.
- Effective vehicle for developing national and international networking and partnerships of postgraduate students in a variety of subject areas.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- advertising *eSharp* as an opportunity to students in the social sciences, humanities and arts in your institution?
- setting up a similar journal for students in your discipline, starting as a small-scale pilot?
- initiating a graduate conference for students in your institution?
- contacting UK GRAD (whose role is to help in embedding skills training into postgraduate research degrees) for information on the postgraduate skills training on offer?

Links and further information

Arts and Humanities Research Council: www.ahrb.ac.uk/

ESharp: www.sharp.arts.gla.ac.uk/

The Higher Education Academy and ESECT: www.heacademy.ac.uk/ESECT.htm

Joint Statement of the Research Councils'/Arts and Humanities Research Board's Skills Training Requirements (2001):
www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/skill_train_req.pdf

UK GRAD: www.grad.ac.uk/

Aberdeen University's Oil Business Game

Institution
University of Aberdeen

Discipline (if applicable)
Geology and petroleum geology

Contact details
Gordon Walkden
Department of Geology and Petroleum Geology
College of Physical Sciences
Meston Building
King's College
Aberdeen
AB24 3UE

Tel: (01224) 273455
Email: g.walkden@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract

The Aberdeen University Oil Business Game (the Game) combines the already highly integrative activity of a discipline-based field course with the skills-rich demands of team play and competition. It demonstrates how self-knowledge, teambuilding awareness, pooled skills, effective division of labour and good command of geology play a key role in business decisions. The exercise also focuses on how we cope with uncertainty and real deadlines in a competitive environment. The Game demonstrates how knowledge adds value. Despite its serious intent, which is to give students employability skills and provide drive and focus for the field course, its pursuit is great fun for all.

In what context does this initiative/project/practice take place?

The Game takes advantage of the unique atmosphere of an optional week-long off-campus residential field course. It links a familiar learning activity with an immediate sense of 'need to know'. Fifteen to 30 level 4 and MSc students take part and work, eat and sleep engaged in the Game. The separation from daily reality maximises students' focus and 'buy-in', and the extended contact also enables activities to evolve, skills to interact and the unexpected to happen. Realistic issues emerge and there is time for resolution.

What was the rationale for introducing this initiative/project/practice?

Professionally accredited degree programmes establish a mechanistic link with employability, but in practice their required elements can fail to connect students with workplace reality. Exercises can develop specific employability skills, and delivery by professionals raises credibility, but problems remain of ensuring focus and buy-in by students.

Aberdeen is a European centre for hydrocarbon exploration and our focused undergraduate degrees reflect this. The Game evolved out of a field course focused on onshore equivalents of North Sea source and reservoir formations. It made sense to develop this firstly into a series of oil-related exercises and then into an integrated, competitive game that mirrored the demands made on professional geologists.

How does it work in practice?

Individuals play as members of a pair and also as members of a six-person team (company). They earn 'cash' as individuals and invest it in companies (both their own and others) through a simulated stock market. Company share values are set by the companies themselves at the outset (flotation), and can then rise and fall according to the popularity of the stocks and the success of the companies. The central part of the exercise simulates a hydrocarbon licensing round where exploration/production blocks in an oil prospective region (eg the North Sea) are put up for competitive tender. Companies use capital received from investors to assess, bid for and develop hydrocarbon prospects, hopefully at a profit. The blocks are precisely defined, based on real local geological maps, and involve the actual rocks and structural features that are visited and examined in detail at various stages in the field course.

The development costs of fields and the ultimate recovery figures are, of course, imaginary. After all, the rocks being examined are now at the surface rather than a couple of kilometres underground, but figures are based on reasonable calculations made by the 'regulators' using exactly the same methods as the teams. Key tools in the Game are three specially built spreadsheets. One records all individual share dealings and simulates stock market movements, another provides a means of integrating reservoir characters and volume to determine value, and the third calculates profit and losses made by companies after successful bids for blocks, exploration and production of any hydrocarbons.

The results are calculated through the stock market spreadsheet on the last evening of the course. The winners are the team that makes the best profit through exploration and production from their block portfolio. There is also a prize for the individual who makes the best profit through a wise choice of stock market investments in the companies.

The Game is fully integrated with daily geological itineraries, and most of the supporting research, value calculation and fieldwork planning is done in the evenings - often (and without encouragement) into the small hours of the night. As one student pointed out in his fieldwork submission, 'it was blatantly obvious that the whole class were getting into it due to the indescribable tension felt before the final results [of the competition] were announced.'

An outline of the programme content is as follows.

Day 1: Outline and rules of the Game, publication of personal CVs.

Day 2: Interviews, team building, allocation of personal capital.

Day 3: Company flotation, the stock market, buying shares.

Day 4: More share dealing, allocation of consultancy work to companies.

Day 5: Microsoft PowerPoint presentations by companies, fees to companies, exploration/production licence blocks are revealed.

Day 6: Team research, evaluating blocks.

Day 7: Bids for block licences by tender, allocation of blocks, calculation of profits/losses, stock market results. Individual and team winners announced, prizes.

By their own account, students learn a lot about their own personal and interpersonal skills and often appreciate for the first time how the application of good scientific skills can inform business decisions. Evidence for the ways in which their employability skills are exercised and developed is usually contained in a series of daily notes, reports and reactions which students are expected to maintain. For example, quotes from students' notes about the Game include the following:

> The value of these [discipline-related] skills was emphasised by having to make business decisions and presentations based on data and information gathered in the field in a fun, competitive scenario.

> The fact that it was a competition made me want to try and understand and work on the geology.

> The Game was handy in bringing things like the cost of development and exploration into the loop rather than just looking for a decent reservoir and not thinking about other factors.

> It took us through the important steps in oil exploration and on the way armed us with important skills such as CV writing, interview techniques, producing presentations, experience with working to real deadlines and working in a competitive environment, all of which will be needed for whatever we choose to do after graduation.

The overall exercise is assessed by submission of the reports and notes mentioned above, but relative success in the Game is not part of the assessment. Instead, we look for a structured, responsive approach to the exercise, including evidence that students have developed and used their geological knowledge during the progress of the Game. What counts is the evidence of input and added value that students can demonstrate. Students are required to submit:

1   a brief summary of the most interesting and educationally valuable aspect of the field course (which could be anything that takes their fancy)

2   their own versions of the various documents and reports they had to prepare or use for the purposes of calculation during the course

3   their field notes completed during the course

4   a daily diary plotting the development of the Game, including personal reactions, comments and compiled notes.

The learning outcomes for the Game are that students should have gained:

- advanced geological knowledge, both general and specific

- knowledge of how information can inform commercial judgements and create added value

- enhanced skills, especially in job-seeking, self-management, communication, numeracy, problem-solving, decision-making and teamworking

- experience of the conflicts between fact-finding, uncertainty and short deadlines in a competitive environment

- awareness of the roles of business organisations, stock markets and central and local government in relation to resource exploitation

- awareness of the effects of business decisions on people and the environment.

The Game always unfolds differently, and pinpointing the causes of both successful and unsuccessful dynamics is sometimes difficult. Personal clashes are the biggest danger, but we preach teamwork and professionalism to circumvent these.

The Game needs staff on a ratio of 1:10 because of the fieldwork. This widens the expertise available and the value of discussion.

How has this initiative/project/practice helped to progress the employability agenda forward in your institution?

It has given us a very clear perspective on the range of skills that are relevant in the context of employability, and a great deal of experience in developing these skills while retaining students' full engagement. So often when we introduce focused skills training it lacks contextualisation and fails to motivate students. They then start to perceive a gap between skills training and discipline focus. The Game is a wonderful way to bridge this gap.

What suggestions would you give to others hoping to introduce a similar initiative/project/practice in their own institution?

The real downside of this type of exercise is the time it takes to create and test it; our evolutionary approach has minimised the impact of this. However, if the Game were adopted elsewhere as a 'oner', successful transfer would probably depend on attending an actual iteration of it. I have briefly discussed increasing the Game's transferability with the Higher Education Academy (Geography, Earth and Environmental Science) Subject Centre. They would like to encourage this and

development of the generic (ie non area-specific or even geology-specific) components into a package that could be grafted onto another scenario, if possible. It is also worth noting that during the BSE crisis, when fieldwork had to be curtailed, we ran the Game successfully as a four-day lab exercise.

The most important generic components are:

- practice in writing a CV for a market

- being interviewed for a job

- teambuilding and setting up a functional team from scratch

- working in a highly visible environment where performance affects others

- contributing to group dynamics and having to communicate effectively

- working to a tight schedule and for (simulated) monetary reward

- seeing how knowledge adds value

- seeing how the business world is financed.

The Game is therefore not a single package that has to be adopted in its entirety. It contains many ideas and components that are flexible and independent, but could be made to work convergently, with a single and climactic outcome.

Key features/strengths of this case study

- Integration between discipline-specific and employability skills, contextualised for students in a fun and engaging way.

- The element of competition, which adds fun to the experience and drives academic learning.

Ideas for adaptation

Why not consider:

- whether you could design a game that would suit your discipline and integrate the business context, eg by using the stock market?

- contacting your Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for ideas?

- how a field trip could add an extra dimension to your course?

- if a field trip is out of the question, whether you could simulate a work context in the classroom? For example, see *Context - Enterprising Intrapreneurship Case Studies*, developed by Pauline Kneale and Sam Aspinall, School of Geography, University of Leeds; these are materials intended to put academic learning into real-world contexts. A series of games and exercises that can be used and adapted for all disciplines can be found at: www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/courses/other/casestudies/

Links and further information

For more information on the Oil Business Game see:

Walkden G (2001) A field-based 'Oil Business Game' for Honours geology students, *Planet* (*Journal of the Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences Subject Centre, GEES*) 1, 8-11

Higher Education Academy Subject Centres home page:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/SubjectNetwork.htm

Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences:
www.gees.ac.uk/