# ASET Annual Conference 2007: Proceedings of the 2007 Placement and Employability Professionals' Conference

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**ASET**

*Integrating Work and Learning*

# ASET Annual Conference 2007

## Proceedings of the 2007 Placement and Employability Professionals' Conference

**UWIC Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff**
**4th – 6th September 2007**

**ASET CONFERENCE**

14th Annual Conference
UWIC Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff
4th – 6th September 2007

# ASET Annual Conference 2007

## Proceedings of the 2007 Placement and Employability Professionals' Conference

**Editor: Keith Fildes**

# ASET Annual Conference 2007

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## WORKSHOP RESEARCH PAPERS

**FOREWORD**

## *FOREWORD*

It is with great pleasure that ASET, the Work-Based and Placement Learning Association, presents the proceedings of the annual Placement and Employability Professionals' Conference held at UWIC, Cardiff, from 4th – 6th September 2007.

These Proceedings have gone to print much later than we would have liked, the twin causes being ASET's office move, necessitated by the end of the lease on the old premises, and late receipt of content from some presenters. For whatever reason, we apologise, and trust that this will act as a gentle reminder that in these matters we are sometimes limited by the pace of the slowest; please get your material in promptly!

The conference coverage continued to reflect ASET's expansion of interest from Sandwich courses alone – though these continue to be at the centre of so much of our work – towards the broader "Integrating Work and Learning".

In response to feedback, sessions continued to offer the rich mix of presentation, involvement and discussion that is coming to be one of the hallmarks of ASET conferences.

And I know that everyone enjoyed the social events at Cardiff Castle and the Millennium Stadium.

This year was the 25th anniversary of the establishment of ASET and it was good to have the opportunity at the Jubilee Dinner to pay tribute to Malcolm Brewer and Mary Harris, who did such stalwart work in the developmental years of ASET in the early 80s.

On behalf of all who attended, I should like to pay tribute to the Conference Committee, particularly Sarah Flynn the Chair, and Keith Fildes the ASET Administrator who, working largely behind the scenes before and during the conference, made all this feasible.

At the time of writing the 2008 Conference in Plymouth is imminent and I look forward to seeing you there.


Dr John Wilson
ASET Chairman

# CONFERENCE WELCOME

### ASET 2007
### The Placement and Employability Professionals' Body

4th - 6th September 2007
UWIC Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### Conference Welcome

Dr John Wilson
- ASET Chairman
- University of Central Lancashire

Dr Colin Turner
- ASET working party; Managing Placements with IT and Online
- OPUS team, University of Ulster

Sarah Flynn
- ASET Conferences working party
- University of Hertfordshire

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### John Wilson

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### Colin Turner

OPUS
online placement university system

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### ASET moving forward

- 25 years on, ASET is taking stock and reflecting
- Proposals for a few changes

- In conference pack "ASET Consultation: Strategic Review"

- ASET is an **educational charity** run by **volunteer** work-based learning **practitioners** who share **support, advice, guidance** and **representation** with all professionals who work in the sector; currently over **1300** academic and administrative placement staff at **90** higher and further education institutions receive regular information

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### Why the change?

- The ASET Executive, and its co-opted members have swollen in numbers over the past few years and are spread across England and Northern Ireland

- ASET was conceived to support and promote sandwich education and training; clearly this picture has broaden over the years with a greater variety of work integrated learning available through higher education in the UK

- "Put the house in order" – to make the organisation **more fit for purpose, more dynamic** and to enable people to **actively engage** with a sense of **intention and progress**

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### Vision and mission

- Our vision is for **all** higher education **students** to have access to **high quality, well supported** opportunities to undertake periods of appropriate **work** integrated with their higher education qualification

- The mission of ASET is to **promote the concept** of higher education programmes that integrate periods of academic study with periods of appropriate work to those whom are involved in the process; namely prospective students and their families, HE students, educational staff, employers, professional and statutory regulatory bodies and central Government departments. The **complementary** aspect of the mission is to **support** those involved in the provision of programmes which **integrate** work and learning

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

### Values

- Support and development for staff

- Effective employer engagement

- Quality experience for students

- Good practice, research and innovation

- Collaboration and representation

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

## Aspirational aims

- To **promote** the concept of HE programmes which integrate work and study to society in general and particularly amongst employers, educators, Government, students and prospective students
- To **encourage** co-operation and good working practices between employing organisations and institutions of higher education
- To **enhance** the quality of HE programmes which integrate work and study and to improve the effectiveness of both their academic and work-based elements
- To **provide** a forum to stimulate, discuss and disseminate ideas and information on this kind of education to all interested parties
- To **work** with other appropriate bodies with similar aims within the UK, EU and worldwide

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

## Proposed changes

- The first major change proposed is the introduction of a deputy position for each of the three formal Officer roles on the Executive i.e. Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary; and in order for an Executive meeting to be quorate; all Officers or their Deputies should be present
- ASET engages with employers and professional bodies but their involvement on the Executive Committee has always been a challenge. There is also a group of people who have been engaged with ASET for many years and have much expertise to offer but who want to step back from the Executive to enable new people to become involved.
- As such, it is proposed that a group is created to sit alongside the Executive with an overarching purpose of providing advice and being available for consultation on strategic business and important operational matters – the adjunct group

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

## Proposed changes

- The next proposed change is for the remaining members of the Executive to be comprised of the President, the convenors (or designate) of the working groups of the Committee, and the convenor (or designate) of the adjunct consultative group
  - Staff Development & Events
  - Membership & Marketing
  - Research & Publications
  - Best Practice & Legal

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## Consultation

- These proposals are here for the wider ASET membership to discuss. Please feel free to talk to any member of the Executive about these proposals
- The 2007 conference is a sounding platform for these ideas, and if you have others of your own then please pass them on
- 2007/08 will see the formal consultation, and then the realisation of changes, and will be an exciting year for ASET – marking the start of the next 25 years in supporting work integrated learning in higher education

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

## ASET 2007

- We've kept the highlights – networking, information exchange, workshops, visits, eating out and the quiz!
- We have increased your opportunities to talk to colleagues by the introduction of the plenary sessions
- Specialist themed sessions on topical issues; health and safety and employer engagement
- Speakers from agencies at the forefront of researching and influencing work based learning; Professor Freda Tallantyre, HEA; Dr Geoffrey Copland, President of ASET; Hugh Tollyfield, DfES and HEFCE; Brenda Little, CHERI at the Open University

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## Throughout the conference...

- Check your arrangements for the visits (Stadium or Castle) and for the dinner at Cardiff Bay (Mimosa or Pearl of the Orient)
- If you need a hand, contact a member of the conference team – Keith, Amanda and Rebecca
- Find a member of the ASET Executive

**Most of all...**
- Talk, listen and be enthused
- Swap ideas and share your thoughts
- Eat, drink and be friendly

*25 years of promoting placements and supporting practitioners*

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

## *Freda Tallantyre, Higher Education Academy*

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**From placements to work-based learning to workforce development : new priorities, new markets, new pedagogies, new systems.**

Professor Freda Tallantyre
Senior Associate, HE Academy
ASET Annual Conference
Cardiff : 4-6 September 2007

The Higher Education Academy

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**Whither work-based learning?**

- Work placements integrated into programmes
- Work experience outside formal programmes
- Practice elements of professional courses
- Negotiated work-based learning programmes

Trajectory is away from first two towards last two.

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**What is driving the agenda?**

Global economic integration
  ► China and India will be much more important than the UK
Raising UK productivity and competitiveness to create a sustainable economy by 2020
Rapid demographic change
  ► There will be a 'greying' workforce who are least likely to train
  ► The number of 17-18 year olds will have decreased significantly

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**Leitch Report : Dec 2006**

Poor at basic skills : 17th of 30 in OECD
Deficiency in intermediate skills : 20th of 30
Better at HE but still 11th of 30
Variations between sectors (e.g. utilities v hotels and catering)
Adult skills
Economically valuable skills
(What about graduate skills?)

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**Leitch Implementation Plan July 2007 : Implications for HLS**

- 1.9 million more people with level 3 qual by 2020
- Free Advanced Apprenticeship programmes for 19-25
- Statutory participation age up to 18?
- 12 National Skills Academies by 2008, & 1 for each major sector
- 40% adults to have level 4 + qual by 2020 (up from 29%), and 36% by 2014
- Public funding for T2G adult demand led learning doubles by 2010/11, and employers contribute 50% of that in addition
- HEFCE co-funds 5000 ASNs p.a. for next few years
- New universal adult careers service in England
- QCF will reflect only quals which meet standards set by SSCs, and also accredited in-house training programmes

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**Typology of workforce development**

Individual driven

| | |
|---|---|
| Investing in learning to improve personal performance in securing new work | Investing in learning to improve personal and professional performance in existing work/ organisation |
| Investing in learning to bring knowledge and skills into the organisation | Investing in learning to improve the organisation's performance and competitiveness |

Informal relationship (not employed) — Formal relationship (employed)

Organisation driven

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Provider identifies needs | ⟺ | Employers and learners identify needs |
| Develops generic knowledge and skills | ⟺ | Develops applied knowledge and skills |
| Creates new knowledge | ⟺ | Transfers existing knowledge |
| Work relevant | ⟺ | Work focused |
| Fixed schedule of delivery | ⟺ | Flexible schedule of delivery |
| Learning away from the work place | ⟺ | Learning in the work place |
| Support is programme centred | ⟺ | Support is learner centred |
| Learner support provided by provider | ⟺ | Learner support is provided by the employer |
| Wholly recognised by professional body | ⟺ | May not be recognised by professional body |
| Assessment focuses on knowledge | ⟺ | Assessment focuses on knowledge and skills |
| Provider undertakes assessment | ⟺ | Employer and/or learner contributes to assessment |
| Wholly accredited by provider | ⟺ | May not be accredited |
| Evaluate quality of learning experience | ⟺ | Evaluate impact on learner development and organisation |

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*agendas/expectations of HE- expertise*

Societal

Widening Participation/access
Sector Skills
Graduate Employability
Higher Education Targets
Professional Quals
Life Long Learning
Workforce Development
Foundation degrees

Economic Growth
Business Competitiveness
Knowledge Transfer
IP exploitation/spinout companies
Regional Development and regeneration

Teaching — Research

Graduates
Post Graduates
Higher Education Targets
Learning programmes
Intellectual Capital

Academic Research
International research base
Discipline advancement
New knowledge
World Class Knowledge Base

Academic

Dr M. Wedgwood, Manchester Metropolitan University

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## HEI characteristics for success in workforce development

- Flexibility and Responsiveness
- Connected to the market - staff & institution
- Customer focused/orientated
- Variable delivery methods
- APEL, ability to map skills and experience in the workplace
- Credit framework based activity
- Well connected to supply chain and partners
- Able to integrate occupational and academic skills

## Placements : Issues and Solutions

| | |
|---|---|
| Place in programme | Managed and timetabled |
| Inexperience of learners | Group preparation |
| What is the content? | Generic LOs and LCs |
| Learning Facilitation | Mentors, academic directors of studies, group debriefings |
| Recording | Reports, portfolios, artefacts |
| Assessment | Academic and external examiners |
| Variable quality | Academic vetting & oversight |
| Variable supervision | Guidance documentation, websites, academic oversight |

## Work experience : Issues and solutions

| | |
|---|---|
| Control and selection | Academic selection bureau |
| Non-integration with programme | PDP/reflective tools |
| | Validated shell modules |
| | Generic credit |
| Learning | As placements |
| Assessment | As placements or non-accredited |

## Practice elements : Issues and solutions

| | |
|---|---|
| Design | Specific LOs and curriculum designed in conjunction with the professions |
| Teaching | Professional facilitators/ joint appointments |
| Staff development | Accreditation/associate lecturer status for professional staff |
| Learning | Individual supervision & group teaching sessions in practice |
| Assessment | Assessment of performance in situ, using CCTV etc to record for externals |

## Negotiated work-based learning : Issues and solutions

| | |
|---|---|
| Design | Reflective LC under academic supervision, sometimes accred |
| | APEL incorporated |
| | Flexible accredited components |
| | Company training accredited |
| Curriculum | Workplace is site of knowledge construction |
| | Tripartite negotiation |
| Multi-disciplinary content | Generic academic supervisor |
| | Workplace mentor/supervisor |
| | Specialist contributions, virtual |
| | Learning cohorts |

## NWBL : Issues and solutions

| | |
|---|---|
| Approval | Validated framework for rapid response |
| | Mechanisms like independent study and research students |
| | Academic panel "validates" LC and approves title and level of award |
| Learning support | Electronic tools |
| | Flexible learning resources |
| | On-line dialogue, text, discussion boards, wikki, blog |

## NWBL : Issues and solutions

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment | Reports, portfolios, journals |
| | Artefacts/tools produced for the workplace |
| | Generic supervisor |
| | Specialist staff and module boards |
| | Specialist field staff as external examiners, in conjunction with generic academic examiner |
| Accreditation of in-company training | Reasonable checks, e.g. validation, moderation, programme reports |

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

*Geoffrey Copland, ASET*

It is a pleasure to be speaking to you as ASET celebrates its 25th anniversary.  When it was established by some far-sighted people in 1982, higher education was simpler than it is now and sandwich education was a specific way of introducing the world of work into degree courses.   Since then ASET has evolved, changing its title and logo to reflect more ways to include work and employability into the curriculum.  The emphasis is now on work-based learning in whatever form that takes and ASET has done excellent work in raising standards, opening eyes and developing good practice.   Education moves in fashions, and someone who has been around as long as I have seen initiatives come and go, and come again, often called something slightly different to indicate new origins though they are usually tackling old problems.  Employability has always been an issue for employers and one can go back a century to find concerns of the limited number of graduate employers about the quality of output from universities.

I want to look at where higher education is today and where it might go in the next decade, and that raises in my mind how ASET will respond and take on new facets of its work.  These days of course the buzz word is "Skills".

When I spoke last year the big uncertainty was the impact of the new tuition fee arrangements for full time undergraduates.  Recruitment overall was on target, although there were differential effects in some institutions.  UCAS applications were well up this year and reports of this year's recruitment suggest that numbers are holding up well.  Each August the media carry stories about higher education, some better researched than others and some frankly rubbish.  This year the stories that caught my eye, apart from the usual collection of league tables and arguments about A level grades, were stories of escalating student debt, the value of non-degree education versus degrees, and the Tax Payers Alliance story of the 400 degree subjects they regard not suitable for public funding.  Do they realise that many of those degrees are directly relevant to the needs of developing economic activity and often contain significant work-based learning elements?

We have a new Prime Minister, one of whose first acts was to reorganise several departments of government, abolishing the Department for Education and Skills and introducing the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the closely related Department of Children Schools and Families and the Department of Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform.  I think that these changes are significant and not just rearranging the deck chairs. And we have increasingly divergent approaches to higher education in Scotland and Wales.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown commissioned the Review entitled "Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for All in the Global Economy".   The government response, published after Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, was entitled "World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England".  Is there any significance in this change of title? Clearly this government attributes great importance to skills and enterprise, as key drivers for national economic success in the next decade but the Select Committee on Education and Skills in a report published last month questioned a number of assumptions that underlie the Leitch Report and the government response.

To set the context for my comments I shall summarise some of the current challenges facing higher education.  These include
- the review of the £3000 tuition fee cap in 2009 - perhaps a more general review of higher education - already Universities UK , IPPR and others are looking at long term issues
- the opening up of the higher education sector to private and international providers
- Full economic costing of research and teaching
- RAE 2008 and the future of research assessment and funding
- yet another change of method of funding HEIF the "third leg" of funding
- the changing nature of employers' demands for graduates
- government steer for HEFCE to seek greater engagement of employers in the design and delivery of degree courses

- foundation degree awarding powers in FE Colleges and steps towards greater local certification at 16-19 levels
- new Vocational Diplomas as alternatives to conventional A levels
- increased emphasis on Skills and the rise of Sector Skills Councils
- increased levels of accreditation of higher education programmes by Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies
- greater emphasis on enterprise and employability including CETLs in various aspects of work integrated learning
- the Burgess Report on Degree Structures and opportunities to re-visit the idea of credit accumulation and transfer with individually accredited modules or elements
- And then there will be a general election probably in 2009.

I could sum this up as continual change, increased competition, greater diversity and greater pressure for universities to meet demands of markets from students, employers, research communities, businesses and the international community.

Although there has been competition for years between universities, it has been relatively minor. In future that competition will become more aggressive. Not only will we have the current players but we undoubtedly will see segments of the market opening up to private sector degree awarding institutions often backed by overseas investors who see higher education as a long term steady option. This is likely to be in the professional development market in high demand subjects where employers and students have deep pockets. We already have elements of this in London.

Many of my former colleagues in universities still see the skills agenda and the potential growth of employer involvement and funding in higher education as merely a side show that applies only to a subset of higher education institutions. They may be taking the long view that governments and their initiatives come and go and so they can be politely kicked into the long grass while universities go on for ever. I think that this time they may be overly optimistic.

I have no doubt that HE is entering a period of change which is likely to be more far-reaching and rapid than the changes of the past few decades. This will affect all of us.

Many areas of these changes should be of direct interest to ASET. Students are undoubtedly more driven by not just studying for a degree but by subsequent employment. Many still have unrealistic expectations that the possession of a degree alone will open up doors. Employers are becoming more strident about their needs and their criticisms of the current graduates. Employers themselves have a patchy record in providing development, too often letting the short term be the enemy of the longer term. We are in an intensively competitive global community where the productivity and creativity of our society is being challenged and so we have to move to higher levels of skill and make sure these are up to date.

Government has a clear view that higher education is important to the economy and is looking to universities to help meet the higher level skills gaps and to contribute to the UK international competitiveness. So the skills agenda is no longer just the preserve of the school and FE sector. However, the major emphasis in Leitch and the government response is still on low level skills, rightly in my view. Work-based and work-integrated learning are now much more talked of in higher education. Many universities have realised the importance of the employability agenda but are unsure how to approach it whilst maintaining their traditional approach to degree course provision and teaching. Some have practised work integrated learning for decades without realising it, e.g. medical degrees.

It is interesting to reflect on the changing nature of the discussion on employability and graduate employment. Too often the self appointed pundits do not recognise the changes that are occurring in our universities. It is too easy to take one's own experience and impose that on one's evaluation of higher education in 2007. We now talk about integrating work and learning, of employability, enterprise, work-based learning, credit accumulation, accreditation of experiential learning. Our pundits talk of graduate level jobs and traditional academic "hard" subjects, often, like the Tax Payers Alliance, referring disparagingly of vocationally oriented subjects as "soft or mickey mouse" degrees, though of course Mickey Mouse is a highly successful world brand. And our pundits do not accept assessment other than traditional 3-hour unseen exams, for example group work on projects, as having

any value. Yet these same people tell us they value communication and team working as key attributes of graduates

As an organisation, ASET stands for integrating work and learning, which has progressed from being a rather fringe activity in a few higher education institutions or subjects to one which is coming into the mainstream with encouragement from our paymasters. The vocabulary and method of delivery has changed. We have moved on from traditional sandwich degrees and the professional elements of practical training required for some professions e.g. medicine, teachers and architects.

Now most full-time undergraduates undertake some form of part-time paid work to help meet their expenses and a gratifyingly increasing number undertake voluntary work, perhaps by recognition of the importance of this for CV building. The students may benefit beyond just the income that they earn, but there is the danger of the student spending too much time, often at unsocial hours, just earning cash to the detriment of their studies. There are debates as to whether these activities are deemed to be of any value in terms of academic credentials. So let us look at this a bit more. The student gains some skills from these experiences though they may not realise it. The traditional complaint from the employer is that modern graduates lack any sense of customer care, team working, communication skills and ability to be responsible for their own behaviours. Yet for many students it is through part-time work that they learn these skills, otherwise their jobs will be very short-lived indeed. So this has value beyond the immediate pay. Some HEIs have found ways of assessing these skills and accrediting them. But do the employers who are looking at CVs value any such credit or the experience of bar working?

For many years some HEIs have provided part-time modes of study for students who are already in employment, at both u/g and p/g levels. Traditionally these students either study in their own time or if they are lucky, will get some form of time allowance from the employer. Even luckier is the student who gets some fee payment from the employer. The classroom based learning will usually take at the HEI but with increasing emphases on project work and on forms of distance delivery, more learning may be taking place in the employer's premises, officially or unofficially, followed by some intensive university based activities.

Now we have Foundation Degrees, two year full-time or longer part-time, with a clearly defined requirement for significant employer engagement. There are different models for these, and the questions of quality control and accreditation have come to the fore with a significant number of such degrees being given limited confidence by QAA, presumably because of issues arising from assessment of delivery and standards in non-traditional ways. Foundation Degree awarding powers for FE colleges have certainly excited the university sector.

I was pleased to see that Leitch emphasised that the skills demand for the future was not just initial skills but the need for regular updating at all levels including Level 4 and above. This may lead to the provision of directly targeted specialist updating and up-skilling short courses. They may be necessary for individuals for retention of professional body recognition. They may be delivered in the work place or in university premises. These are unlikely to be credit rated but there is an increasing trend in this direction. It is said that HEIs have only about 5% of this big market. It is not entirely clear to me that this is a sound figure as much of what is delivered at HE level is not funded through the public purse and thus unlikely to be captured by the normal HESA statistics. However, there is a big market for us which we are not exploiting nearly enough. Why is this? Are we too expensive, too rigid in our requirements, inflexible, too slow to respond or just not marketing our offerings effectively? Or are we just not interested? It does not figure in League Tables so for some there is no incentive to divert energies in this direction, particularly if employers turn out to be fickle customers.

The question we need to address is whether we have the right infrastructure, policies and attitudes to respond to the challenges. Government policy as ever is subject to rapid change and seeks rapid responses to policy objectives which leave many of the providers confused as to what to prioritise. And we are faced with increasingly testing accountabilities, including the very important one of health and safety on fieldwork and employer based activities.

In addition to ASET, there are many organisations that have sprung up apparently to help to deliver this agenda. We have established universities and FE colleges, though not all see the skills agenda and WBL to be part of their mission or tradition. There is a range of private providers, some of long

standing, some seeing a market in which to make a quick profit. We have Sector Skills Councils, Sector Skills Development Agency, shortly to be replaced by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, Regional Skills Councils, London Skills and Employment Board, Regional Development Agencies, Train to Gain, Foundation Degree Forward, ASET, UVAC, EDGE, Higher Education Academy, and the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in WBL established by HEFCE. Then there are Sector Skills Agreements, Skills Pledges, Skills Accounts, National Skills Academies, I am sure there are more in this alphabet soup.

The questions for ASET and those working in higher education integrating work and learning are what impact or influence might all these agencies and those who are passionately committed to their bit of this broad agenda have on higher education and its delivery.

We hear from employers that they want highly educated and skilled, well motivated and adaptable employees. There are continual complaints, often supported by little hard evidence, that modern graduates are lacking in these qualities. HEIs are aware of this and seek to offer in a variety of ways some of the "employability skills" in their offerings. Some of this is grounded in various forms of work integrated learning but is this what employers really seek? Traditional recruitment patterns suggest that the major employers pay less attention to such factors than to A Level points score and university attended. Such attitudes lead to a polarisation of attitudes to WBL and similar initiatives and to the universities that deliver these. There are of course other, less traditional employers, often smaller and newer organisations that really do value the skills and attitudes from WBL. We encounter other perceptual barriers to innovation. Graduate employment is no longer seen as a sufficient discriminator of employment but we find leagues tables and performance measures now differentiating between "graduate" and "non-graduate" jobs, largely to the detriment of those universities and colleges who are responding to the skills agenda in innovative ways.

Now we have the 25 Sector Skills Councils and the Sector Skills Development Agency until it is replaced by the UK Commission on Skills. These have been set up explicitly to be employer led bodies to address the skills needs of specific sectors of employment. The government response to Leitch emphasises the importance that is attached to these bodies as a way of increasing the influence of employers in the design and delivery of degree programmes. Higher education is a key constituency for these organisations and yet most of the SSCs have no higher education involvement on their boards. I believe that this is a fundamental flaw in their structures. Many of us in HE want to help to develop a strong and responsive element of our work to help to address the skills needs of the future. It is deeply frustrating to us to be excluded from much of the debate and then have policies and practices imposed on us that do not fit with our vision of helping to create graduates fit, not just for the skills of last week or even next week but for the future. A key function of higher education is research and the translation of that into knowledge to help business and society to move ahead and to be internationally competitive. We do think seriously about these matters, yet can find our programmes being assessed and kite-marked by organisations that lack input at the strategic level. Equally irritating is for us to be subject also to the requirements of chartered professional bodies that have different or conflicting requirements for recognition. Then we have the Quality Assurance Agency that, whilst it does have strong HE input, appears to have difficulty in dealing with unconventional approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Then add another complexity in that the English Regional Development Agencies, with their Regional Skills Partnerships may try to drive yet a different set of priorities to meet their regional needs that do not necessarily connect with those being driven by SSCs. The recent Select Committee report on this area highlights a number of problems that arise from the current complicated and yet non universal coverage of SSCs. The Select Committee expressed a fundamental concern as to whether Sector Skills Councils have the capacity to go beyond the lowest common denominator when representing employers' needs. Many of you here are engaged in direct contact with employers to find the best way of integrating work and learning to meet the needs of the future. The Select Committee, rightly in my view, is critical of the role of intermediaries and brokers who get between employers and educational institutions. I worry about some body coming between you and your established relationships to impose a different model which in their view represents what is important in your relations with employers for sandwich or placement or curriculum design and delivery.

Funding arrangements need to be reviewed for institutions to ensure that this work is properly funded, if it is seen as so important and to break out of the implicit assumption that full-time HEI based education is the gold standard and anything else has to fit around the edges. Hugh [Tollyfield, HEFCE]

will doubtless tell us more of the steps being taken by HEFCE to enhance employer engagement and to respond to the changing climate.

Quality assurance, accreditation and recognition arrangements need to be brought together to support WBL, not act against it as something unusual.

The various bodies, HEFCE, SSCs, SSDA, Regional Skills Councils, Professional bodies, QAA, FDF and anyone else who wants to be involved need to recognise the importance of Higher Education in this work and involve HE to avoid setting conflicting or contradictory approaches. Universities have long and proven success in delivering relevant but forward looking curricula. They are already over-regulated. They do not need more bodies accrediting and kite-marking their work. What they do need, and here SSCs and other agencies can do is provide contacts, market information and opportunities for better work integrated learning including mentoring schemes.

I see my role as your president as one to help to take arguments and ideas to government and senior employer bodies to advance the constructive integration of work and learning, to advance the cause of your students and to help to deliver the skills agenda to meet the challenges set out by Leitch. Your role is to think how for the next 25 years, ASET can continue to respond to new challenges, set standards and help prepare generations of graduates to excel in the future.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

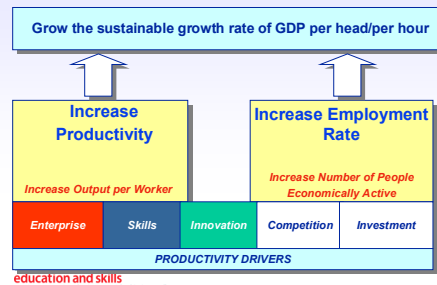*Hugh Tollyfield, DfES and Higher Education Funding Council for England*

### Unlocking Workforce Potential

Hugh Tollyfield

**hefce**

department for
**education and skills**
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

Special Adviser

---

### The Drivers of Productivity

Grow the sustainable growth rate of GDP per head/per hour

| Increase Productivity | Increase Employment Rate |
|---|---|
| *Increase Output per Worker* | *Increase Number of People Economically Active* |

| Enterprise | Skills | Innovation | Competition | Investment |
|---|---|---|---|---|

PRODUCTIVITY DRIVERS

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### The Leitch Report
### A Compelling Vision For The UK

**For the UK to be World Class in skills by 2020:**

- **95%** of adults with functional literacy and numeracy
- **90+%** of adults qualified to at least Level 2. Aim to achieve 95% as soon as possible
- Shift intermediate skills balance - Level 2 to Level 3
- **40+%** of adults qualified to Level 4 and above - commit to continue progression to Level 5+

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### The New Market For HE- People In Work Progressing From L3/L2

| Source – DfES estimates from LFS 2006,Q4 | Working Age '000s | Level 4+ % | Level 3 % | Level 2 % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **UK** | **36,652** | **28.2%** | **19.4%** | **22.0%** |
| **Eng.** | **30,709** | **28.1%** | **19.2%** | **22.1%** |
| **Wales** | **1,763** | **23.9%** | **20.4%** | **23.4%** |
| **Scot.** | **3,119** | **32.3%** | **20.9%** | **20.0%** |
| **NI** | **1,061** | **25.1%** | **18.8%** | **23.7%** |

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### Leitch Report
### Key Underpinning Principles

- **Shared responsibility** – Government, employers and individuals in a new partnership, to increase investment
- **Focus on economically valuable skills:**
  - **must provide real returns**
  - **should be portable**
- **Demand-led skills** – system to meet needs of individuals and employers must be demand led, not centrally planned
- **Adapt and respond** – a flexible framework to react to future change
- **Build on existing structures** – improve current performance through simplification and rationalisation

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### The Leitch Report
### Recommendations For HE

**Re-balance HE priorities:**

- **Teaching and learning mission for HE extended to the whole adult workforce**
- **HE to deliver flexible and responsive provision to meet employers' needs**

**Develop and grow the workforce market**

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### The Leitch Report
### Recommendations For HE

- A portion of HE funding to be delivered through demand-led mechanism 'similar to' Train to Gain
- SSCs to work directly with HE providers to influence content of e.g. Foundation Degrees
- Key role for HE in driving up quality of management and leadership skills in workforce
- 2010 Employment & Skills Commission Review

**How will the sector respond? Opportunity for innovation, collaboration and progression**

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### The HE policy challenges are how best to stimulate:

- Higher level skills demand
- Higher level skills supply
- Effective deployment
- A fair and equitable society

**In an environment of shared responsibility for investment**

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## Action Already In Hand

- 2006 and 2007 HEFCE grant letters
  - Employer focused provision a priority
  - 5000 employer co-funded places in 2008-09
  - 5000 year on year growth
- HEFCE investing in employer engagement:
  - 3 regional HE in Train To Gain Pathfinders
  - 10 HE employer engagement development projects
- Communications strategy
- HEA development programme
- Further Education Bill

**This is a start, but it is supply-side focused**

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## Economic Growth Through Skills

**High workforce skills**

**Continuing progression**

**Lifelong Learning**

**The workplace**

**Employer/HE Provider collaboration**

Enabled by

Achieved through

Accessed in

Delivered by

department for
**education and skills**
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

## For HE Providers This Means Rethinking and Re-engineering:

- **Core Mission – business facing**
- **Systems and funding mechanisms:**
  - **Enablers – building them**
  - **Barriers – removing them**
- **Delivery partnerships**
  - **Making and reaching the market**
  - **Delivering learning solutions**
- **Integrated solutions - enabling progression**
- **HE workforce – CPD**

**To deliver the 'thinking workforce'**

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*hefce*

## So what's stopping us? What would make the difference?

**Risk**
  - Has to be shared and managed

**Critical mass**
  - Build capacity and capability

**Sustainability**
  - Invest in market making

**Reward and recognition**
  - Funding, systems, attitudes

**Commitment – we all have to sign up to change**

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*hefce*

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

*Brenda Little, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information*
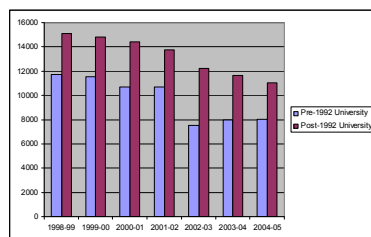
CHERI
Centre for Higher Education
Research and Information

The Open University

## Squaring the circle?

Brenda Little
ASET Conference September 2007, Cardiff

## Empirical evidence

- Higher Education Empirical Research database (http://heerd.open.ac.uk) – created and maintained by OU's Centre for Higher Education Research and Information

ASET Conference September 2007

First Degree Students on Placements at UK Higher Education Institutions, 1998-99 to 2004-05 by Type of Institution



Pre-1992 University
Post-1992 University

ASET Conference September 2007

## Decline …

- …in some HEIs, but others maintaining or increasing commitment to s/w programmes (+ other programmes with 'placements')
- …in some programmes, placement (still) compulsory, and if optional, majority (still) choose to do …but in others ….

[CHERI study to inform HEFCE's workplace learning strategy, 2006]
[Little and Harvey, 2006]

ASET Conference September 2007

## Subject matters …….

Two studies in Engineering –
- 2 universities – post-92 significantly less likely to do placements (more likely to have previous work experience). 93% females, 87% males intend to do placements (to help decide future career options)

[Bagilhole, 2007]

single university – 80% students looking to work in Engineering. Half do not intend to do placements ( and 73% females do not)

[Jensen et al., 2005]

ASET Conference September 2007

## Type of student matters...

- Study of minority ethnic students at post-92 university - part-time work; childcare logistics; previous bad experiences; lack of confidence cited as reasons for not pursuing placement

[Hills, 2004]

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## General environment matters ….

- Financial imperatives
- Lack of motivation, increased flexibility within programmes, tutors not very enthusiastic
- External environment (companies downsizing; 'stiff' competition in locality)

[Little and Harvey, 2006]

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## Employer perspectives …

- High regard for work placements + skills developed by s/w graduates
[Study of 18 city regions in England, Hogworth et al., 2007]

- Of 100 major employers, half offered s/w placements, and some willing to pay premium for relevant work experience
[Income Data Services, 2006]

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## Employer perspectives…

- Retail sector in South East - employers overwhelmed with requests for work experience

[Ball et al., 2006]

- Employers value (students') communication and interpersonal skills above their academic achievement, attach importance to work experience…(but…….)

[HEFCE, 2006]

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## Effects …

Increases final marks (3-5% points) ?

[Reddy and Moores, 2006, psychology]
[Gomes et al., 2004, biosciences]
[Duignan, 2003, business studies]

Easier transition 'in' to labour market (speed and choice of career)

ASET Conference September 2007

## Effects …..students' views

Personal growth and development
[Reddy and Moores, 2006]

Personal and interpersonal skills - confidence, teamworking, oral communication, networking

Broader understandings, 'the bigger picture'

More active engagement with learning, increased motivation
[Little and Harvey, 2006]

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## Squaring the circle…

- Competing commitments (limiting and removing 'choice')
- Financial/instrumental imperatives to 'complete'
- Lack of motivation v. increased motivation (on 'return')
- Lack of confidence v. increased confidence (on completion)
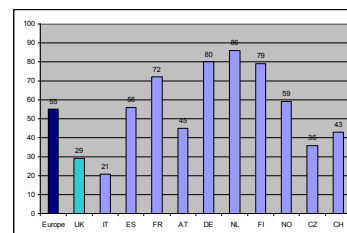
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## Should we be worried ..?

- How do we fare compared with other countries ?

[Reflex – The flexible professional in the knowledge society. Draft findings. http://www.reflexproject.org]

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Graduates who participated in work placement/internships (%)



ASET Conference September 2007

## Long-term effects …

- Comparative study (Reflex)  - analysing relationship between students' experiences during HE (1999/2000) and (self-reported) competences five years later
- Low level effect of study-related work experience (before and during HE) on competences but…
- No such effect for internships/placements

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## Finally….

- Are the social and personal aspects of work placements being squeezed out by economic imperatives (students', employers' and institutions'….)?

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# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

*Denis Anthony, Katherine Duffy and Fran Vickers, De Montfort University*

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**Slide 1**

dmu.ac.uk
DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER

ASET

**Innovative methods of portfolio assessment:
an interim report**

*Presentation to the 'ASET annual conference 2007: integrating work and learning'*

Katherine Duffy, Denis Anthony, Fran Vickers
De Montfort University
6 September 2007, Cardiff

1

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**Slide 2**

## Structure of presentation

- Why this research?
- Who are we, what do we do?
- The ASET research design
- Key points from the literature
- Key results from the survey
  – Portfolios and assessment
  – e-portfolios
- Conclusions

2

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**Slide 3**

## Why this research?

- ASET wished to evaluative assessment methods for students undertaking work placements
- ASET are particularly interested in innovative assessment and in the use of e-portfolios
- Leicester Business School (DMU) Work based Learning Unit are practioners who feel we need to take stock and learn from others
- *So we undertook this research. This work is in progress and we are presenting you our interim report.*

3

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**Slide 4**

## Who are we and what do we do?

**Who are we? Leicester Business School Work based Learning Unit**
- *Katherine Duffy*, Academic Head        *Fran Vickers*, Unit Manager
- Contact details: fvickers@dmu.ac.uk or kbdcor@dmu.ac.uk
- Our staff: Full time manager, 3 part time assistants, part time academic
- *Professor Denis Anthony: Faculty of Health and Life Sciences*

**What do we do in the WBLU? - Overview**
- Market placement to first years', liaise with employers, market to regional employers, train students, organise intra-university placement units' group, induct tutors, oversee placement and portfolio process, arrange (and conduct) feedback, assessment and moderation and produce documents and arrange events.

*Note: We are running a joint conference with NIACE: 'Winning ways for work-based learning in HE' – 19th September 2007 at De Montfort University. Contact Natalie Bellis NIACE 0116 2044221 or natalie.bellis@niace.org.uk*

4

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**Slide 5**

## Our placement and portfolio process

**Placement**
- Placement optional for all Business School students
- Place approx 100 – 120 students per year
- 12 month, assessed but non credit bearing placement

**Portfolio**
Assessed portfolio
  – 60% by tutor for written portfolio work/presentation
  – 40% by employer for workplace performance
- Portfolio includes
  – Skill reviews, task analysis, PDP development goal setting/reviews, academic business reports, work place presentation, extended graduate cv/report

**Degree credits**
Placement students' have option to take final year Reflective Business Practice Module based on their placement experience

**Changes to ICT**
- In October 07, launching Blackboard site and redesigned intranet site.
- Our Pinesoft placement management system will be replaced 2008 with a University wide system

5

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**Slide 6**

## The ASET research

**The research question**

*What is the added value for the student learning experience, of innovative methods of portfolio assessment?*

6

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**Slide 7**

## What do we mean by 'portfolio'?

- *'A collection of evidence that is gathered together to show a person's learning journey over time and to demonstrate their abilities'* (Butler 2006)
- In the context of this research, it may include any kind of written work by students, from diary keeping to research assignments, undertaken during students' work placements
- It may include also other forms of evidence of practical work done on placement, copies of tutor or peer assessment reports and employer appraisals and items of personal interest to the student.

7

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**Slide 8**

## What do we mean by 'innovative assessment'?

We draw very broadly.

It could describe *aspects of unconventional exams, oral presentations, group projects or peer assessment or their method of delivery, including electronic methods.*

8

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## Four aspects of the research

- A **review of the research literature on portfolios and assessment** with a particular but not exclusive focus on e-portfolios.
- A **map of the current activities of key agencies and centres** that are active in the field of work based learning *(in process)*.
- A **survey and telephone follow up** of a sample of placement units and associated centres *(in process)*.
- **Case studies of up to three organisations in which e-portfolios are in place** *(to be done)*.

9

## Key points from the research literature….

- **e-portfolio and p-portfolio**: *very little evidence of difference in content and impact*
- **Reflective practice**: *important, but has to be learned*
- **Portfolios:** *are effective at linking theory and practice*
- **Placements:** *give students an advantage in job seeking (but limited employment advantage)*

10

## Key points from the research literature: assessment

- *Students get stressed about being assessed, but do not engage if they are not*

- *Assessment should be qualitative and accept professional judgment*

11

## The survey

- **E questionnaire** (but also opportunity to use paper copy)
- **Piloted** in 3 organisations (4 units)
- **Sent** to ASET, PlaceNet and Nurse UK **email lists** in July 07; *still in progress*
- **Main question areas**
  - basic placement information
  - portfolio content and support including e-support
  - assessment – method, added value, who does it
  - plans, innovation and evaluation

12

## Survey results

- Placement Units in 21 universities and 1 FE college have replied so far....
- 12 Business related disciplines responded (plus wide variety of others in ones and twos)

13

## QB2  Placements – compulsory or voluntary?
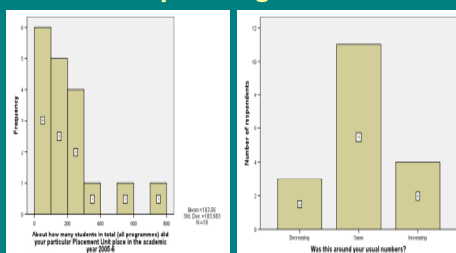


14

## QB3  Students placed in 2006 by responding units



15

## QC4  Is it a requirement for work placement students to complete portfolios?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 15 |
| No | 3 |
| Did not say/ not applicable | 4 |

16

## QC5 Elements of the students' own work included in portfolios



17

## QC6 Support offered for the preparation of their portfolio



18

## QC10 Completing their portfolio adds value to the students' learning experience from placement?



## QC10 Portfolio assessment adds value to the students' learning experience from placement



## QC10 Role of portfolios in various methods of assessment



21

## QC12 Who assesses portfolios?



22

## Portfolio assessment: degree credits and innovative methods planned

**QC13 Does the portfolio assessment contribute credits to degree classification?**
5 respondents said yes (amount of credits varies)

**QC17 Planning innovative methods of assessment?**
7 respondents said yes
- e-portfolios, blackboard; other software
- promoting portfolio type assessment elsewhere in university
- increasing the range of skills assessed –from 10 to 40
- switch from skills based to company based assessment
- credit–rated module

23

## Use of ICT including e-portfolios

- Few respondents expressed specific views – but few using e-portfolios
- Technology and access problems – but can be overcome
- Some respondents 'on the cusp' between paper and e-portfolios
- Not evident e-portfolios can do anything more than p-portfolios – but maybe better?
- Some suspicion – if it ain't broke don't fix it

24

**QC10   Do electronic portfolios offer additional benefits over paper portfolios?**



**QC7  Electronic support offered?**



**QC8  Further plans to provide electronic support for portfolio preparation?**

**10 said yes**
- but no detailed plans yet for most
- *'review what is available and affordable'*
- *'may depend on your research!'*

Specifically mentioned...
- Blackboard (3) Pebblepad (1) Ulster system (1)
- Facebook (1)

**QC10  Do placement students experience access problems using e-portfolios?**



**Conclusions on portfolio content and assessment**

*Using the portfolio process to maximise the student learning experience:*
*1. What did respondents tell us?*
*2. Some questions to pursue further...*

**3 key work placement goals**

1. Boost employability *( job-specific skills, soft skills and experience)*
2. Boost learning capacity *(meta-cognition and life long learning)*
3. Encourage career planning *(what happens after the first 6 months in first job.....)*

**Added value for the student learning experience of methods used in  portfolio assessment?**

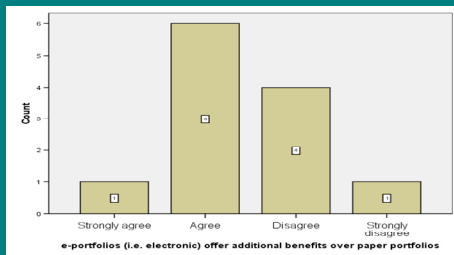- **One to one supervised** process and/or **collaborative assessment** aid development
- **Ability to set goals and flexibility in progressing them**
- Reflecting on **own** experience... not an essay
- **Meta-cognition** and socio-cultural understanding of work environment
- **Employer appraisal** of competence
- **Transferable skills** (to the classroom)
- Increased capacity for **life-long learning**
- **e-portfolios** – resources in one place; links, easier communication and dialogue, access to records

**What did respondents say was <u>innovative</u> in their portfolio assessment methods?**

- Student-led/autonomous
- Use of e-portfolio
- Skill based not employer based
- Holistic approach to learning and assessment
- Collaborative assessment
- Employer involvement in appraisal
- Mirrors the appraisal in organisations
- City and Guilds or other external qualifications
- PDP/career planning

### Good practice: 10 ways to maximise the student learning experience

1. Explicit **tutoring in reflective practice techniques** prior to placement
2. Explicit **diagnostic assessment** and **learning outcomes**
3. Ensure student sets, negotiates and reviews **work based learning goals**
4. Ensure **employer mentoring procedures** are in place (and use portfolio as development tool)
5. Encourage all parties to '**grow' the placement and reflect this in the PDP**

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### Good practice: 10 ways to maximise the student learning experience (cont.)

6. Integrate CV development and **career planning** into portfolio development
7. Provide **formative feedback** on portfolio work (tutor and perhaps employer).
8. Provide **marks and/or awards and/or credits for summative assessment**
9. Include **employer appraisal of competency** in the job in portfolio assessment
10. Ensure thorough **debrief of placement students (and other stakeholders)** and opportunities to continue reflective practice following placement

.....plus – portfolio work should be enjoyable ... at least sometimes

34

### Further investigation needed on ...portfolio assessment...

- What should be the **balance between diagnostic, formative and summative assessment** and how should that be reflected in the portfolio work?
- What is and should be the **role of the employer/ placement provider in assessment**?
- Is there a role for **peer assessment**?
- Is there a role for **collaborative assessment** (student, tutor, employer?)
- What do **e-portfolios** add to assessment possiblities?
- **Credits** towards degree classification - what difference does and should that make to who assesses and what is assessed?

35

### ...Switching to e-portfolios.....

- What is the core added value of e -portfolios – and are they worth the cost of implementing and maintaining? **Facebook or face time?**
- What would best encourage the implementation and use of e-portfolios?
- Are there yet other practices/tools that are innovative and effective in placement learning and how do they fit with e-portfolios?

36

### Thank you for listening and participating

- If you have not done it already, we would be very grateful if you would complete our questionnaire
- We have some hard copies with us
- Or email us at fvickers@dmu.ac.uk
- Or find our questionnaire at www.danthony.talktalk.net/ASET

37

# Working with SES to Place More of Your Students

Alison Riggott and Matt Wise
Student Employment Services

**The SES service in brief**
- *'SES recruits and employs placement students on behalf of other organisations'*
- One of top 10 employers of placement students in the UK
- Employ 400-600 students every year
- Highly specialised agency dealing solely with placement students
- Work with all industry sectors, all UK universities and students on every discipline
- No cost to students or universities to use the SES service

********

**History of SES**
- Company formed by ex-Sheffield Hallam placement tutors
- Links to ASET throughout the years
- Demand led service – original enquiry from Severn Trent Water led to SES being created
- Service expansion into recruitment was also demand led by current employment clients of SES.

********

**Problems faced in getting students placed and how SES overcomes these problems**

**\*No addition to headcount:**
One of, if not the most common, reason organisations choose to use SES are headcount restrictions. As the employer, the student will be added to our headcount, which leaves the organisation with, effectively, an additional employee, with no additions to their headcount.

**\*Avoiding budget constraints:**
Budgets can sometimes be a deciding factor in having a placement student. SES will invoice the organisation for its service, which will allow them to spread the costs over their budgets as they see fit.

**\*Saving time on payroll issues:**
Producing a monthly payroll can be daunting for organisations of all sizes, with worries over tax and national insurance etc. SES's skilled workforce and advanced systems will process the payroll taking away all of the stress and confusion.

**\*Cutting down on administration:**
It can be a very time consuming job administering employees. The SES service allows organisations to do as little paperwork as possible, freeing up their time to concentrate on more important things.

**\*Dealing with contracts of employment:**
We will produce a contract of employment for the student, but the contract will be based on, and reflect, the host organisation's terms and conditions.

**\*Expansion of current placement programmes:**
Organisations often want the benefits to be gained from increasing the numbers of placement students that they employ, without the expense of the additional time and resources needed to administer such an expansion – SES provides the perfect solution.

**\*Our service speaks for itself!**
Our client testimonials illustrate that our professional, versatile, friendly and personalised service is another key reason why they come back to us year on year.

**Clients we have worked with this year**
Please see our list of Client testimonials and examples of recruitment undertaken in your packs.

********

**Job roles – a huge variety, including:**
- Environmental Health
- Packaging Design
- Web Community Administrator
- Marketing and Communications Executive
- Finance Assistant
- Business Solutions Assistant
- Graphic Design Artist
- CSR student

********

**Helping us to help you**
- No cost to student or Universities
- We see our role as complementary to role of placement tutors
- All working towards same goal

- Looking to build closer relationships with all universities

    1. Ask all year 2 students to register with SES, so they are informed of new placements as they go live – www.studentemploymentservices.co.uk/student

    2. Add weblink to SES website on your student intranet

    3. Consider enclosing the details of our employment service when contacting prospective employers – we can provide you with literature to distribute

Between us, we are offering organisations the best overall solution to improving their business with placement students.

********

**Placement tutor registration – how it works and benefits**
- Simple online registration process
- www.studentemploymentservices.co.uk/placement
- Receive regular updates of new placements as they go live
- Building in the ability to view job descriptions online
- Any additional features that would help you?

**Student registration – how it works and benefits**
- Simple online registration process
- www.studentemploymentservices.co.uk/student
- Receive regular updates of new placements as they go live
- Additional features, such as CV and interview tips, student friendly links, tax information, help and guidance offered regarding starting work etc

# Encouraging Students to Take International Placements: A Business School's Perspective

Nicola Bullivant
Aston University

ASTON
BUSINESS SCHOOL

**Encouraging Students To Take International Placements: A Business School's Story**

Presented at the ASET conference, UWIC, Cardiff, September 2007

EQUIS

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ASTON
BUSINESS SCHOOL

**Welcome!**

- **Nicola Bullivant**
  - **Undergraduate Placement Manager**
  - **Aston Business School, Aston University, UK**
  - n.s.bullivant@aston.ac.uk
  - **0121 204 3247**
  - **http://www.abs.aston.ac.uk**

EQUIS

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ASTON
BUSINESS SCHOOL

**Key Facts**

- ABS is a leading international Business School
- C25% of our students are international
- International accreditations: EQUIS/AACSB/AMBA
- 3rd for Business Studies in The Times Good University Guide 2005
- 4th for Business in the Sunday Times University Guide 2006
- Aston Business School graduates into graduate level employment = 84% (national average 57% source: DLHE)

EQUIS

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**Our Degrees**

ASTON
BUSINESS SCHOOL

- Single Honours:
  - Accounting for Management
  - Business and Management
  - Business Computing and IT
  - Business Research and Consulting
  - Economics and Management
  - Human Resource Management
  - International Business and Economics
  - **International Business and Management**
  - **International Business and Modern Languages (jointly taught with the School of Languages and Social Sciences)**
  - Law and Management
  - Management and Strategy
  - Marketing
- Combined Honours:
  - Business Administration
  - Public Policy and Management

**Number of students on placement**

ASTON
BUSINESS SCHOOL



**Student numbers – 2006/7**

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BUSINESS SCHOOL

- International Business and Modern Languages
  - Year two – 59
  - Year one – 70 – to go on placement in 2008/9
- International Business and Management
  - Year two – 54
  - Year one – 95 – to go on placement in 2008/9
- Overall, an increase in students on our international programmes – 165 to go on placement overseas in 2008/9
  - Plus, any others who *choose* to go abroad

**What do we do to encourage students to go overseas?**

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BUSINESS SCHOOL

- Developed international degrees
  - IBAM
  - IBML
- Pre- and post-application open days
- Placement Office team
  - Merged two teams
- Options
  - International work placements
  - Study exchanges
  - Volunteer schemes – VSO Youth for Development
- Intercultural training

**ITIP**

ASTON
BUSINESS SCHOOL

- Intercultural training for international placements
- Training specifically for placements abroad
- Gives students an overview of cultural differences
- Mainly for placements in France, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (French and German speaking countries)
- General aspects of culture and adjustment that are relevant for any country you might go to
- Connected with a PhD research project

**What do we do to encourage students to go overseas? - cont.**

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- Intranet
  - Reports
  - Placement jobs
  - Advice sheets
  - Weblinks
- Company presentations
- Partner institution presentations
- Exchange students – excellent ambassadors

**What do we do to encourage students to go overseas? – cont.**

- Placement event – international desk
- Mentor scheme
- Weekly e-newsletter
  - IBAM
  - IBML
  - General
- Advice sheets
- Resources room
  - Rough Guide/Lonely Planet guidebooks
  - Reports
    - Student
    - Tutor
- Mock interviews
- Daily office hours
- One to one appointments

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**Financial motivation**

- Previously
  - Erasmus
  - Leonardo da Vinci – commenced 2 years ago
  - Bursaries

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**Where?**

- France
- The Netherlands
- Belgium
- Germany
- Austria
- Papua New Guinea
- India
- Hong Kong
- Greece
- Bulgaria
- Italy
- Spain

- USA
- Australia
- Japan
- Gibraltar
- Kenya
- Rwanda
- China
- Sweden
- Vietnam
- Switzerland
- Luxemburg

ASTON BUSINESS SCHOOL

**Our Exchange Partners**

- **Austria**
  - Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien
- **Denmark**
  - Copenhagen Business School
- **France**
  - Bordeaux Business School
  - EDHEC Business School
  - Grenoble Ecole de Management
  - AUDENCIA Nantes
  - ESCP/EAP
  - Rouen School of Management
  - Groupe ESC Toulouse

- **Germany**
  - Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg
  - Universität Mannheim
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**Problems!**

- The reality of the prospect – it's daunting!
- Finances
- Sourcing placements
- Resources
- Cost of living vs. salaries paid
- The duration of our placement programme
- Tutor visits
- Home sicknesses/isolation
- Cultural differences
- Students not wishing to return……

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Questions?

# The Use of Student Placement Case Studies to Promote a Manufacturing Engineering Degree Course

Richard Newman
Loughborough University

**Abstract:**

The Innovative Manufacturing Technology (IMT) course is a four year MEng degree with integrated placements aimed at high fliers with good 'A' levels. A consortium of sponsoring companies provide placements and aim to attract these employable students when they graduate. However, the well publicised decline in manufacturing engineering has affected recruitment for this course. We, at engCETL, have worked with placement tutors to develop a website to promote the benefits of placements using case studies written by current students.

## Introduction

The IMT course is a unique MEng manufacturing engineering degree course within the Wolfson School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering at Loughborough University. The course was launched in October 2003 and is supported by a consortium of companies; ArvinMeritor, Bentley, Perkins/Caterpillar, IMI, Indesit, Rolls Royce, Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery and Smiths Aerospace. The consortium model is based on the sponsored degree courses within the Civil and Building Engineering department at Loughborough University.

MEng degree courses at Loughborough usually involve four years of academic study. MEng degrees with extensive industrial experience involve the Diploma in Industrial Studies (DIS) which are five years; four years academic study and one year on placement in industry. The MEng IMT degree successfully integrates both academic study and industrial experience in to four years.

An important feature of the IMT course is the sponsorship available to the students provided by the consortium companies. Students receive £500 in Part A (Year 1) and Part B (Year 2) which increases to £1000 in Part C (Year 3) and Part D (Year 4).
The industrial placements throughout the course are also paid.

In Part A, students spend two short placements with different companies. The first placement is for two weeks in January and the second placement is for four weeks during the summer vacation. In Part B/C, students spend at least 26 weeks with a sponsoring company - usually one of the two companies visited in Year 1 - involving 10 weeks during the summer vacation and 16 weeks during Semester 1 of Year 3. In Part A and Part B, each student receives sponsorship from the consortium. In Part C and Part D, students are sponsored by an individual company.

Many of the sponsoring companies are aiming to recruit future IMT graduates and all of the companies are keen to play their part in attracting students to manufacturing engineering, to increase the pool of potential employees. Companies should also benefit from having a student on placement who can work on a specific project but due to the low numbers of applicants, not all of the consortium companies have benefited from a placement student.

## Placement modules

Students work on an individual project during their 26 week placement, which is assessed by their Academic Supervisor and their Industrial Supervisor. The student completes a project proposal form in cooperation with their Industrial Supervisor, which needs to be approved by their Academic Supervisor.

The placement is assessed using two modules, a Project Module and a Personal and Professional Development Module. The Project Module involves the student writing a project thesis, initiative evidenced by visits, weekly email updates and a viva voce. The aim of the Personal and Professional Development module is "to develop interpersonal and vocational skills appropriate to the student's intended career destination through experience of an engineering company" and "to record this development in a professional manner". The module is assessed through a written company profile report, an oral presentation at the company, assessment of the student's day-to-day performance, and a personal and professional development record.

**Context**

The report of Sir Gareth Roberts' review highlights the factors that influence student demand for Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) degree courses:

"There are a number of issues that influence both students' demand for SET degrees and the skills they develop during the degree. These include:

- the appeal of the structure and the content of the course;
- the length of the course and the impact of student debt; and
- the employment prospects resulting from the course.

Employment prospects are particularly important, as students increasingly want to be sure about the type of job they are likely to be able to get and what they are likely to earn as a result of their degree." (SET for success, 2002, p.88).

The IMT degree course was designed to give students an MEng with industrial experience in four years with sponsorship. The students are paid during their placements and have excellent employment prospects with high earning potential. Roberts also reviews how industry can work in partnership with a university to develop a course which meets their skills needs.

"Occasionally companies seek to develop specific courses designed for their own needs, with a view to employing the graduates or influencing the R&D activity of the university. The more usual relationship is not as direct, but skills communication appears to work best when universities are involved in regional and local partnerships based on particular business clusters or in the context of collaborative research." (SET for success, 2002, p.98).

The IMT course was created in partnership with the consortium companies because they want to recruit well qualified manufacturing engineering graduates and were keen to work with the university to support students with industrial placements and sponsorship.

**Decreasing number of applicants**

UCAS data (Figure 1) shows that there has been a decrease in the number of applicants to manufacturing engineering degree courses since 2002 (Code H7 – Production and Manufacturing Engineering).

Figure 1: Applicants to Manufacturing Engineering degree courses



| | Applicants to Manufacturing Engineering degree courses | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
| Applicants | 6787 | 6469 | 5734 | 5587 | 4262 |

There are a reducing number of applicants to manufacturing engineering degree courses and subsequently a smaller pool of students with good 'A' levels who might be suitable candidates for the IMT course.

There are a relatively small number of students on the IMT course and there is a need to increase the number of applicants for it to continue to be viable. The course currently has 16 students; three students on Part A, three students on Part B, seven students on Part C and three students on Part D. The current Part D students will graduate in summer 2007 and will be the first cohort of graduates from the course. The IMT course had 16 applicants in 2005/06; eight students were invited to interview and four students accepted their offers.

**Website**  http://imt.lboro.ac.uk

The IMT Programme Director was keen to create a website which would help to promote the course and I felt it would be useful to create case studies written by the current Part C placement students. The case studies would explain more about the course, the consortium companies and the integrated work placements.

I asked all of the Part C placement students if they would be willing to write a case study, with the permission of their sponsoring company and provide digital photographs for the website. As an incentive to the students, engCETL paid the students £50 for writing a case study. Five out of the seven Part C students agreed to write a case study and two of the students jointly wrote a case study as they were both on placement with the same employer.

The website was created by Dr Caroline Lowery, Learning Technologist within engCETL. The website has been designed primarily for prospective students allowing them to gain an overview of the course and the consortium of sponsoring companies. They can also download a placement case study to find out more about the experiences of a particular student within a company.

**Placement case studies**

The case studies are written in the students own words and were designed to answer questions which potential applicants might ask. In each case study the students explain why they decided to study the IMT course, what their placement company manufacture and the projects they are working on.

The case studies give an overview of the placement experience and examples of the support the students receive from their sponsoring company and answers to questions such as:

**What are the benefits of being on a placement?**

*"The placement has given us a very good insight into life in engineering. It has allowed us to demonstrate the technical abilities we have developed at university. As well as this we have learnt many things that cannot be taught in a university environment."*

*"During the placement we have developed a lot of skills, amassed an extensive amount of knowledge and gained some very valuable experience. We both feel that we have matured into engineering roles and improved our project management skills.*
*We have enhanced our written and verbal communication skills, and developed critical thinking. It has also been extremely interesting to work with robotics and to see the work that you have completed bring about real gains for the company."*

Samuel Inshaw and Michael Dickson on placement at ArvinMeritor.

*"I have grown in confidence tremendously over the past six months and have learnt how to work with a wide variety of people, from managers, to shop floor workers and suppliers. The experiences from my placement will definitely help me with the rest of my degree course, as well as aiding my future career decisions."*

Alison Gilmour on placement at Perkins Engines.

**What skills have you developed?**

*"I have developed my communication skills and my presentation skills. I have improved my time management skills and my report writing abilities. I have learnt to deal with suppliers and work as a team to achieve a common goal."*

Bradley Debenham on placement at Bentley.

*"My practical engineering skills have developed greatly. I have become more competent in directing engineering activities and my ability to design to specification has improved. I am able to manage larger, more diverse workloads and prioritise my work. I have a greater ability to see potential for improvement. I have also developed my confidence and my interpersonal skills being more able to communicate to colleagues at all levels of the business."*

Chris Boardman on placement at Indesit.

**Feedback**

I asked for feedback on the website and case studies from university staff and the following are examples of their comments:

"This website is great. Thanks to you and Caroline."
IMT Programme Director

"I like it."
Head of Department

"Website looks good. I will certainly include reference to it in future marketing material."
Faculty Marketing Manager

I asked the consortium companies for feedback on the website and the case studies and the feedback has been positive.  I also worked in partnership with some of the consortium companies to promote the website to schools that they have links with.  Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery have links with City of Lincoln Community College (a specialist engineering school) and they asked the Headteacher to find out what the students thought of the website and case studies.

These are comments from A level Engineering students about the website and case studies:

"Site looks good."
"Graphics could be improved."
"Title graphics look boring."
"Good descriptions including the prospectus."
"Could have drop down menus."
"Impressive range of sponsors."
"Limited useful information."
"Useful 'student views' which provide primary evidence."

The feedback from the students will be used to further develop the website and make improvements where necessary.

**Future work**

The IMT website and placement case studies will be promoted to school students through the consortium companies and university marketing material.  The consortium companies have been encouraged to create a link from their websites to the IMT website.  The numbers of people who look at the website will be monitored and the website will be developed in response to feedback from potential applicants.

The number of applicants to the IMT course will be monitored and hopefully there is an increase in applicants compared with previous years.

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**Loughborough University**

**The use of student placement case studies to promote a manufacturing engineering degree course**

**Richard Newman**
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**engCETL - Loughborough University**

**engCETL**

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**Loughborough University**

### engCETL

- Engineering Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (HEFCE)
- Departments have good links with industry
- Academics seconded from departments
- Staff include researchers & learning technologists
- Activities include academic support with an industry focus

**engCETL**

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**Loughborough University**

### Innovative Manufacturing Technology (IMT)

- Wolfson School of Mechanical & Manufacturing Engineering
- 4 year MEng with paid industrial experience
- Consortium of companies who sponsor students; *ArvinMeritor, Bentley, Perkins, IMI, Indesit, Rolls-Royce, Siemens & Smiths Aerospace*
- Aimed at high fliers with good 'A' levels (AAB/ABB)
- Placements are assessed using 2 modules:
  - Project module
  - Personal & Professional Development module

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### IMT sponsorship

- Students are sponsored £500 in Part A & Part B and £1000 in Part C & Part D
- In Part A students have 2 short placements
- In Part B/C students spend 26 weeks with a sponsoring company
- Small number of students due to difficulty in attracting applicants

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### Applicants to Manufacturing degrees

- Reducing numbers of applicants
- JACS code H7 – Production and Manufacturing Engineering (UCAS data)



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### IMT student numbers

- Currently small number of students
- 16 students on course; 3 on Part A, 3 on Part B, 7 on Part C & 3 on Part D
- Need to increase numbers for the course to be viable in the future
- 2005/06 course had 16 applicants; 8 invited to interview and 4 accepted offers

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### IMT website

- http://imt.lboro.ac.uk
- Programme Director required a website which would promote the course
- Idea of student placement case studies
- Potential applicants can find out more about the sponsoring companies
- Links to department, online prospectus and companies

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### Placement case studies

- Case studies written by current placement students
- 5 students agreed to be involved
- Potential applicants can download case studies
- Asked for feedback from staff in department, consortium companies and school students

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## Quotes from students

+ What are the benefits of being on a placement?

+ *"I have grown in confidence tremendously over the past six months and have learnt how to work with a wide variety of people, from managers, to shop floor workers and suppliers. The experiences from my placement will definitely help me with the rest of my degree course, as well as aiding my future career decisions."*
Alison Gilmour on placement at Perkins Engines

+ What skills have you developed?

+ *"I have developed my communication skills and my presentation skills. I have improved my time management skills and my report writing abilities. I have learnt to deal with suppliers and work as a team to achieve a common goal."*
Bradley Debenham on placement at Bentley

## Future

+ Promote the course through the consortium companies & faculty/dept. marketing material
+ Encourage consortium companies to create a link from their website to the IMT website
+ Monitor numbers who look at the website and course applicants
+ Advertising and press release to promote the course and benefit of placements
+ Develop website in response to feedback

# Engineering Students and Line Managers' Perceptions of Value of Work Placements

Yussuf Ahmed
Loughborough University

A survey of views of current students and line managers on the value of supervised and assessed work placements was undertaken prior to placement. The students were from three engineering departments (Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering and the Institute of Polymer Technology and Materials Engineering (IPTME)) at Loughborough University and line managers from 11 different companies which takes students on placement. Results indicated that the overwhelming majority of students valued work placements as a way of developing transferable skills, but about two thirds did not think that work placements would improve their degree results. Students particularly valued work placements for the experience, in order to improve their chances of 'getting a job when they finish university' and 'to give them an idea of what industry is really like'. Lowest values were given to the items 'because it is a part of the course', 'they need a break from education' and 'because they need money'.

There were some significant differences between students from each of the departments/engineering disciplines, between males and females and between those who are planning work placements and those who are not. Overall, students have a high expectation of work placements in order to develop their transferable skills whilst pursuing a full-time undergraduate engineering degree programme.

Eighty six percent of the line managers interviewed considered that a work placement had a very strong or strong impact upon the transferable skills of the students. Most of the line managers stressed that work placements increased the confidence and maturity of the students. Communication skills, particularly presentation and report writing, were thought to improve. But also technical and practical problem solving, team working and time management. They also gained knowledge of how companies operate and the experience helped them to decide on their careers. There was a divided opinion from line managers regarding the impact of work placements on the students' academic performance. Fifty percent of the line managers did not think that work placement would help students get a better degree.

**Keywords:** Work placement, sandwich placement, summer placement, transferable skills, work-based learning, engineering, skills.

## 1. Introduction

Work placements have been part of engineering education in the United Kingdom since the 1950's (Brennan and Little, 2006). They are usually in the form of a 'thick sandwich' of a year in industry in which, it is claimed, students gain valuable work experience and employers and industry in general benefit from the contributions made by students in the short and long term (Blackwell *et al*, 2001; Morris, 2002).

During the early years of implementing placements it was not thought necessary to integrate the work experience into the degree courses. There was little emphasis on preparation for work experience, on supervising work placements or using the experience in courses after returning to University. Subsequently there have been attempts to justify and integrate work placements into the structure of degrees, not wholly with success (Pickles, 1999, Ryan *et al*, 1996).

The sandwich principle has been characterised as founded upon 'the interaction of academic study and practical applications such that each serves to illuminate and stimulate the other' (Crick Report cited in Nixon, 1990). The purpose of the work based learning gained in placements has been variously described as gaining 'employability', 'transferable' or 'generic' skills, developing an understanding of

world and work organisations, and understanding the 'real world' application of skills (Ryan *et al*, 1996 Kerawala et al, 1998, Pickles, 1999, Baird, 2005).

Of these arguments perhaps the most persuasive is the role of work placements in developing 'transferable skills' since these are arguably the basis of applying knowledge and understanding of work and of the work place. The transferable skills developed on work placements may feed back to academic study and provide a foundation for the transfer of these skills when the students enter the engineering or other professions. However the precise nature of transferable skills is open to dispute (Bennett, Dunne and Carre, 2000).

As indicated above, the term 'transferable skills' is often used interchangeably with employment-related skills, generic skills and personal transferable skills. (Fallows and Stevens, 2000, Chadha, 2005). Bennet, (2002) defines transferable skills as the skills "needed in any job and which enable people to participate in a flexible and adaptable work force". This definition provides a useful basis for identifying a list of important transferable skills and many such lists exist (Bennett, Dunne and Carré, 2000, Dearing Report, 1997, DfES, 2005, MIT-Cambridge, 2006).

The study was undertaken in order to explore students' perception and expectations of work placements immediately before they went on placements, which may influence what they gain from placements. Also to explore the Line Managers' perception of the values of work placements to the students in developing their transferable skills

## 2. Methods of data collection and analysis

A questionnaire was designed, piloted, and administered to 107 current engineering students at Loughborough University during class time, one month prior to the summer vacation when placement students will be starting their work experience. All the students completed the questionnaire which consisted of structured questions on placements and transferable skills.

Also a semi-structured interview schedule was designed and piloted to fifteen line managers from 11 different engineering companies. These companies were: Lubrizol Ltd., Tyco Electronics, BP, Balfour Beatty, Interserve, British Sugar, Diageo, Rolls Royce, Cytec Engineered Material Ltd. and Smiths Medical.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and analysed by the researcher. An independent observer checked the categories and carried out a blind analysis of a sample of the transcripts. The correlation between the researcher and the observer analysis was 1, which indicates a high degree of inter common reliability.

This paper reports the main findings. Means, standard deviations and the percentage coefficients of variation (CV) were calculated to measure the central tendencies and range of scores, to provide a measure of the reliability of the scores, to enable the rank orders of students' responses to be identified and to distinguish between means with the same value. In these cases, the mean score with the lowest coefficient of variation was deemed to have the higher rank. Chi-squared tests, uncorrelated 't' tests and Spearman's rank correlation were used to identify significant relationships within the data. The conventional levels of significance were used: $p < 0.05$ is statistically significant, $p < 0.01$ is highly significant and $p < 0.001$ is very highly significant. The analysis of the results was undertaken with SPSS version 14.

## 3. Profile of the students' characteristics

Of the 107 questionnaires completed, there were 84 male and 20 female respondents and 3 did not indicate their gender. The age range of the sample was from 19 to over 23 years of age. Twelve of the students were international, 91 reported they were UK/EU students and 4 did not respond. One hundred and three students were second years, 1 was an Erasmus student and 3 did not complete this question. Forty nine of the students were from Civil Engineering department, 33 from Chemical Engineering and 25 from IPTME (Materials Engineering). Eighty seven students expected to do work placements and 18 reported they were not doing work placements and 2 did not respond. Seventy four percent of students had an experience of work in engineering or other work experience prior to their courses. Field of interest, company location, followed by the size of the company were the most important

factors that have influenced their choice of company. Fifty eight students were not concerned about the size of the company, 18 preferred to work in a large company, 26 in a medium company, 3 preferred to work in a small company and 2 students did not respond. Sixty seven percent of the students preferred to work in companies close to their family home and friends in UK.

## 4. The perceived value of work placements - Students

Ninety per cent of the students agreed or strongly agreed that work placements would help them develop their transferable skills but, again, taking agree and strongly agree as a measure, only 35.5% thought it would improve their grades on return to university, whilst about 65% thought that it would have little effect upon their academic performance.

Two further questions in different parts of the questionnaire were asked concerning the specific value of work placement for developing transferable skills. In response to the question 'is a degree which includes a work placement more effective for the development of transferable skills than a degree course without?' Ninety four percent of the placement students said 'Yes' compared with only 67% of the non-placement students. Not surprisingly, there was a significant difference between students going on placements and those who were not ($\chi^2 = 10.0$, df = 1, p < 0.02). As a cross-check, the second question asked was "if you were to do (or are doing) a work placement, would you expect it to improve your transferable skills?" Again 94% thought that work placements would help them improve their transferable skills, while 3% didn't agree and another 3% did not answer this question. Again, there was a significant difference between placement and non-placement students ($\chi^2 = 15.6$, df = 1 p < 0.02). One hundred percent of the placement students agreed with this statement compared with 82% of the non-placement students. There were no significant differences between placement and non-placement students, between genders or between engineering disciplines on these issues. The concordance between these sets of results confirms that students value highly work placements as a means of developing transferable skills.

Students particularly valued work placements for the experience to improve their chances of 'getting a job when they finish university' and 'to give them an idea of what industry is really like'. Lowest values were given to the items 'because it is a part of the course', 'they need a break from education' and 'because they need money'. But, not surprisingly, there were significant differences between placement and non-placement students on the value of placements. Overall, placement students valued placements more than non-placement students (Placement mean (P x) = 54.39, non-Placement mean (nonP x) = 50.38, p < 0.05 ). Placement students differed from non-placement students in their views on: 'to improve their chances of getting a job' (P x = 5.48, nonP x = 4.78, p < 0.001), 'to give them an idea of what industry is really like' ( P x = 5.27, nonP x = 4.78, p < 0.05) and 'the year in industry counts towards getting their Chartership' (P x = 4.70, non P x = 4.11, p < 0.05). Females were less likely to report that 'they needed a break from education' (F x = 3.50, M x = 4.20 , p < 0.05) or 'because it is part of the course' (F x = 2.50, M x = 3.46, p < 0.01), more likely for 'Personal Development' (F x = 5.35, M x = 4.71, p < 0.05), 'it will be an opportunity to apply theory' (F x = 4.85, M x = 3.95, p < 0.05),  and 'it will help them to choose what to do in their final project' (F x = 4.50, M x = 3.95, p < 0.05).

## 5. The perceived value of work placements – Line Managers

13 out of the 15 line managers considered that a work placement had a very strong or strong impact upon the transferable skills of the students. Most of the line managers stressed that work placements increased the confidence and maturity of the students. Communication skills particularly presentation and report writing were thought to improve. But also technical and practical problem solving, team working and time management. They also gained a knowledge of how companies operate and the experience helps them to decide on their careers.
**LM3** – "They mostly gain an appreciation of how things work/get done in industry.  Those who are most able gain in confidence, learn how to work in teams, and learn about how to get their ideas across. Some are able to develop some ideas about how they want their career to develop",
**LM8** – "They are learning to apply their chemistry knowledge in commercial environment, they usually almost all of them are becoming less shy, and lot more open, and a lot more happier to deal with people, obviously they are used to deal with the people of their ages but probably not that much

dealing with adults or whatever, you see their communication improving a lot both written and oral and you see them gaining more confidence".

Almost all line managers preferred work placement of one year. Three main themes emerged: benefit for students, benefits for companies and obstacles. Most of the respondents focussed upon the benefits to their companies but they also considered the benefits for the students.
**LM15** - "It gives the student a decent length of time to learn from the experience and also gives our company a chance to benefit from the placement",
**LM10** - "The students benefits the most from having a year placement, their contribution is much higher in the last 6 months compared to the first 6 months. So it is much more valuable to both parties and it can take about 6 months before they really start to positively contribute".

But some line managers thought that shorter placement did not benefit their company sufficiently.
**LM5** - "Short placements are not worthwhile as it takes at least 3 months to understand the systems, procedures and processes before the Intern is able to contribute useful work. Summer placements are impossible because with summer holidays, there is never enough experienced staff to look after the Interns, with the lean manning now in the process industries".

Others pointed out that the investment/training/supervision of the students for short placement is not workable. **LM9** - "Our industry sector requires close supervision for the first six months and it is only in the second six months we regain the cost of supervision and training".

### 6. The importance of developing transferable skills

Students were asked give their views on the importance of developing transferable skills. In descending order, the top four were 'communication skills', 'working as a team member', 'problem-solving' and 'planning and organising'. The lowest ratings in ascending order were given to 'management skills', 'research skills' and 'technical skills'. There were no significant differences between males and females, students from different departments or those going or not going on placements. Table 1 below summarises the students' views on the importance of developing transferable skills. Most of the students thought that these transferable skills were important to develop on placements.

Table 1 – The importance of developing transferable skills

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Mean | Standard Deviation | %CV |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communication skills | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 26 | 74 | 5.56 | 0.94 | 16.9 |
| Ability to solve problems | 3 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 47 | 41 | 5.08 | 1.07 | 21.06 |
| Ability to work as a team member | 3 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 35 | 60 | 5.35 | 1.04 | 19.4 |
| Planning and organising skills | 2 | 3 | 0 | 13 | 56 | 33 | 5.03 | 1 | 19.9 |
| Management skills | 2 | 5 | 5 | 31 | 44 | 20 | 4.59 | 1.11 | 24.2 |
| Technical skills | 2 | 2 | 7 | 22 | 55 | 19 | 4.71 | 1.02 | 21.66 |
| Personal effectiveness skills | 3 | 1 | 3 | 20 | 48 | 32 | 4.92 | 1.07 | 21.75 |
| Research skills | 2 | 6 | 13 | 35 | 36 | 15 | 4.33 | 1.15 | 26.6 |
| Information Technology skills | 3 | 0 | 2 | 18 | 45 | 22 | 4.87 | 1.03 | 21.15 |
| Decision making skills | 4 | 0 | 4 | 22 | 53 | 24 | 4.79 | 1.07 | 22.3 |
| Time management | 5 | 0 | 2 | 17 | 44 | 38 | 4.97 | 1.17 | 23.5 |

1 = very unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = slightly unimportant,
4 = slightly important, 5 = important, 6 = very important.

Table 2 below shows the comparison of the results obtained from line managers and the students on the importance of developing transferable skill and table 2 shows the Spearman's correlation coefficient.

Table 2 – Comparison between line managers' and students' feedbacks on the
importance of developing the following transferable skills

|  | Students | Line Managers |
|---|---|---|
| Communication skills | 5.56 (1) | 5.53 (1) |
| Ability to solve problems | 5.08 (3) | 5.00 (4) |
| Ability to work as a team member | 5.35 (2) | 5.20 (2) |
| Planning and organising skills | 5.03 (4) | 4.67 (7) |
| Management skills | 4.59 (10) | 3.27 (11) |
| Technical skills | 4.71 (9) | 5.07 (3) |
| Personal effectiveness skills | 4.92 (6) | 4.87 (6) |
| Research skills | 4.33 (11) | 4.13 (9) |
| Information Technology skills | 4.87 (7) | 4.07 (10) |
| Decision making skills | 4.79 (8) | 4.13 (8) |
| Time management | 4.97 (5) | 4.93 (5) |

Mean score on 1 – 6 scale: 1 = Very unimportant, 6 = Very important.

Table 3 – Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

|  |  | Students | Line Managers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | 0.715* |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | 0.013 |
|  | N | 11 | 11 |
| Line Managers | Correlation coefficient | 0.715* | 1.000 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.013 |  |
|  | N | 11 | 11 |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As you can see from the table 3, there is a close agreement from line managers and students views on the importance of transferable skills, Spearman's rho ($\rho = 0.013$). The line managers and students regarded communications skills as the most important to develop followed by ability to work as a team member and ability to solve problems.

Management skills were not thought to be important by either group. The main disagreement was upon technical skills, line managers regarded this most important at work while students did not.

### 7. Benefits of placements to students

Most of the line managers stressed that work placements helped students to make and improve their careers choice and employability. **LM11** - "If the students does a good work placement, the biggest advantages, they might get a graduate job with us, if they do a good work placement we will then hopefully get them back as a graduates, so we can guarantee them a job hopefully", **LM15** - "The student gains a better CV by being able to state they have worked for a certain time with, in our case, a high profile company. It therefore increases their chance of gaining employment in the future. It could result in a job opportunity within our company", **LM1** – "Permanent job after graduating, confirming career choice", **LM2** - "Students can either confirm (or otherwise) that they have chosen the right field of engineering for them, in addition to the confidence, self-esteem, communication issues mentioned above".

### 8. Impact of work placement on academic performance and transferable skills

There was a divided opinion from line managers regarding the impact of work placements on the students' academic performance. 50% of the line managers did not think that work placements will help students get a better degree. But the main theme emerged from the line managers in this question, seems that they value work placements more.

When line managers were asked that, would they expect work placements to improve students' transferable skills? All of them agreed and believe that some transferable skills can be developed better at work place as the students gets the opportunity to work in a team in a real work environment as well as learning a lot from others.

**LM5** - "Opportunity to work in a Team in a real work environment. Communication and presentation at all levels. May be opportunities for formal training in time management, influencing skills, negotiating skills etc",

**LM15** - "The student is placed in a situation where he/she is using these skills daily and getting coaching and feedback on a regular basis".

Another line manager thought that work placements, usually reveals what skills the students already has, more than actually developing them, **LM3** - "There should normally be opportunities to work in teams, solve problems, present conclusions, and recommend courses of action. But, ultimately, I think the work placement more usually reveals what skills the student already has, more than actually developing them".

One line manager believes that, many of the skills could be developed reasonably effectively during the degree course. Another issue emerged was the length of the placement, **LM3** - "A work placement clearly has some value in the development of transferable skills, though it is not clear to me (i) whether a formal/official placement is entirely necessary, and (ii) how long it needs to be. Many of the skills above could be developed reasonably effectively during the degree course".

## 9. Discussion

The overall majority (90%) of students and 87% of the line managers valued work placements highly as a means of developing transferable skills. The majority of students agreed that it was important to develop transferable skills and, of these skills, the most important to develop were communication, team working, problem solving and planning and organising. They rated fairly highly their competences in these skills and reflected most frequently on two of these skills: planning and organising and problem solving. The students did also reflect frequently upon time management and IT skills. These are skills which are necessary for their current academic achievement.

The skills which students thought were least important at this stage during their placements were research skills and management skills. These were also the skills they regarded as their weakest and were amongst the skills least reflected upon. These skills do not figure largely in the first two years of their undergraduate courses. Majority of the line managers interviewed also thought that the research skills and management skills were not very important for the students during their work experiences. From the data collected from the students, these skills had high coefficients of variation which indicate a wide spectrum of views on the importance, self-assessment and frequency of assessment of these skills.

The students had less confidence that work placements would assist them to obtain better degrees even though it is sometimes argued that work placements do enhance transferable skills and therefore feedback into academic performance (Blackwell *et al*, 2001). Perhaps the students' views are realistic. It is likely that their experience in the workplace will develop their transferable skills and understanding of work and work organisations (Ryan *et al*, 1996). But whether these experiences and skills will transfer depends, in part on the nature of the placement and the existing capabilities of the students. A student who does an IT project on a placement is obviously better equipped in the final year to do a similar project than one whose experience has been confined to shop floor management. The variability of work placements is a vexing problem in the assessment of the impact of placements on transferable skills. Further, if work placements have a relatively uniform effect upon transferable skills relevant to academic performance, this effect would not necessarily change the rank order of performance in the final year of the degree (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury, 1997).

Some caution should be taken in drawing conclusions from these results. Only 15 line managers took part in the survey and the sample of the students surveyed was drawn from only three engineering disciplines, only 18 of the sample were not going on placements and the results are based on students' perceptions. But, insofar as this sample is typical of other engineering students, it would seem that, regardless of gender or discipline, most students value work placements very highly and regard transferable skills as very important to develop. They regard themselves as fairly competent in transferable skills but in need of further support and development during work placements. They do reflect upon transferable skills which are relevant to their immediate tasks and, by induction, one can assume they will continue to do so. In short, the students have high expectations of work placements. It remains to be seen if these expectations are realised.

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# Engaging Employers in Work-Based Learning: A Case Study BSc (Hons) Environmental Health

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## Introduction

This paper examines the processes and interventions to support and engage employers hosting students in work-based learning element of the BSc (Hons) Environmental Health at Middlesex University and link these to wider literature on work-based learning and good practice.

As part of the quality assurance processes (QAA, 2001) the School of Health and Social Sciences through the Practice and Placement Learning Group aims to improve learning experiences. In a series of ongoing developments, the area of employer engagement was one such development in response to a few anecdotal concerns which emerged. Engagement with employers is considered key to a successful learning experience (McCoshan et al, 2005, Nixon et al, 2006) and as such can impact on the student learning experience. Interactions with employers vary at Middlesex - some of the interactions necessitate the professional bodies whilst others evolved as practice which works beneficially for all parties. Examples include: BSc Psychology annual student placement conference hosted by Middlesex with placement supervisors and employers as invited guests. Another example is the incorporation of professional bodies and employers on curriculum development panels and even interview panels for prospective students (BSc Nursing, BA Social Work). The diverse placement and work-based learning environments serviced by Middlesex University gives rise to a variety of employer needs and whilst positive relationships are fostered as mentioned above, any unfulfilled or unacknowledged needs can potentially affect the quality of the learning experience. In essence, one single approach is neither appropriate nor desirable. Specific approaches, elements of which may be generalisable, are preferred which this case study demonstrates.

## Work-based learning – a challenging area

Nationally undergraduate and postgraduate Environmental Health courses require students to obtain a placement to undertake experiential learning (CIEH, 2006). This is normally undertaken over a year long period between years 2 and 3 or at the end of the programme of study to enable professional registration with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH). The CIEH require students to obtain an accredited degree in Environmental Health, complete an Experiential Learning Portfolio (ELP) and pass professional examinations and a professional interview. The BSc (Hons) Environmental Health at Middlesex University is unique in accrediting experiential work-based learning within the programme  The CIEH have recently produced guidance to employers and students about their respective roles and expectations in experiential learning (CIEH, 2006). The majority of employers supporting students in work-based experiential learning for environmental health are currently Local Authorities (LA) as training consortia and other government agencies, although the private sector is playing an increasing role in the delivery of environmental health services.

The CIEH (2006) identify that one of the key objectives of academic programmes is to develop the 'reflective practitioner' with developed skills of critical review and analysis constantly evaluating working in a manner of ongoing continuous professional development (CPD). Further, the process of work-based experiential learning compliments this approach. The wider literature also extols the benefits of work-based learning (WBL) moreover in engaging the learner in problem solving, enhancing the skills of inquiry, networking, and change management and creativity (Moore 2005, Moore 2007). Further, these skills of inquiry encourage the student to address awkward and challenging questions within a real world of work situation which learners need to learn to resolve and are not readily developed through academic preparation alone (Lee et al 2004).   Ultimately, one of the most powerful learning situations is the workplace where students report a sense of real world application to their theoretical studies (Little & Harvey, 2006). Work-based learning is an evolving

field which has been explored widely of late which Portwood (2000) asserts is not merely a mode of study but a subject with its own epistemology. One of the challenges of work-based learning is that the learner is not bound by restricted knowledge domains rather encouraged to construct and manage unbound or intuitive professional knowledge from the 'communities of practice' as opposed to the traditional absorption of existing knowledge (Costley, 2000).

Unwin et al (2005) indicate that there is still a tendency on the part of UK policy makers, employers and agencies/providers which support workforce development to conceptualise work-related or work-based learning as a linear, fixed time activity and to use qualifications as a benchmark for job competence and skills. The literature indicates that this can be a potential block to WBL in its purest sense, namely the perception of learning at work as being specific knowledge for particular tasks ultimately conceptualising this as a traditional 'lesson' format. Schon (1994) terms this 'technical rationality' indicating that employers or supervisors assume that learners will then naturally apply this learning to everyday problems and situations. Finally, for employers, learning in the workplace is not a first order concern, it is expected that they prefer the acquisition of skills and knowledge to be organised in such a way as to not interfere too much with the daily business (Unwin, 2005). In a report from the Learning and Skills Development Agency (Doyle & Hughes, 2004) it is argued that because workers learn best whilst in work, organisations and training providers should concentrate on developing coaching and mentoring skills rather than providing formal or more traditional forms of learning opportunities. The closer the synergy between what is needed to be learned and real work activity, the more likely individuals will be motivated to respond. The understanding of 'situated' learning within the workplace environment with its perceived informal nature with the development of more complex and at times different knowledge and skills than those prescribed presented a huge shift in understanding and thinking and even ways of working. Taylor (1998) maintains that the process of situated learning is difficult for all parties (learner and employer) beginning with disorientation and discomfort along a continuum of processes including negotiation and eventual knowledge acquisition and reframing the perspective. If the learner is to achieve the 'perspective transformation' implied in workplace learning recognition of the three elements identified by Mezirow (cited in Taylor, 1998) need attention namely: experience, critical reflection and rational discourse in the process of making meaning.

Employers' understanding of WBL is a significant issue that feeds into a variety of misperceptions (McCoshan, 2005) and, given that, clarity of roles and responsibilities as well as clear processes of quality enhancement are identified by the QAA (2001, 2007). Key to this is employer engagement. In a research report on work-based providers' views on their links with employers McCoshan (2005) states that information deficiencies were found to exist on both sides of the employers-provider relationships. Furthermore structures and processes suggested by for effective employer engagement are varied with some simple elements i.e. a single point of contact for employers, effective planning and delivery of learning opportunities and obtaining feedback from employers.

**Environmental Health programmes**

The publication of CIEH guidance and a variety of anecdotal employer concerns and uncertainties were the primary drivers for initiating this exploration and intervention. The employers' supporting Middlesex Environmental Health students voiced concerns via diverse routes including communication with the programme leader and placement tutors, via students and via interest groups such as the Association of Environmental Health Managers (ALEHM). Additionally some of the training consortia had concerns and lack of clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities. Common themes within these concerns were apparent despite active and consistent mechanisms of information sharing and support. The main themes appeared to revolve around communication processes, preparation for placement and management of expectations and clarification of roles and responsibilities. In conclusion, the anecdotal evidence was one of need and support beyond the current approach.

The concerns were being addressed individually and were not impacting on students learning, students reported being well supported and having positive learning experiences. However, responding to employers with uncertainties which seemed shared by others was not considered to be an efficient or effective way of managing the work based learning element of this programme. There appeared to be a mismatch between employer and students expectations. The CIEH guidance (2006) and QAA Placement precepts (2001, 2007) go some way to addressing the issues generally but it was felt that there was a need for further support.

The BSc (Hons) Environmental Health programme at Middlesex University has recently being re-designed and validated and the new programme is due to start in September 2008. Part of this process involved assessing the value of accrediting work-based learning experiences. It was concluded that both employers and students valued work-based learning highly and it was decided to continue including this in the degree and that employers concerns should be considered and addressed in the redesign of the modules and the programme as a whole. With support from the Practice and Placement Learning Group within the School of Health & Social Science (HSSc) mechanisms to explore the concerns of the employers were discussed. The aim was to maintain the excellent elements of work with employers thus far but try to engage them further in discussion and debate, focussing down on specific aspects which could be addressed. In this instance the aim of engaging employers was to address the aforementioned concerns but additionally to strengthen the relationship between the university and the employers supporting students as well as supporting professional development.

The aims of the activity were to:-

> Engage employers in and with the processes and principles of experiential learning
> Enhance preparation of employers for student placement experiences
> Develop an effective support mechanism for employers

**Engagement and debate**

In response to this, the School hosted an event to explore these concerns. In order to make the work-based learning of good quality, it is suggested that all stakeholders appreciate and support the intentions of the experience (QAA, 2007. Moreland 2005). Tentative enquires indicated that many employers expressed an interest in attending such an event to explore particular queries they may have had and to explore the CIEH work-based learning guidance. Employers were therefore invited to discuss the process and professional guidance surrounding experiential learning as part of the BSc (Hons) Environmental Health. Many of the Local Authority (LA) employers sponsor their own employees as students to attend Middlesex University BSc (Hons) Environmental Health, the support can be rather generous: meeting fees, paid time off to attend university and supporting the work-based learning element. Approximately 50% of the students fall into this category. In addition, these same LAs also commonly support non-employed students in either paid or unpaid placements.

This event sought to engage the employers and to foster a greater level of commitment to the process of work-based learning. Moore (2007) suggests that the commitment of workplace facilitators or supervisors to inspire learning, support the exploitation of workplace resources and networking is key to enabling the development of work-based learners. Thus the event aimed to engage employers by: informing them about the expectations of Middlesex University and the CIEH with regard to students' experiential learning, encouraging employers to recognise and develop a learning environment, clarifying roles and responsibilities, promoting discussion and feedback, develop a support mechanism to address the main areas of concern

The event was organised as a networking event involving the employers, the university and the CIEH in a tripartite approach. In total 42 representatives attended from either personal invitation emanating from a locally held employer database but also from an open invitation in the Environmental Health News journal. Attendance at this event also resulted in awarding of a continuous professional development (CPD) certificate, reflecting the importance of ongoing and continuous professional development.

During the event the CIEH launched their guidance on student placements, work-based learning and discussed the Experiential Learning Portfolio (ELP) requirements with employers. The university informed employers of their requirements for the work based learning modules and presented the proposed new EH programme for Sept 2008. Following on from this break out groups were organised in which ELP requirements for each area of EH were given and groups discussed how they might assist students in meeting these. Finally a stakeholder discussion was facilitated and a questionnaire was distributed.

As part of the evaluation of the event a short open questionnaire was distributed to elicit employer views of their own support needs and their perceptions of a possible electronic form of support. In

addition, the participants were invited to volunteer as a focus group in the future, to debate further their views and support needs.  The responses revealed a variety of views and concerns many of which reflected the anecdotal areas identified earlier. The main themes were:-

1.    Communication processes and routes
2.    Role clarification
3.    'Active' involvement with learning
4.    Feedback on student progress

**Communication processes and routes**

Employers identified that whilst they had some good levels of communication, it was variable. This was also affected by access to electronic sources.  One of the key areas identified was regular and timely contact, ideally by e-mail, though not everyone had this facility. One employer requested a 'live' contact as opposed to an indirect answer phone or at the very least a more focused response to their requests or queries. A message board facility was suggested with interactive communication, however the operationalisation and maintenance was acknowledged as difficult. Lack of clarity with some professional aspects to communication were expressed (i.e. letter writing) and expectations of how students should be able to communicate either verbally or written and the university preparation for this.

**Role clarification**

One of the concerns identified was that of boundaries and responsibilities towards supporting students. Employers identified needing an understanding of the application of knowledge and needing an insight into the theoretical components within university. They wished to know how best they can then follow on within the work environment to make this appear seamless and integrated. They expressed a desire to know particular topics that may not have been addressed at university, such as Enviro-crime, Licensing and No-smoking legislation as these then may be addressed within the work situations. Employers sought clarification about the practical level of partnerships and collaboration with the university. Furthermore, they identified confusion regarding students' time commitment to the university (for theoretical commitment), time needed for the ELP (professional portfolio) or at least an indication of how long this would take.

**Active involvement with learning**

Several comments indicated a traditional approach to training as opposed to learning reflecting the 'technical rationality' approach to learning. Employers requested practical advice on 'teaching' and mentoring/coaching the students. Employers reported a desire to have detailed information on student modules and assessment requirements and also to have inclusion in the assessment process. Concern was expressed at interpretation of the reflective element of the portfolio development and how this can be supported. Essentially the concept of reflection was quite new in some areas.

**Feedback on student progress**

Employers sponsor employees as students whilst also offering placement experience to independent students and as such for the former felt the need for constant updates and reports on the student progress. This is not offered as part of the educational contract and had lead to frustrations and tensions as students receive feedback and employers feel the need to have this also. A further issue included feedback on details of student attendance and performance. One employer mentioned the development of a 'parents' evening' to feedback progress. Feedback which was two-way and regular was important as employers felt they were investing in the students' education and needed endorsement of this. This theme of 'paternalism' was dominant and in many respects can create tensions within the work-based learning setting especially when autonomy is advocated and desired form learners and education arenas (Moore, 2007)

**Developments in response to employer concerns**

The ongoing developments with the Practice and Placement Learning group has enabled many issues to be addressed. The developments include a comprehensive review of the processes and management of

placement experiences, a review and redrafting of core documentation for clearer communication processes and developing pro-forma checklists for inclusion of key information in programme and module handbooks, the latter also serving as individual self evaluation as well as aide-memoire. However, some of the identified concerns were considered alongside the simultaneous creation of Employer focussed web-based communication pages on the School website. In particular it is hoped these will address some of the communication concerns with specific information regarding contact details of university staff, resources and time plans for preparation for placement, support during placement and feedback and follow-up after placement addition. These pages will also host provision of resources to enhance the learning environment and develop employers understanding of learning at and reflecting upon learning through, work. Typical resources include module handbooks, programme information including term dates and assessment rubrics. It is recognised that not all the employers have free access to the internet or to e-mail at the workplace and as such hard copies of documents and letters indicating sources of support (such as professional documentation, learning theory resources) will be furnished. In addition documents such as CIEH guidance for Work-Based and Experiential Learning, provision of a 'frequently asked questions' page, hyperlinks to professional organisations and sources of useful information. Whilst this seems information intensive, all of this was requested and seems best placed within one accessible source than a number of differing texts (handbooks etc.) have also been provided and will be evaluated in due course.

In respect of active learning, the CIEH document was explored to address this, in specific the ELP record. There are a number of electronic and hard copy resources concerning learning theory and mentorship which are freely available for use, in particular one resource: Making Practice Based Learning Work developed via the Higher Education Academy (Mulholland et al, 2006). Resources which detail responsibilities of employers, university and learners are also included, and this is amply covered within the CIEH documentation, however reinforcement is not considered extraneous. The Health and Safety and any other information regarding theoretical and legislative information which employers will need to address during the placement time is also there. The role of the supervisor/mentor was explored under role clarification and whilst some resources have also been placed on the website to support the process of reflection and supervision the expertise and key figure of the manager or supervisor as a role model, is credible and can talk the 'talk', was reinforced.

Through the our working relationship with the Association of London Environmental Health Managers (ALEHM) we have set up a regular forum for disseminating information regarding Environmental Health education and to receive feedback on issues or concerns surrounding this. This body represents all of the London boroughs Environmental Health departments and as such is a valuable forum to organisations which host our students. Whilst this addresses the London area, a similar approach is being planned with other bodies representing different geographical areas served by Middlesex University.

Other areas of the University have similar issues with requirements for reports on attendance and progression within programmes. The development of contract with employers will need to be addressed and developed from experiences of these other programmes and identified as a future development.

Examples of good practice within other universities which are being explored with a view for ongoing development include a student 'buddy' scheme at Nottingham Trent University for BSc (Hons) Environmental Health. This peer support approach appears to have produced beneficial results (Lockley et al. 2004) and is also a potential mechanism for the future.

One of the key advantages which emerged from this event was active engagement with employers and the development of a voluntary enthusiastic working group to enhance student experience. Evaluations indicate that this forum was a powerful motivator and assisted in dispelling myths and uncertainties which employers had.

**Conclusion**

This case study has revealed a simple approach to employer engagement to respond to a number of anecdotal concerns. Whilst there are a number of areas with guidance for best practice it must be recognised that misperceptions and conceptions of the role of the learner within work-based learning may create tensions and confusion suggesting the need for more dialogue within and between

organisations to explore how the employer and importantly the learner can be supported in the workplace.

It is recognised that the building of learning organisations is key in this experiential or transformational learning to achieve a cultural shift in learning to active engagement rather than something 'done' to the learner. In short supporting the learner in work-based learning is a whole organisation approach and not isolated, thus embracing all employees and reflecting political and economic policy shifts and the concept of life-long learning (Lee et al, 2004). This concept becoming more important especially given the recommendations of the recently published Leitch (2005) report into workforce skills development.

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# Benefits and Challenges of Work-Based and Workplace Learning within the Creative Industries Programmes

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## ASET Conference 2007

Work-Based Learning Opportunities and Employability Skills development in Art, Design and Media Related Programmes: Benefits and Challenges

## Definition

- *'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'*

('Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001', Department for Culture, Media and Sport).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Advertising** | **Interactive leisure software** |
| **Architecture** | **Music** |
| **Art and antiques market** | **Performing arts** |
| **Crafts** | **Publishing** |
| **Design** | **Software and computer services** |
| **Designer fashion** | **Television and radio** |
| **Film and video** | |

## The Context

- Creative Industries accounted for 7.9% GDP in 2000.
- UK: £110 billion turnover.
- Creative Industries grew by an average of 9% per annum between 1997 and 2000 compared to 2.8% for the whole of the economy over this period.
- Creative employment totalled 1.95 million in December 2001.
- Employment in the Creative Industries grew at a rate of 9% per annum over the period 1997 - 2001, compared to 1.5 % for the whole of the economy.

## 'The Portfolio Career'

- The creative industries sector – predominantly made up of freelancers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The 'Portfolio Career'
- Destinations studies and other surveys, demonstrate that graduates entering the creative industries experience complex career paths involving a mixture of short-term contracts, employment, further study, part-time and freelance work rather than a predictable career progression.

## Challenges

- Challenges are often a result of the employment structures which prevail across the creative industry sectors which are predominantly SME. Sole trader, freelance or project based activities.

- This presents particular difficulties for students securing work place learning opportunities, never mind the difficulties these structures places on the practitioner/employer themselves!

## The Creative Approach

- Employability and the Creative process

- Independent thought and problem solving
- Decision making
- Originality of creative approach and outcomes. Applied skills and unique outcomes
- Exploitation Intellectual Property: the 'Knowledge Based Economy'

## Essential Features of WBL Experience

- Investigation of opportunities, negotiation and confirmation of activities and reflection on the experience and learning

- A flexible, dynamic and 'realistic' approach with a range of styles of experience and engagement with work based activities

- Employability skills
- Decision making and self management skills

## Challenges

- SME/freelance employment structures. Limited or constraints on opportunities (availability and impact on employers work)
- Limited supply and increasing demand for placement and work experience (Schools (14-19, etc), FE and HE)
- Enterprise and entrepreneurial skills along side 'practice based' studies
- Employability and the 'portfolio career'
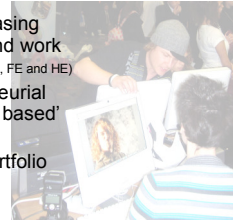


## Benefits

- Development of personal and social skills and experience (networking, contacts, etc)
- Preparation for the world of work
- Contextualisation of learning experience through practice
- Confidence building
- Range of opportunities and styles of experiences (including self employment and 'internal' employment opportunities)



## PCAD Foundation Degree Model

- PCAD 100: 'Work-Based Learning: Investigation and Preparation'

  Focuses on developing an understanding of students individual skills, aspirations and opportunities for work-place learning, sector employment structures and action planning for potential work-place learning. The module aims to develop a tool kit for careers investigation and 'employability', including research and investigation skills, CV development and how to approach potential employment opportunities, whether for full time, part time or placement.

- PCAD 200: 'Work-Based Learning: Experience and Evaluation'

  Active participation of external activities in line with individual vocational aspirations and career progression and the 'reflective evaluation' of the activity to direct future planning and activities.

- When students graduate often their creative practice and skills of production are well developed, however….

- The difficulty is finding a 'market' or 'audience' for their creativity and the skills to exploit these opportunities.
- Awareness of the employment structures is important, but investigating entrepreneurship and enterprise will therefore be key to their progression.

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# Placement Podcasts - The University of Huddersfield Experience

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## BACKGROUND

The University of Huddersfield is "top for teaching quality among all the new universities in the North of England" (THES League Table, 2005) [1] and "top new university in the UK for customer satisfaction among its students" (THES student satisfaction survey, 2006) [2]. It is also one of the top five providers of sandwich education in the UK [3]. The University comprises seven Schools of study:

- Four Schools widely involved in Sandwich Education. This normally means a four year undergraduate degree, with the entire third year spent in industry or commerce:
    - School of Computing and Engineering
    - Huddersfield University Business School
    - School of Applied Sciences
    - School of Art, Design and Architecture
- Two Schools with integral / professional work placements. This is normally where students are training for a profession such as nursing, teaching or social work. Each subject area has it's own clearly defined objectives for work related placement experiences:
    - School of Human and Health Sciences. (This school also pioneered the first UK work placements in Politics and History.)
    - School of Education and Professional Development
- School of Music, Humanities and Media.
    - Mixture: Music Technology Sandwich Course, History Work Placements.

The University of Huddersfield and its predecessor institution Huddersfield Polytechnic has always had a strong reputation for providing high quality sandwich education. However in recent years it has became apparent that students are not taking up the opportunities offered for sandwich placements. In line with UK wide trends, an average of only 50% of students who are enrolled on sandwich courses are taking up a work placement. Anecdotal evidence gained from delegates at ASET (Association for Sandwich Education and Training) would indicate that this is a national issue, that has grown considerably since the beginning of the 1990's. Research into this area, carried out by Little and Harvey [4] shows that the reasons are complex and varied. These include:

- Financial, students unwilling to 'add' an extra year to their degree courses feeling that they just want to get the qualification and then find permanent employment on completion.
- 'Peer pressure', if friends have decided against taking a placement individuals don't want to be left behind.
- More students living at the family home whilst studying and being reluctant to work away from home.

Research has been carried out by the author [5] at the University of Huddersfield and presented at a joint Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) Conference in June 2006. It showed that our students who complete a one-year work placement as part of their degree tend to get better jobs, better degrees and slightly higher salaries than their counterparts who study full-time. With this in mind it is important that as a University we do everything that we can to support our students who go on work placements.

A strategic decision was taken by the University's most senior managers that from the start of the new fee regime in October 2006, Huddersfield University would lead the way in promoting work placements, by not charging course fees to our third year undergraduates on sandwich placements.

## AIM OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the project is to provide resources in a variety of formats that can be accessed by all students to encourage them to go on placement. A core 'film' has been made to emphasis the benefits of placements. This is complemented by twelve individual case studies, which students can watch at their own leisure.

**THE CASE STUDY APPROACH**

Using case studies has long been established as an effective method for encouraging students to go on placements. Examples exist at most universities of this approach. In recent years the advent of the Internet and specifically of the 'blog' has increased the range of materials available for students to learn more about the placement experience.

**A UNIVERSITY WIDE RESOURCE**

Each of the Schools of study hosts their own events to encourage students to go on placement. This often involves asking previous students to come and talk to others. The returning students are generally very positive about their experiences and recommend that others go on placement. However, due to time constraints normally no more than three students are asked to speak at such events. This may mean that only limited parts of the placement experience are explored. This project has provided a bank of placements resources which can be used by a variety of people:

- Students choosing to/or deciding whether to go on placement.
- Placement tutors and staff in placement offices wanting to encourage students to go on placement can point students to the resources as and when the need arises.
- Staff organising student placement events or open days can use the resources as part of the event.
- International students can use the resources either for choosing the University or for help with placements.

**RESOURCE FORMATS**

The resources are being provided in a variety of formats in order to capture as large an audience as possible, in particular:

- A DVD distributed to placement offices, the Careers Service and other departments within the University which have an interest in encouraging students to undertake placements.
- A sample of the resources are being formatted for inclusion on the University website and/or Intranet e.g. as part of an e-prospectus
- The resources can be made available in the appropriate format via the University website, Intranet and/or the University's virtual learning environment for students to download to mobile phone or similar device.

## Placement Podcasts: Our Film



Lisa Ward TQEF Project Manager (Student Employability and Good Practice in Placement Provision)
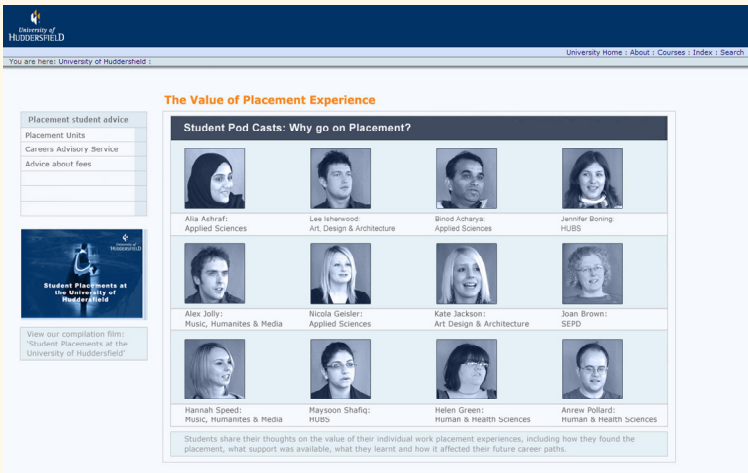
## Placement Podcasts: Film for Mobile Device



Lisa Ward TQEF Project Manager (Student Employability and Good Practice in Placement Provision)

Placement Podcasts: Website

The Value of Placement Experience

Student Pod Casts: Why go on Placement?

Lisa Ward TQEF Project Manager (Student Employability and Good Practice in Placement Provision)

## PRODUCTION STAGES

### Stage 1: Selection

Initially students interested in participating in the project were invited to submit a short form providing details of their placement role, what advice they would give to other students and why we should choose them. We received a good response and selected students from all over the University to talk about their placement experience. To ensure as wide a cohort as possible, we chose students from different schools of study, different backgrounds and with differing forms of work experience. We also chose students for whom English was not their first language. It was felt it was important to pick a representative sample and not just those who could be considered to be 'high flyers'.

### Stage 2: Filming

Video and audio recordings were made of each student, answering a set of pre-prepared questions. The questions were carefully formulated in order to elicit a positive response from the students. For example they were asked what were the 'challenges and highlights'. This was to support the aim of the project to encourage students to go on placement. It was felt that it was important for the students to come across as naturally as possible; so an informal setting was chosen and the interview and filming itself was relatively low-key. Students were encouraged to express themselves in their own words. Our initial estimate was that each interview would last around 5 minutes, however this proved to be misjudged with most taking 10 minutes and some longer.

### Stage 3: Editing

An initial edit was produced of each student's interview with any repetition being removed and salient points being emphasised in text. Due to the length of the initial films this proved to be a fairly time consuming undertaking. Individual films have been made of each case study, thereby allowing students to focus their viewing on their areas of interest.

A composite film has been made, covering the following questions:
- What was you reason for doing a placement and how did you obtain the placement?
- What did you learn; can you tell us about the challenges and highlights?

- Did your placement experience influence your future career plans/final year and has it increased your chances of securing employment?
- What advice would you give to other students considering going on placement?

The purpose of the composite film is to showcase the placement experience and can be used as a standalone film. We are now transferring the above resources to formats which are suitable for viewing and downloading via the web. This technology is currently being investigated; we are aware that video files are large and will need to be compressed appropriately. The editing is also being considered – it is likely we will produce much smaller chunks of content. Due to file size there is bandwidth issues associated with streaming video (where video is continuously received by the viewer whilst being delivered by the provider). Audio files are much smaller so one possibility is to offer audio versions over the web with the option to download (rather than stream) the video clips. These could be provided in formats suitable for display on a variety of devices as well as a PC.

**Stage 4: Feedback and Evaluation**

An initial viewing has been held with participating students, staff from the School based Placement Units, Careers Service and other interested parties. We asked for their feedback and evaluation, which has been incorporated where feasible.

**Stage 5: Future Directions**

Once this first phase of the project is complete we plan to undertake a second round of student interviews. We are also investigating the possibility of filming and interviewing a small sample of students currently on placement along with their employers. We feel that showcasing the employer's perspective would add an extra dimension. This additional material could be used to make a second DVD and also be hosted on the web.

**CONFERENCE PAPER**

We will present the following at the conference.
- A short paper depicting the work of the project so far.
- Two short films: part of the composite film, and an individual case study played on a mobile phone.

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# Making Sandwich Placements Count within Huddersfield University Business School

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## Abstract

Sandwich placements have a long standing tradition and engender wide spread support from within the Huddersfield University Business School (HUBS) and whilst assessed, placements are non-graded and the mark is not used within the final degree calculation. As part of a 2 year Work Based Learning (WBL) assessment and credit project, this paper outlines the work undertaken to construct a model for awarding academic credit for the sandwich year.

The research framework has included questionnaires directed to those students returning from placements into their final year of study in 2007/2008, current Year 4 students (i.e. those who completed placements during 2005/2006) and interviews with a number of HUBS academic staff, all of whom are involved with placement students to some significant extent.

Analysis of the data reveals a high proportion (88%) of students on placement felt that it should 'count' and some of those who did not undertake a placement suggest that they would have been encouraged to undertake a placement if this was the case. In terms of the development on placement, there is little doubt of the depth and breadth of experiences, with extensive evidence of developing high level skills both generic and specific to the role or organisation. Academics, whilst in favour of awarding credit, showed some caution in how to compose an appropriate assessment methodology, and noted issues regarding the comparability of placements and therefore the individual experiences gained.

This paper notes the key need to focus upon reflective learning as central to the assessment framework. It then provides an outline of a revised placement assessment model to be evaluated through a pilot scheme with a student cohort commencing placement in the summer of 2007, considering especially issues relating to credit value and its relevance and impact on the actual degree classification. This will then provide the necessary research to inform and support a wider 'roll-out' of the revised framework for 2008/2009.

## Introduction

"The notions of 'knowledge in action (Barnett 1997) or active intellectual reflection (Schon 1996) have begun to break down the barriers between what is academic and what is vocational". (Portwood and Costley 2000) who continue that the idea that the workplace are sites of learning and that universities are not "the sole generators and maintainers of knowledge" is not a new concept. In supporting such views here in HUBS and elsewhere in other institutions, sandwich placements have been a key component in many undergraduate courses and can be viewed as a major work-based element of a degree programme.

Historically, the view held with HUBS is that whilst providing a very meaningful experience, for example in enhancing a students' employability and developing relevant and transferable business skills, the experience should be one that enables the student to undertake the placement with minimal pressure to produce assessed work. So at present, although the placement is subject to a form of summative assessment, placements are non-graded and the mark is not used within the final honours degree calculation.

Despite the almost inherent and unquestioned support for the concept of student placements, the reality is that within HUBS, the University and indeed nationally, there has been a decline in placement take-up. HEFCE sets this figure at a fall from 22,850 to 17,810 between 1999 and 2005 (HEFCE, 2006 UVAC Conference Proceedings). It is noted that key factors leading to this decline include: an increased number of females on Business related course, a large number of ethnic minorities, mature

students with family commitments, and an increasing the unwillingness/inability to travel/re-locate, all of which relates to wider changes in the student profile and student access to HE.

This then adds a further dimension to our research enquiry – what is it that makes placements attractive as learning experience from a students' perspective? And how might we increase the attractiveness of the placement in terms of its relationship to the University-based curricula and learning experience?

The aim of this paper then, and more generally of the action-research being described within this paper, is to:

- Consider student views on the nature of the learning achieved within placements and the relative value of that learning vis-à-vis existing University-based academic modules;
- Similarly consider academic views on the learning and the relative value of the learning achieved within student placements;
- Outline current progress towards a revised assessment model and framework which reflects the relative value of WBL through the process of standard accreditation towards the honours classification.

## **Work based learning and sandwich placements**

An initial question might be: why undertake placements at all?

Enhanced employability is one benefit from undertaking a placement, research by Bowes and Harvey (1999) suggests that those students with 12 months work placement are more likely to find employment more quickly and in their preferred field than those students without employment experience, with almost 70% of sandwich graduates being employed 6 months after graduation. The placement thus plays a key and vital role in developing skills for employment some of which, whilst can be taught in a classroom environment, can only be put to real practice in the workplace.

Accrediting the placement, basing the final degree mark on a percentage calculation of the assessed work can provide the challenge and motivation to encourage students to reflect on their work, learn from the experience and link this to academic studies. It can also assist the student and employer to set learning goals and targets which will enable development of key competencies, skills and personal development.

The alternative view, and one that has in part been endorsed by recent and current practice within HUBS, is that work performance may suffer if the quest to accumulate academic credit results in a lack of focus on their actual placement work. This is supported by McLernon and Hughes (2004) who note that awarding academic credit for WBL should be on the basis of knowledge development through reflection and adjustment, again stressing the reflective nature of the learning as individuals being able to acquire knowledge by learning "And then of analysing, developing and synthesising that knowledge and finally applying this synthesised knowledge". McLernon and Hughes (2004). What is being assessed within work-based learning should focus upon the understanding, articulation and application of learning without being constrained by academic accreditation.

There is also a view that placements are not comparable as there is such a wide variety in the type of company and organisational setting in which students are placed. Workplaces can differ considerably in the ability to offer learning settings due to the varying nature of their complexity, insularity, power relations and the "nature of their boundaries with academic contexts of learning and knowledge production" Brennan & Little (2006). Evans et al (2002) emphasise the contextual nature of the learning at work and that a particular form of learning that works well in one context may not do so in others "where they are undermined by other aspects of the employment relationship, for example job insecurity, work intensification and absence of employee voice". These could thus form a barrier to learning and may prove a disadvantage to students who have additional pressures on them in relation to the environment, department or company they find themselves in.

It is however suggested it is not the experience itself but the learning derived from that experience that is important (Frame and Dattani, 2000 and Hill, 2004) and assessment is based upon students' articulation of learning not upon the 'quality' or the conditions of the experience itself but the quality of the reflection of learning. The focus is on the quality of the reflection of learning and so "it is

possible to produce an excellent portfolio – and get a first class mark from a 'mediocre' experience". Hill (2004). Equally the reverse may be true: students may secure a placement within an organisation or setting with a rich diversity of *potential* learning and experiential inputs but the student themselves fail to effectively draw upon these experiences and/or understand, appreciate and reflect upon what this learning is or means.

In order to learn from the workplace the support mechanisms need to be in place to assist and develop students in their ability to develop strategies for planning, reflecting and developing their learning.

## What is the appropriate credit value?

There are a number of challenges in determining the relative academic value of WBL:

a) To what extent the WBL has some element of uniqueness and adds to the existing academic learning i.e. to ensure the WBL does not merely duplicate other academic learning and experiences.
b) Separating the contextual position and impact from the individual learning and student development (Evans et al (2002)). In essence, to what extent does the quality of the student placement materially impact and influence the quality of the learning experience?
c) Enabling placement students to reflect and articulate on their WBL i.e. their skills, knowledge, attitudes and emotions according to the framework outlined by Frame and Dattani (2000)
d) Consideration of the relative quantity and value of WBL vis-à-vis an academic learning experience, which in practice amounts to what modular credit value can be given and at what level (McLernon and Hughes (2004))
e) Establishing effective and robust evaluation and assessment processes to provide for the accreditation and 'award' of WBL-based modular credits.
f) Awarding credit that is representative in terms of quality and quantity of the learning obtained (McLernon and Hughes (2004))

None of these challenges are insurmountable and indeed much progress has been made with each, but they remain areas of concern and necessary consideration.

## Research methodology

A questionnaire was distributed to students from two departments who attended the options day on 27 April 2007 to select modules for their final year of study. 32 completed questionnaires were received, 21 of which were from students currently on placement (from a total of 75 placement students)

The questionnaires were designed to understand students' views on using the placement year towards the final degree mark and were piloted on recent graduates/final year students. For those students who did not undertake a placement we wanted to understand the reasons why and whether the proposed scheme would have increased the likelihood of them applying for a placement.

Whilst the questionnaire would provide the views of students, it was also necessary to determine how students valued the placement and the learning and development they achieved as a result of the placement. Therefore a sample from a group of Year 4 (final year) BA Business Studies students, some of whom were taking specialist routes such as a CIPD, was selected and an 'open-format' questionnaire schedule was issued which was completed and returned via e-mail and then followed up by further brief telephone interviewing for further clarification and elaboration of certain key points. This enabled a greater exploration of the types of work, level of responsibility, skills and competencies developed along with an understanding of the level of articulation of this development students are able to show, reflection and articulation of learning being of paramount importance within work-based learning assessment.

The sample cohort had undertaken their placement year during 2005-06 and were subject to the research investigation almost one year after the completion of their placement. This was considered appropriate as it provided for more considered reflection of the impact and value of the placement as well as comparison and reflection on their final year academic progress.

Given that historically within HUBS the view was that students had enough to cope with without the additional pressure of further assessment, 10 members of academic staff who had experience of placement visiting tutor role were interviewed during March 2007 to understand the academic view of the level and credit value for placements and how they felt it would affect the student both in considering a placement and when on placement.

**Research findings - comparative models of placement and accreditation**

A.      Other institutions Business Schools

Contact was made with 36 HE Institutes' Business Schools to determine firstly if they offered courses with sandwich placements and if so whether the assessment was used in the calculation of the final degree mark.  Out of the responses received the following information was collated:

> 8 Business Schools awarded academic credit with between 10 and 12.5% of final mark used; 4 Business Schools gave separate awards in the form of work based learning type internally validated awards;
> 2 Business Schools gave separate awards plus accredited towards final mark;
> 8 Schools did not use the sandwich year assessment in the final mark calculation nor gave a separate award
> 12 Business Schools did not offer placements.

B.      Huddersfield University Business School (HUBS)

During term 1, all second year students seeking placements attend placement workshops run by HUBS placement unit to provide assistance with CV and application letter preparation, interview techniques and general placement application advice.  All students register on MaPPiT once CVs are received and this enables access to vacancies and other related information.

The current sandwich placement bears 120 S level credits and would this is shown on the transcript as a Sandwich award.   The placement year is assessed through tutor and supervisor appraisals and a tutor marked placement report which is submitted in September and developed through encouraging students to maintain a placement logbook/diary which is reviewed through tutor visits.  There is no grading of the placement, it is a pass or a fail and those students who do not pass the placement year, which would happen in only extreme cases, would receive an ordinary degree award.

The assessment mechanisms are therefore in place already using the standard type methods of assessing work-based learning.

C.       School of Computing and Engineering, University of Huddersfield

The model which has been in use for the past 10 years within the School of Computing and Engineering is two 60 credit modules whilst on placement which are graded and are used in the final mark calculation.  In terms of the assessment, the tools used within this model and similar to those used within HUBS

**Research findings – current year 2 and year 3 student perspectives**

Questionnaires were sent to all students who would be commencing their final year in September 2007.  Of the 32 responses received, 21 were currently on placement, the others on year 2 of the course who would not be undertaking a placement as part of the degree.

*A.      Students on placement*

86% of those students on placement stated that the placement should be used in the calculation of the final degree mark.  A recurring theme was that the placement is valuable experience which requires a lot of hard work and therefore should be acknowledged and rewarded.  Other comments included "it would have had more value" and "would be an added incentive to do well" and "push people to try harder on placement".

Those students who felt the placement should not count cited the reason being the variety of the placements and the differing experiences making 'fairness' of marking difficult. One student commented that perhaps there should be a choice as to whether it would count

In terms of the weighting of the placement, 72% of students thought that it should count as $1/3^{rd}$ of the final mark, 28% suggested less than $1/3^{rd}$ and preferred methods of assessment were employer and visiting tutor appraisals, logbooks, assignments and presentations. It is interesting that employer appraisals scored most highly suggesting students feel this is the most effective way of assessing their performance in the workplace.

95% of responses stated that the current level of tutor contact/tutor visits would not be appropriate if the placement was to be used to calculate the final degree mark. This however may reflect the current lack of knowledge of how exactly the placement will be assessed, but it is an area that will be monitored through the pilot scheme.

For those students on placement, 1 respondent did state that they would be less inclined to undertake a placement, this however is a retrospective view

### B.        *Students without sandwich year*

It was important for the research to discover the effect of the proposed placement module on the decision to undertake a placement. Given the declining take up rate of placements, would it make a difference to the decision? For non-sandwich students 70% stated that the likelihood of them selecting a sandwich placement would have increased and 30% said it would stay the same. Therefore there were no responses of a negative effect on their decision.

The reasons for not undertaking a placement were the wish to study over 3 years instead of 4 (40%), family/personal reasons making placement unviable (30%), having previous work experience (20%) and not being able to secure a placement (10%)

### Research findings – current year 4 (post-placement) student perspectives

The sample group were varied in their placement focus, including public and private sector, local and national companies, large corporate businesses and SMEs. In summary the research responses are identified as:

> Houseware retail – trainee supervisor (R1)
> Food manufacturer – HR asst (R2)
> Drinks manufacturer – operations planning (R3)
> Facilities support – design/sales operations (R4)
> Food manufacturer – HR asst (R5)
> Operations support – project/change management co-ordinator (R6)
> Houseware manufacturing/retail – operations asst (R7)
> NHS – HR asst (R8)
> Health training – office manager (R9)

The initial question that was asked was a quite fundamental one of what is was about the placement that stood out for the student. Some of the responses are illuminating:

*'The environment, the people I met and the experiences that I was opened up to' (R2)*

*'The responsibility in the end was huge and I enjoyed this' (R3)*

*'The highlights of the job were going to site, seeing the finished article and shaking the customers hand ...' (R4)*

*'I leant things in my placement that I could never have learned in the basic [academic] 3 years' (R8)*

*'Doing my placement gave me the drive to try my hardest in my final year' (R8)*

The analysis of responses from students in respect of their learning was undertaken using the AKSE framework as used by Frame and Dattani (2000), in which typically, the following learning areas are considered:

**Knowledge:** product-based, organisational/business structure, job practices and policies, technical areas etc.

**Skills:** customer exchanges, time management, decision-making, communications, IT, applied numeracy, problem-solving, delegation and planning etc.

**Attitudes:** self-discipline, responsibility, commitment, adaptability, self-awareness, motivation, politeness and political astuteness, etc.

**Emotions:** coping with pressure and stress, coping with criticism, work affiliation or isolation, self-esteem, sense of anomie, etc.

The respondents' answers reflect many of these issues:

Knowledge

> *'I gained important qualifications that will benefit my future e.g. SHL qualified [recruitment assessment system]' (R2)*

> *'I have learnt a lot about the food industry – both inside the business and my perspective as a customer' (R3)*

> *'I have met many suppliers and am aware of many business that I didn't know existed' (R3)*

> *'Within the particular industry, it is very harsh where little mistakes can be very costly' (R7)*

> *'I have a good knowledge of the public health sector ... the NHS works very differently when compared to other private sector organisations' (R8)*

> *'I have a view of working in a small family business' (R9)*

Skills

> *'The best experience was ... being able to change product displays and seeing how customers react and respond' (R1)*

> *'My confidence, presentation, organisation and learning skills have increased dramatically which has also been seen in my university work' (R2)*

> *'I am confident in using Excel ... I also have a basic certificate in food hygiene' (R3)*

> *'Basic CAD drawing, accounts and costings, communication and time management' (R4)*

> *'I am able to plan and successfully chair a meeting' (R6)*

> *'My organisational skills took a battering ... but I believe I have improved considerably' (R7)*

> *'Social skills, communication, workload priorities ...' (R8)*

> *'Skills that I have now developed further are my customer relationship skills, people skills, IT skills and general confidence' (R9)*

Attitudes

> *'I gained a good insight into what a managerial role entails and requires' (R1)*

*'It highlighted I enjoyed the real world of HR work and enabled me to establish a direction for my career' (R2)*

*'I definitely believe that I am even more career determined than before and I want to do well for myself' (R3)*

*'Going on placement has allowed me to realise what I want to do in life' (R5)*

*'I have learnt how important it is to be part of a close team and to communicate with these team members' (R6)*

*'I feel more professional' (R8)*

Emotions

*'I enjoyed the routine and the stability of the working environment rather than the lack of this in the student world' (R2)*

*'I started off being quite shy .... 6 months into my placement I was comfortable as I realised this is the only way I could complete a task' (R3)*

*'I would always be worried if I was going to say the wrong thing ..' (R4)*

*'During my time on placement the HR officer bullied me ..... [BUT] I was able to overcome these difficulties and would feel comfortable overcoming then again' (R5)*

*'The trust and support from my colleagues enabled me to build on my confidence. I began to voice my opinions ... I am able to voice my opinions in a more constructive manner' (R6)*

*'Negative situations do arise in the workplace but how we react to those situations determines our success' (R7)*

For those that responded, and these are likely to be skewed towards the more positive experience, the placement can to some extent be described as life-changing. Students view seemed to confirm that the placement experience was one that simply could not be replicated within the university setting. They identify the richness of organisational, contextual and interpersonal experiences, even when tinged with some negative or less positive elements, were truly developmental and a real learning experience. This confirms experiences referred to elsewhere:

*'Working [in the service industries] offers students the opportunity to gain abilities which the lecture theatre simply can't' (Richards, 2000, p6).*

This being the students' perspective, it is clear that there is a substantial element of WBL which adds to the students' learning, most specifically within the business setting as considered within a business studies degree programme. This answers the first question set out earlier: WBL does have some element of uniqueness and adds to the existing academic learning.

Secondly, respondents do seem have understood and appreciated a learning experience even when the placement experience has not always been an entirely positive one. Hill (2004) has commented similarly.

The range and quality of student responses does indicate a problem of encouraging appropriate reflection and articulation of the WBL. Some respondents provided very reflective commentaries whilst others struggled to achieve the same level of analysis. This is not necessarily a consequence of WBL, but merely a mirror of general student performance and the capacity to engage in reflective thought.

**Research findings – HUBS academic staff view**

*The value of the placement to student development*
There is no doubt within the academic community that the placement year is a valuable, some argue essential element of the undergraduate business programmes. The school has increased the number of courses that offer a placement year, however there is concern that the number of student opting for a placement has declined over the past few years. Quite often viewed as an 'option' rather than a necessary requirement, it was agreed that ways of encouraging more students to take placements should be developed.

The positive effect on the student was the most notable immediate effect seen by academics, as they saw returning students to have matured, become more focussed and clear in what they wanted to achieve, which can help with the option selection for the final year modules as the year in industry has enabled them to have a taste of things that they may or may not wish to do.

Final marks and improvement in marks were also noted by all interviewees. Although they did not have the actually evidence, they felt sure that there was a marked improvement in some cases a "whole grade difference between those who had been on placement and those who hadn't". What was agreed is that answers in assignments and exams were more mature with the ability to apply the knowledge better and challenge the theory helped by being "more fired up" which helps them to "get a lot more from their final year of study"

*Making the placement 'count' in the final degree mark*
Again consensus of opinion was shown in terms of the placement year 'counting' towards the final degree mark and the view was commonly held that this should be a way of encouraging students to apply for placements. There were however varying opinions as to the credit value and weighting of the placement year and a number of ways of making the placement 'count' were suggested.

Academic staff showed their concerns in 120 credits being a "big part for those students who haven't really embraced it (PDP) in years one and two", reflecting the notion that a 'good' placement experience and success in the workplace may not necessarily be reflected in the PDP type portfolio. Suggestions for alternatives included relieving the burden in the final year, either by making the dissertation proposal a requirement during the sandwich year or marks from the placement year carrying marks towards the placement or by having fewer modules to have to study.

*The effect on placement take-up and placement experience*
The commonly held view was that by placements counting in the mark calculation, this would encourage more students to apply for placements. One academic did feel that less students would do it as "it's another element of uncertainty that you are putting in place because they just don't know do they?" There were also positive effects in terms of the students' motivation on placement as the student may become more proactive in searching for activities that will enable them to develop particular skills. It would also provide a clear structure and introduce standards as well as providing guidelines for the visiting tutors and the supervisor in the workplace.

*Assessing the placement*
Assessment of the learning in the workplace did not highlight any major concerns by academics as one pointed out that "it's more and more possible to compare the workplace experience to uni experience as the uni experience becomes more practical and less theoretical in some parts". There was recognition of the different methods of assessment and that exams and assignments are not necessarily in tune with work-based learning.

*Considerations*
A theme running through the interview responses was the idea of parity in the placement so that there was 'fairness' to all students: those who had been on placement, those who hadn't and those whose placement was limited in the opportunities it provided. Consistency in judgement would need to be maintained ensuring that it was clear to the visiting tutors and the placement supervisors just how the placement should be judged.

The impact on resources was highlighted as it was felt that time allocation should be considered for the visits, support in addition to site visits and the marking of the student work.

Although positive effects on students had been mentioned previously, there were slight concerns that assessing the placements in this way may put additional pressure on the student and it may "inhibit (the student) experience a little bit if they are always thinking of it as another academic exercise … instead of them developing in the workplace sort of naturally".

## The proposed pilot placement model

This does however lead into the next key questions – assessing the quality, quantity and standard of WBL and WBL evidence.

Based upon an existing model for sandwich placements within the University, it is proposed that there will be four main methods of assessment for the pilot:

*A formalised diary* of activities outline skills and competence development over the duration of the placement which within the current placement model is purely to assist in producing the placement report. A reflective style will need to be developed and for the majority of students reflection on learning from the workplace will be a new concept as any current reflection, through PDP modules is primarily through group and individual work at university.

*A placement report* providing an analysis of the organisation, the role of the student within that organisation and an evaluation of the learning and development as a result of the sandwich year.

*Placement supervisor appraisals* will be undertaken twice through the placement, the final appraisal being the main mechanism for the grading of the placement in terms of social, personal and work related skills development. This final appraisal also reflects the students' view of this being one of the most appropriate ways of assessing their development, progress and performance throughout their workplace.

*Visiting tutor reports* will continue to be a basis for assessment as these provide the link to the academic output requirements of the placement.

## Managing the pilot scheme

*Visiting tutors*
For the pilot scheme, the number of visiting tutors will be kept to a minimum to enable consistency and ease of evaluation of the scheme. Tutors ordinarily are selected on the basis of their area of expertise and academic interest, however this may not necessarily be the case for the pilot scheme.

*Students on the pilot*
It is recognised that the pilot group will not actually benefit from the scheme as they will not be awarded academic credit, despite our request for them to undertake additional work. A Certificate of Work-Based Learning Competence will be issued for the successful completion of the pilot scheme which can be used as an aid when applying for graduate jobs.

*The competencies*
The QAA framework of competencies for business students will be used whereby it is anticipated that all students should have an opportunity to show the development of a number of personal/social skills which are relevant to any workplace and not organisation/environment specific.

In addition, there will be a list of marketing related competencies that students can select and collate evidence of having gained these skills, backed up by reflective statements and review at 3 monthly intervals throughout the placement. It is not expected that all students will develop all of these skills due to the differing nature of the placements and the opportunities that are available or presented to the students.

*Ensuring student support for the development of learning targets and the reflective process*
It is recognised in any new job that there is a period of settling into the role and finding your feet before there is any real outputs or level of confidence from both the student and the company. It will be crucial to have a visit from the tutor early on in order to assist the student in developing targets for their learning upon which they are then able to reflect.

Other factors to consider are assisting students in identifying opportunities for development, what learning they would like to acquire and how they can develop this learning.

**Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot placement scheme**

Whilst the success of this model can be demonstrated within the School of Computing and Engineering, it is recognised that there are differences between the content and nature of these programmes that may also result in differences in the experiences of students.

What needs to be fully explored is the success of the pilot scheme in order to determine the way forward with placement accreditation from 2008. It is also vital from the point of view of students who will embark upon the placement search from September 2007 that they are clear of the potential routes forward in terms of accreditation.

**Conclusion**

What is evident from the research is that placements provide a valuable experience, the workplace providing a rich source of learning and experience which enables students not only to develop skills and competencies for that work and future employability, but also enhancing students both in terms of personal development and the ability to apply that learning when completing the final year of study.

The work undertaken to date supports the notion of awarding academic credit for the placement year, however further research will inform the debate on the appropriate level and value at which the credit should be awarded.

What is potentially suggested is that awarding credit, however this may be eventually undertaken, could be an influencing factor when considering whether to undertake a placement year. The pilot scheme will enable us to monitor the development and learning within the workplace and to understand the affect on students in their pursuit and application for placements and in looking at how learning from and within the workplace can be enhanced through encouraging reflection and application of that learning.

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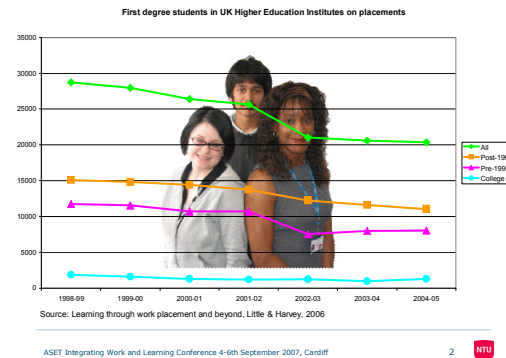
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QAA Code of Practice – Placement Learning

# Changing Student/Employer Attitudes and Requirements at the Placement Interface – An Opportunity for Discussion

Ray Wallace
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## Two interesting reports published recently

- Learning through Work Placements and Beyond, Brenda Little & Lee Harvey, July 2006
- A Degree of Concern?  UK First Degrees in Science, Technology and Mathematics, The Royal Society, October 2006

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## The first publication

- Investigates students' perceptions of learning from placements
- Explores how values and ethical positions are developed on placement
- Investigates the extent to which students try to transfer and build on such learning in subsequent stages of the taught curriculum

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## The second publication

- Describes, details and incisively discusses a whole raft of topics and issues relating to first degrees in Science, Technology & Mathematics in the UK
- Pertinent to the sandwich training arena it examines STM first degrees: skills, knowledge and experience and what STM first degree graduates do

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## However what appears not to have been examined to any great degree with one or two notable exceptions are:

- The engagement of students with the placement process in the first place
- The expectations of employers that placement students will be literate, communicative have good subject knowledge etc
- The assumption that, for instance, with science in particular, but equally with students of other disciplines such as law, business etc that they will naturally embark upon a subject discipline based placement

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In this session I would like to examine these 3 areas, calling upon delegates experiences to try to tease out the critical factors that affect:

- Student engagement
- Employer expectations
- Choice of placement field

## Activities

- Split into 3 groups to brainstorm/discuss the issues **6 minutes**
- Come together to prepare a bullet list of the key issues raised **4 minutes**
- Discuss whether we want to take our pooled findings forward **3 minutes**

## Points to stimulate discussion – student engagement with the placement process

- Nottingham Trent University – Some figures from 2004 DLHE data
  - Over 112 graduates returned to graduate roles with their placement companies
  - 2.4% placement students were employed in non-graduate level jobs
  - 44.6% of non-placement students were employed in non-graduate level jobs

## Points to stimulate discussion – student engagement with the placement process

- Huddersfield University – Data from Lisa Ward, the Higher Education Academy & the Higher Education Careers Service Unit, Summer Conference, Manchester 2006
  - Fewer than 50% of students enrolled on sandwich courses are taking a placement year
  - Students who do a placement are more likely to:
    » Gain a managerial, professional or senior official post
    » Gain an associate professional or technical post
    » Get any job

## Points to stimulate discussion – student engagement with the placement process

**Most Important Factors when deciding which Graduate Employers to Apply to**



Base – **Face-to-face interviews with 16,113 final year students**

Source: High Fliers Research Limited 2005

Percentage of finalists looking for graduate jobs in 2005

## Points to aid discussion – employer expectations

**Tuesday February 20, 2007**
**EducationGuardian.co.uk**

A senior director in a leading British company is sifting through online applications for this year's graduate jobs. Among a few outstanding applicants, and a number of obviously unsuitable candidates, he starts to notice a surprising and worrying trend.

"The applications had been sorted so that only graduates with firsts and 2:1s were being considered," he says. "And yet among those, there were a huge number of CVs that I could barely understand. The grammar and spelling were so bad, the articulation so muddled that it was a real effort to go through them. The majority of them were rejected immediately."

The example is only one way in which many leading businesses feel that applicants for graduate jobs are failing to show themselves as fit for purpose. Other attributes that make up the broad house of employability skills, such as communication, team work and business acumen, are also found to be lacking.

## Points to aid discussion – employer expectations

- SMEs employ more than 80% of graduates
- Charles J Watkinson, Chief Executive Corrosioneering Group (an SME)
  - "Our expectations of graduate applicants"
    - Has interview skills! Do you always dress like that?!!
    - Intelligent and logical Can understand and give instructions
    - Literate "I was not gud at spelin but I got a first in siense"
    - Articulate How would you describe yourself? "What? Don't know really"!
    - Knowledgeable Can you repair a bicycle puncture? What's a bicycle!
    - Knowledgeable of their subject Well versed in the basics
    - Resourceful Able to find information and resources
    - Enquiring/Inquisitive Wants the whole picture, asking relevant questions
    - Hard working Not waiting for the clock to go around or playing computer games

## Points to aid discussion – employer expectations

Skills and Attributes sought by employers in graduates

| The Top 10 in 2006 | |
|---|---|
| **IMPORTANT SKILLS** | **DIFFICULT TO FIND SKILLS** |
| Motivation & enthusiasm | Commercial awareness |
| Team working | Leadership |
| Oral | Project management |
| Communication | Risk taking/enterprise |
| Flexibility | Managing own learning |
| Customer focus | Second language |
| Problem solving | Problem solving |
| Managing own learning | Customer focus |
| Commercial awareness | Report writing |
| Planning & organisation | Cultural sensitivity |

## Points to aid discussion – choice of placement field

- 'What do graduates do? 2007'

– Of the graduates entering employment, 52% of chemists appear to be doing jobs with tenuous links to chemistry and 66% of biologists seem to find themselves in a similar position with regard to biology

- 'A degree of concern 2006'

– The number of graduates classified as science and engineering professionals varies significantly by subject with 35% of engineering & technology and 20% of chemistry graduates classified under this heading in 2003/4 compared with 6% of biology and 7% of physics graduates.

– Assuming that the seven 'professional' categories constitute 'graduate-level' jobs then 45% of engineering & technology graduates and 38% of chemistry, 37% of mathematics and 35% of computer science graduates, 33% of physics graduates and 20% of biology graduates are employed in graduate-level occupations six months after graduation.

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## Points to aid discussion – choice of placement field

**Personneltoday.com** - 18 May 2007

**" Students choose work experience over pay in bid to secure top jobs"**

- Eight in 10 students believe work experience will help to build a career, with half certain that it will help their quest for a graduate job, new research has found.

- A survey of more than 1,200 students by career website doctorjob.com, found that only 22% selected their place of work for the money. Instead, gaining experience to help them get a job after graduation was the most important factor for 76% of respondents.

- Up to a quarter of students had worked for no wage, while 78% had worked for minimum wage or less.

- Additional reasons for taking up work experience included: how good it would look on their CV, a convenient location, getting a 'taster' of a job or sector, and gaining experience to help them get on a course.

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## Points to aid discussion – choice of placement field

Graduate Employment Data (DLHE 2004) Huddersfield University



**Placements - Yes**   **Placements - No**

- Managers, Senior Officials and Professionals
- Associate Professional and Technical Occupations
- Administrative and Secretarial Occupations
- Other Jobs
- Doing Something Else
- Actively Looking for Work

Combined data from the Schools of Applied Science, Art & Design, Computing & Engineering and Business *(Source Lisa Ward the Higher Education Academy & the Higher Education Careers Service Unit, Summer Conference, Manchester 2006)*

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## Thank you for your attention today

### I hope that you have enjoyed the workshop

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Student placements

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# A Critical Review of Measuring Student Expectations through the Placement Learning Project at the European Business School, London

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**Abstract**

As part of the BA in International Business degree, EBSL has been running a successful Placement Learning Project (hereafter referred to as PLP) for five years. Students have a choice in their fourth or fifth semester to either study at another institution abroad (Study Period Abroad - SPA) or undertake a Placement Learning Project (PLP). In the first few years of operation, EBSL had not conducted a formal analysis of the undergraduate students on the relevance of the PLP to their studies. However, by analysing the students' reflections through their assessments, we are able to measure students' perception of the PLP. Thus this paper evaluates the effectiveness of the PLP in terms of students' expectations. This paper will outline our findings and identify the lessons learnt for future Placement Learning Projects.

**Key Words**

Students, Expectation, Perception, Evaluations, Outcomes

**The Placement Learning Project Module**

In their fourth year of undergraduate programme, students have an option to either Study Abroad (SPA) in their target language or undertake a Placement Learning Project (PLP). This can also be in a target language for a 4/5-month (minimum 16 working weeks). This module formalises EBSL's experience of providing and monitoring international placement opportunities for business students. The successful development of the PLP has been reflected in the workshop presentations made at the 2004 and 2006 ASET conferences. This module provides the crucial link in applying the conceptual knowledge and understanding gained in Levels 1 and 2 with real-life business practice. It thus not only contributes to the overall coherence of the management stream of the programme, but provides another tool for self-awareness and development for the student. The aim is for students to experience reality and attempt to understand why and how business "behaves" but more importantly, acknowledge their skills and develop themselves within this context.

**Rationale for the Study**

There is a lack of clear uniform criteria that students expect from their placements. Thus this paper will attempt to measure whether the expectations identified above – such as self-awareness or the ability to understand how a business "behaves", have indeed been met.  Hence this paper will attempt to reconcile the following:

- Whether the students' expectations have been met;
- whether EBSL's expectations via learning outcomes and skills have been achieved, and also;
- whether we can identify and resolve any gaps in terms of expectations from both the students' and EBSL's perspective.

**Literature Review**

According to Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml et al., 1993, expectations serve as the standard of comparison, whereby consumers compare ensuing service encounters with their expectations, ultimately resulting in the evaluation of service quality and/or satisfaction

Prugsamatz et al (2006) commented that Parsauraman's earlier work provided a well-known framework for measuring service quality, but mainly relied upon a single expectation standard, *desired expectations* (i.e. what a consumer feels a service provider should offer), as a comparison against which service performance is assessed. More recently, however, researchers have suggested that multi-expectations approaches may be more appropriate in service quality models (Parasuraman et al., 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1993). Similarly, research on customer satisfaction proposes that consumer judgements result from a comparison of expectations and perceptions of performance and traditionally has also relied primarily upon a single expectation standard, *predicted expectations* (i.e. what consumers predict or think will occur) (Swan and Trawick, 1980)

On the other hand, from an organisational behaviour perspective, when discussing expectations and perceptions Mullins (2005) makes reference to the term *psychological contract* and the relationship between employees and the organisation. In the Placement Learning Project context, as there are three stakeholders, the psychological contract is between the School, the placement organisation and the student. Interestingly, according to Emmott, M (2001), the relationship between the two parties - in this case the students and the organisation are likely to have the most influence in framing and managing the expectations.

Despite the difference in definitions and terms used, expectations are most typically defined as the predicted level of performance, or what a consumer anticipates will occur (Prugsamatz et al 2006; Oliver, 1985; Zeithaml et al., 1993).

Thus this paper analyses whether the schools' expectations have been met and, where these are not the same as the students', whether the students' expectations have been met.

**Methodology - Sample**

A random sample of twenty students – 14 male and 6 female assignments –  was used for this paper.

**Instruments**

The two key instruments used in writing this paper were, the Pre-Placement Questionnaire and the Post-Placement Questionnaire. Before the placement students are asked to complete a Pre-Placement Questionnaire. In this, students are asked to provide the key reasons for choosing the placement and to identify the skills that they want to apply. At the end of the placement students are asked to measure whether they had fulfilled their objectives by completing the Post-Placement Questionnaire and providing anecdotal evidence. Sample quotes from students have also been extracted to back-up whether the students' expectations have been achieved.

Another instrument used was the Company/Supervisor's Questionnaire. Some supervisors' quotes have been used in this paper.

**Limitations**

A larger sample base would have provided more valid and reliable data.

It would have been prudent to interview both the students and indeed the organisations involved in the placement. These would have been useful in terms of amplifying the data and providing added material for the paper. That is we could not follow-up "why" the students made the decisions they did.

It was not possible to collect meaningful information from all the organisations as not all the organisations completed the Company Questionnaire.

**Findings**

The module has been devised with all three stakeholders' expectations in mind. At the end of the day, EBSL has to articulate the expectations in the form of aims, objectives and learning outcomes.  For the Placement Learning Project the aim is to:

- develop the student as a reflective practitioner and to,
- enable the student to demonstrate previous learning into a work context by submitting an academic report.

More specifically to achieve these aims the student must be able recognise and apply their skills and knowledge in a business setting. In order to do this they must be able to satisfy the following learning outcomes. The School defines this as *"... what a graduate should know and be able to do on completion of the programme."* BA Handbook 2006-07.

Table I illustrates the key learning outcomes for the Placement Learning Project. These are subdivided into four key areas – Knowledge and Understanding, Cognitive, Transferable and Practical skills, and finally Personal and Interpersonal skills.

**Table I          Outcomes being evaluated for the Placement Learning Project**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Knowledge and Understanding* | To identify and develop an in-depth knowledge of concepts, principles and ideas from different business disciplines and their relationships, particularly the business major. |
| | To demonstrate a recognition of differing perspectives and methods of enquiry arising from contemporary developments in business. |
| *Cognitive (Intellectual & Conceptual)* | To demonstrate discernment in the application of theory to hypothetical and practical business situations. |
| | To provide solutions to a range of complex and/or unpredictable problems, based on critical evaluation through appropriate analytical frameworks. |
| *Transferable and Practical Skills (including Linguistic & Cross-Cultural)* | |
| | To show evidence of self- and peer- assessment capability. |
| *Personal and Interpersonal Skills* | To present a self-reflective analysis of personal training requirements appropriate to further development. |
| | To enhance organisational skills and self-efficacy through SPA experience and work placements (including the Placement Learning Project). |
| | To give and receive feedback supported by further evidence, positively and courteously. |

These expectations need to be measured and assessed. In order to break these expectations down, students need to demonstrate a set of skills. These can be seen in Table II below. These are the skills that we expect the students to fulfil. This paper will examine whether the students have chosen the placement to develop these skills, or whether any of these skills are indeed applicable for these modules.

**Table II**  **Table showing the core skills content for the placement learning project.**

| Skills | Evidence of the skill |
|---|---|
| **Cognitive skills** | • Develop reasoning and logical thought founded on the basis of theory and knowledge-gathering<br>• Apply relevant frameworks, ideas and models. |
| **Problem solving & decision making skills** | • Create, evaluate, assess and perceive a range of options together with the capacity to apply ideas and knowledge to a range of situations<br>• Reformat and express a range of ideas and information towards a given purpose<br>• Apply given tools and methods accurately to a problem in order to deduce appropriate conclusions |
| **Communication skills** | • Communicate in writing using appropriate formats (e.g. reports)<br>• Produce a complex piece of work that demonstrates a grasp of vocabulary within a business setting<br>• Produce work which succeeds in communicating a series of points effectively (e.g. through self-assessment, report and presentation) |
| **IT skills** | • Demonstrate the ability to use appropriate business software packages in assignments<br>• Use a range of technological equipment & systems independently to support work e.g. e-mail |
| **Self-management skills** | • Manage own roles and responsibilities to achieve intended goals<br>• Make effective use of time in achieving objectives<br>• Undertake personal and career development through self, company and formal assessment<br>• Develop intending, envisioning planning and goal setting skills<br>• Demonstrate the ability to self-motivate and discipline oneself throughout the module |
| **Performance** | • Demonstrate the ability to identify ways of improving performance through self-evaluation and company assessment and accept criticism. |
| **Interpersonal skills** | • Develop effective listening by treating others' values, beliefs and opinions with respect, within a working environment<br>• Provide evidence of effective negotiating or persuading with individuals and groups<br>• Demonstrate interpersonal awareness and sensitivity of various cultures<br>• Participate effectively in the operation of a team and collaborate with members of the team |
| **Managing tasks** | • Can take responsibility for own learning with minimum direction<br>• Deal with a combination of routine and non-routine tasks with increasing autonomy<br>• Identify and solve routine and non-routine problems in a considered manner |

The Placement Learning Project team has identified eight core skills, broken into various sub-skills.

**Reasons for participating in the Placement Learning Project**

For this sample students undertook their placements in various sectors, such as fashion, automobile, banking, advertising, travel, hotel and the pharmaceutical industries. These are illustrated in Appendix One.

Students were free to choose the reasons as to why they opted to do the PLP without any restriction. From the table below, students provided 36 different reasons for choosing the PLP. The table below provides a summary of the key reasons as to why the students chose to do the PLP.

**Table III        Students' reasons for participating in Placement Learning Project**

| Response | Frequency | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Gain knowledge of businesses | 13 | 15.8 |
| Develop language | 10 | 12.1 |
| Learn to adapt to the workplace (culture) | 7 | 8.4 |
| Develop self-awareness | 5 | 6.0 |
| Apply learnt business concepts into the real world | 5 | 6.0 |
| Understand how the market influence business decisions | 3 | 3.6 |
| Develop a clearer view of career progression | 3 | 3.6 |
| Develop effective communication in the business setting | 3 | 3.6 |
| Increase interpersonal skills | 3 | 3.6 |
| Apply Information Technology | 2 | 2.4 |
| Organisation | 2 | 2.4 |
| Improve knowledge of financial instruments | 2 | 2.4 |
| Make (myself) a reliable / responsible employee | 2 | 2.4 |
| Others (only generated one response) | 23 | 27.7 |
| **Total** | **83** | **100** |

The most popular reason for participating in the PLP was to develop awareness of how a business works.

> *" [I] intend to gain experience and knowledge of the company's varied matrix structure and how the operations are carried out."*

> *"I mainly intend to increase my knowledge within the areas [banking and finance] and to see if these areas interest me…It will also be a great opportunity for me to improve my business as well as personal skills."*

This is not surprising as students could not replicate gaining knowledge of businesses if they studied abroad. However, it should be noted that even though this was the most popular outcome, only 15% of the students undertaking the PLP chose this as the main reason. This is rather low.

The second most popular reason given by students was to develop their target language.

> *"[I want to] perfect my proficiency of the French language by engaging within a workplace with French-speaking colleagues, clients and customers."*

> *"[It will mean] I will have worked in three different countries in three different languages."*

All the students who wanted to achieve this objective at the beginning of the placement achieved it. However, once again only 12% of the students stated that this was one of the reasons for undertaking the PLP – another surprisingly low figure.

From the table above, the following can be concluded:

1) The reasons for students choosing the PLP are varied.
2) There is no one dominant or overriding reason for students to choose the PLP.
3) The Learning Outcomes as defined above are being achieved, but at various levels

**Table IV**        **Skills developed from the Placement Learning Project**

| Response | Frequency | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Communication (in the business setting, incl. report writing) | 9 | 12.5 |
| Information Technology | 8 | 11.0 |
| Languages | 6 | 8.2 |
| Self–management | 6 | 8.2 |
| Interpersonal skills | 4 | 5.5 |
| Problem solving | 4 | 5.5 |
| Cross cultural | 3 | 4.1 |
| Writing and analytical skills | 3 | 4.1 |
| Teamwork | 3 | 4.1 |
| Communication (other than generic business) | 2 | 2.7 |
| Negotiation skills | 2 | 2.7 |
| Leadership | 2 | 2.7 |
| Attention to detail | 2 | 2.7 |
| Professionalism | 2 | 2.7 |
| Time management | 2 | 2.7 |
| Perseverance | 2 | 2.7 |
| Others (only generated one response) | 13 | 17.9 |
| **Total** | **73** | **100** |

Skills tend to be the softer outcomes that students need to demonstrate in the placement. The table demonstrates that the students want to experience a wide array of skills and these vary. Students identified 29 different skills.

Communicating in the business context, namely writing reports, sending business emails, dealing with people etc., where the skills that were the most popular and subsequently achieved.

> *"I am a good communicator but I haven't been in an environment where I communicated with customers so I seek for opportunities."*

Surprisingly, "Information Technology" skills namely the ability to communicate via email, learning software packages, etc. came second in our study.

Only 8.2% of the students sampled felt that developing their target language was important. The same response rate was given for Self-management skills. It would be dangerous to assume that these two skills should be treated in an equal manner, but the data suggests that these two skills are viewed as of equal importance by students.
The following are examples of quotes of students....

> *"I want to improve and learn new skills, explore and develop my strengths as well as my weaknesses and try to improve them."*

> *"I really hope it will be an overall great learning experience and promote self-development."*

> *"It will allow me to put into practice what I have learnt in the classroom at university."*

> *"I wish to be seen as an important team member, not a foreign, temporary, work-experience person."*

Thus as a summary students go into the PLP with varied expectations, most of these are indeed fulfilled. However, it would be advisable to examine whether all of the Schools' expectations in the form of learning outcomes (from Table I) and consequently the key skills (from Table II) are indeed

being matched. Table V clearly illustrates that the following three areas are the significant key core skills:

- Produce a complex piece of work that demonstrates a grasp of vocabulary within a business setting;
- Demonstrate the ability to use appropriate business software packages in assignments;
- Demonstrate interpersonal awareness and sensitivity of various cultures.

All together just 60% of the skills were chosen from the list provided. Significantly, nine out of a possible twenty-three (nearly 40%) of the sub-skills were not chosen at all. These included the following:

- Reformat and express a range of ideas and information towards a given purpose
- Apply given tools and methods accurately to a problem in order to deduce appropriate conclusions
- Use a range of technological equipment and systems independently to support work e.g. e-mail (although this could be seen as part of IT)
- Manage own roles and responsibilities to achieve intended goals
- Develop intending, envisioning planning and goal setting skills
- Demonstrate the ability to identify ways of improving performance through self-evaluation and company assessment and accept criticism.
- Develop effective listening by treating others' values, beliefs and opinions with respect, within a working environment
- Deal with a combination of routine and non-routine tasks with increasing autonomy
- Identify and solve routine and non-routine problems in a considered manner

**Table V Table showing the core skills chosen by the students on a Placement Learning Project**

| Skills | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognitive skills** | Develop reasoning and logical thought founded on the basis of theory and knowledge-gathering | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| | Apply relevant frameworks, ideas and models | | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| **Problem solving and decision making skills** | Create, evaluate, assess and perceive a range of options together with the capacity to apply ideas and knowledge to a range of situations | | | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| | Reformat and express a range of ideas and information towards a given purpose | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | Apply given tools and methods accurately to a problem in order to deduce appropriate conclusions | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| **Communication skills** | Communicate in writing using appropriate formats (e.g. reports) | | | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| | Produce a complex piece of work that demonstrates a grasp of vocabulary within a business setting | | | | | | | | | | | 8 |
| | Produce work which succeeds in communicating a series of points effectively (e.g. through self-assessment, report and presentation) | | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| **IT skills** | Demonstrate the ability to use appropriate business software packages in assignments | | | | | | | | | | | 7 |
| | Use a range of technological equipment & systems independently to support work e.g. e-mail | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| **Self-management skills** | Manage own roles and responsibilities to achieve intended goals | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | Make effective use of time in achieving objectives | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| | Undertake personal and career development through self, company and formal assessment | | | | | | | | | | | 6 |
| | Develop intending, envisioning planning and goal setting skills | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | Demonstrate the ability to self-motivate and discipline oneself throughout the module | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| **Performance** | Demonstrate the ability to identify ways of improving performance through self-evaluation and company assessment and accept criticism. | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| **Interpersonal skills** | Develop effective listening by treating others' values, beliefs and opinions with respect, within a working environment | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | Provide evidence of effective negotiating or persuading with individuals and groups | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| | Demonstrate interpersonal awareness and sensitivity of various cultures | | | | | | | | | | | 7 |
| | Participate effectively in the operation of a team and collaborate with members of the team | | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| **Managing tasks** | Can take responsibility for own learning with minimum direction | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| | Deal with a combination of routine and non-routine tasks with increasing autonomy | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | Identify and solve routine and non-routine problems in a considered manner | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |

On the flip side, the following are a list of skills that the students had chosen but that did not fall into either of the categories above:

- Precision
- Perseverance (twice)
- Patience
- Personal skills
- Finance
- Assertive
- Open minded
- Adaptability
- Self-reflection
- Leadership
- Presentation
- Psychology of working relationship
- Attention to detail
- Professionalism

[It should be noted that eight sub-skills were not chosen at all.]

In some respects, the skills/attributes noted above represent a more general set of characteristics. These should perhaps be reflected in the specification of the learning outcomes of the PLP. However it is also interesting that these attributes have been declared and generated by the students themselves. This seems to reflect the outcome of the students' very useful learning experiences in the real world business world. In some cases these are attributes that can be better experienced than taught. Indeed it could be argued that some of these factors can only be learnt by experiencing and doing. Many students appreciate and understand the key factors for becoming a successful business person through their direct exposure to the world of work – they 'get it' in a way that the classroom can never convey.

The relevance of the students' experiences is seen in both their own comments and those of their supervisors/managers in the companies. To illustrate this, we have included below some direct quotations from students on what they think they have gained from their placements and a few comments by their corporate supervisors/managers.

Students' comments:

*"I feel that I have become more mature from doing this work placement and it has certainly reinforced my values and beliefs. Doing an internship helps you to understand that nothing in life comes for free…If you want to achieve certain goals in life, you have to be determined and do things you might not really enjoy."*

*"By doing this placement, I have enhanced many of my strengths and improved my weaknesses. I have grown mentally and I have realised what is required to perform well within this type of business…I am very satisfied with my effort and I think that this placement has had a very good effect on me."*

*"I don't know how to name this skill but I have learnt to learn by myself. I couldn't expect my colleagues to teach me everything. I also knew that I had a lot to learn since this was my first proper work experience. However, with supervision, I have taught myself a lot of things."*

*"It gives you the entire experience of what it feels like [to be] working and prepares you for life after School."*

This is just a small sample of the personal reflections of students on their learning while working in business organisations.

In a similar vein, there is recognition from the supervisors/managers of the contribution that certain students have made to their organisation and of the learning that they have achieved. Once again, we are including a few of these comments as evidence of the value of the PLP.

Supervisors'/managers' comments:

> *"An extremely motivated student. 'X' completed tasks to deadline, was able to prioritise and produced work of a high standard."*

> *"She was an incredible team player; she learnt everything she needed to and applied it beautifully. 'Y' has made significant progress in applying her B.A. [degree] to practice and has learnt from it. She is a very keen, intelligent and motivated individual and will thrive whatever she does. It was a pleasure to have her on board."*

> *"'Z' has brought us a breath of fresh air…She did a fantastic job by being very helpful and capable…It has been a pleasure to have her as our intern."*

Clearly, these are the more positive comments but it has to be noted that, in general, that is the way the comments were. Apart from a few suggestions for students, such as "he could work on becoming more assertive and direct", the tendency was for supervisors/managers to make no comment at all or to comment positively.

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this paper has been to evaluate the effectiveness of the PLP in terms of students' expectations. As far as we can determine from the small sample investigated, and from selections of students' own reflections on their learning, we can assert that the PLP has broadly met students' expectations. As is often the case with a study of this kind, it is difficult to pin down in any quantitative fashion the measurement of expectations. It is more a question of trying to match 'expectation' statements to 'outcome' statements. This has been done in both the text and in the presentation of tabulated data.

Similarly, from the point of view of the Business School, we can judge that, in general, the expectations that we had in establishing and operating the PLP have been broadly met. The PLP *has* given students a meaningful experience of the realities of life in the business world; the PLP *has* required students to reflect perceptively on their experience; and the PLP *has* established itself as a valid and valued part of the undergraduate experience for the relatively small number of students who opt to take it.

In a broader academic context, the findings of this paper seem to bear out the views of Emmott, M (2001) that the significant relationship between the two parties - in this case the students and the PLP organisation – are likely to have the most influence in framing and managing the expectations on all sides. It is clearly the practical experience of working in business organisations that has most impact on our most important stakeholders – the students undertaking placements as part of their preparation for the world of work.

**Recommendations**

This paper has outlined our findings and attempted to identify any lessons learnt for the future development of the Placement Learning Project. We would assert that there are a number of internal and external lessons in the form of recommendations.

*Internal*

Carry out further surveys of student expectations in relation to outcomes

Maintain a regular log of expectations and outcomes

Administer regular questionnaires to PLP students on the expectations/outcomes issue

Establish more detailed recording of the comments of managers/supervisors

*External*

Conduct further research into the matching of customers' expectations and outcomes within the context of placements in general, both within EBS London and in other higher education institutions

Establish a (better) quantitative tool for measuring the match or mismatch between expectations and outcomes

Research other studies that have examined Emmott's (2001) contention about expectations and outcomes

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## Appendix One

| Industry Sector | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Pharmaceutical | 3 |
| Fashion | 2 |
| Interior Design | 1 |
| Automobile | 1 |
| Manufacturing | 1 |
| Engineering | 1 |
| Banking | 2 |
| Export | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Advertising | 2 |
| Marketing/Media | 1 |
| Travel/Leisure | 1 |
| Luxury Hotels/Leisure | 1 |
| Investments/Real Estate | 1 |
| Shipping | 1 |
| Finance | 1 |
| **Total** | **20** |

*EXTRAS Examples*

*Examples*

"I mainly intend to increase my knowledge within the areas [banking and finance] and to see if these areas interest me…It will also be a great opportunity for me to improve my business as well as personal skills."

"[I hope to] experience first-hand the reality of responsibility one is obliged to fulfil in being a full-time employee."

"The work should teach me to be more independent and organised."

"I want to improve and learn new skills, explore and develop my strengths as well as my weaknesses and try to improve them."

"I really hope it will be an overall great learning experience and promote self-development."

"The job I am doing is not exactly what I wanted, but I think it is also a good lesson because you have to deal sometimes in your life with what you do not wish to do."

"[A PLP] will allow me to learn different job positions…which will help me choose my future career."

"The PLP will also reflect very well on my future CV for having…some real time experience."

"It will allow me to put into practice what I have learnt in the classroom at university."

"[It will mean] I will have worked in three different countries in three different languages."

"I will obtain experience of business practices in a foreign country."

"I wish to be seen as an important team member, not a foreign, temporary, work-experience person."

**Student Outcomes**

Categories

> Taking/showing initiative
> Self-directed learning
> Showing enthusiasm
> Having a positive attitude
> Recognising one's own qualities
> Personal development
> Personal maturity
> Recognising weaknesses

Improving strengths
Recognising and facing difficulties
Standing up for own beliefs/values (when they were challenged)
Working successfully in a team
Gaining understanding of work in a business/organisation
Understanding work and business cultures
Preparing for the future (outside university/post-graduation)

**Examples**

"I took initiatives on many occasions…After a certain period of time, she [my supervisor] believed I could prepare the proposals by myself without her guidance all the time. I had plenty of creative ideas that I want to put together so this was a perfect chance."

"I think I have great determination, patience and consideration which are good qualities in a professional environment."

"I learned how to deal with a boss who is in a bad mood."

"I have more knowledge of what the customer needs, and therefore possibly finding a solution 'half way', instead of rejecting an offer."

"I have learnt that sometimes I am too afraid to make mistakes."

"There have been a few occasions where I believed that we have not acted correctly…In these situations, I struggled with my own beliefs/ethics and the responsibility/mission I had from the company."

"It has been quite difficult at times but I am proud of what I have achieved and it has been a challenge I have enjoyed."

"The working culture was much more laidback than what [sic] I had come to expect."

"Internal politics were ever-present."

"I had been taught at EBS to write reports but never with such refined accuracy and concise revision."

"I still have a problem over-analysing things."

"It is always important to be enthusiastic and show that you are motivated."

"There were many things that you could see as boring and mundane but I tried to have a positive outlook…and a positive attitude: it makes it all so much easier."

"I usually don't like to work as a team due to the bad experiences I had at EBS. However, I started to appreciate working as a team thanks to my internship."

"I think this is proof of a good effort and it feels like I have achieved my main objective."

"I have had many thoughts about my future after having done this placement and I have decided that maybe being an entrepreneur is something that suits my personality more."

"Without having good teamwork skills, working for such a firm can be very difficult. I was lucky because I had good experience from [the Business] School as well as from different team work courses. Being a team player makes the working environment much more pleasant."

"I didn't fully grasp the inter-linking or, in some cases, the inter-dependence of the organisational unites that comprise the company at large."

**Supervisors' Comments**

*Positive*

"R's level of work and commitment to the group is of high quality. He understands the importance and dependency [*sic*] of teamwork."

"X was very serious and reliable…very successful in building relationships with people…very open-minded and motivated."

"Z has shown a strong will to progress and to set up good relationships within the team and other staff."

"Z has a good practical sense and he's able to innovate."

"Y was independent, yet a team player at the same time."

*Negative*

"He could work on becoming more assertive and direct."

"He shouldn't be afraid to assert himself more."

# Notions of Professional Recognition and Identity amongst Educators from HE Professional Education Programmes

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**Abstract**

This paper reports the outcomes of a pilot study undertaken to inform a more substantial project on notions of identity amongst educators teaching on HE professional education programmes. The pilot draws on a sample of seven semi-structured interviews with individual HE educators from youth and community work, post-compulsory education and training and initial teacher education and training. The sample is drawn from three HEIs. The research is also informed by a focus group of eleven educators drawn from nine HE youth and community work programmes.

The pilot study found tensions related to the managerialism and marketisation of HE, articulated in two particular contexts – student support and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). There was evidence of work taking place in invisible contexts which are not recognised in the educator's workload and a sense that HEIs do not always recognise the workload demands of those teaching on professionally accredited programmes. There were also frustrations around research agendas in the context of the RAE and a lack of time and space for educators to research issues of importance to professional programmes.

Some interesting views were offered on the differences between those teaching on vocational and non-vocational programmes.

The paper concludes that there is perhaps a need to address these issues within a collective, interprofessional context.

**Background**

This research aims to explore themes that are important to educators who teach on professionally validated Higher Education (HE) programmes. It was inspired by an earlier investigation of 'stakeholder perceptions' of housing studies (Huyton, 2003). The 2003 investigation was based on a small sample of educators, former day-release students and sponsoring employers associated with professional housing studies programmes at three British higher education institutions (HEIs). Semi-structured interviews with each 'stakeholder' group discovered that there was some disparity between the employer view and the educator view of the nature and purpose of housing studies programmes in higher education (HE). Educators veered towards the view that the academic integrity of programmes could be compromised by pressures from employers and from the professional body to prioritise occupational standards within curriculum content. A review of literature at the time had uncovered similar tensions.

Employers commented that some modules were insufficiently located in housing practice and expressed concern about their ability to impart the skills and competences required in the field. Former students reported having found clear relevance in the curriculum content in relation to overarching policy and strategic themes, but felt that some content was based around individual educators' research projects which were not necessarily relevant to the role of the housing worker.

The fact that interview data was reported anonymously was of particular importance to both educators and employers. Each relied on the other for the continued existence of housing studies programmes and many of the tensions expressed in the interviews had not been articulated between parties. It seemed that in the absence of alternatives, the continuity of this sometimes uneasy partnership was important. Whilst clear themes had emerged which were important and relevant to educators on professional or vocational programmes at British HEIs, the sample was too small and too specialised to produce

generalisable conclusions. Opportunities for exploring this particular scenario more deeply were restricted by the reluctance of some respondents to engage in open and honest debate. It was clear that there were two distinct identities associated with housing studies, the housing professional and the housing academic, with educators locating themselves firmly in the academic domain. This phenomenon was deemed worthy of further investigation.

In 2007 a pilot study was undertaken to inform the design of a larger, more substantial project that would investigate notions of identity amongst educators teaching on professional HE programmes. This more recent research used a wider sample drawing on higher education programmes for education professionals comprising youth and community work, post-compulsory education and training and initial teacher education and training. This paper will focus on the outcomes of seven semi-structured interviews with individual educators and a focus group of eleven educators from youth and community work programmes. The focus group included representatives from nine HEIs and uncovered issues relating to age, sex, ethnicity and type of institution, none of which were raised in any depth during the individual interviews. The individual interviews enabled a level of in-depth personal exploration which was not possible within the focus group.

The paper begins with a brief incursion into literature considered relevant as a framework for analytical themes. Whilst these themes were utilised as a focus for data collection, they were introduced in the form of generalised topics rather than rigid guidelines and respondents were encouraged to introduce and develop topics they found important.

**A brief incursion into the literature**

There is a developing literature which examines the effects of marketisation and managerialism on the professional identity and practice of educators in HEIs (for example: Pollitt, 1993; Eraut, 1994; Thorne and Cuthbert, 1996; Deem, 1998; Exworthy and Halford, 1999; Flynn, 1999; Clarke et al, 2000; Fergusson, 2000; Ozga, 2000 a and b; Shore and Wright, 2000; Walker, 2001 a and b; Patterson, 2003; Giroux and Searles Giroux, 2004; Gleeson and Knights, 2006**).** Managerialism and marketisation have been sufficiently powerful to displace notions of curriculum and pedagogy (Walker, 2002: 43).

Bernstein (2000: 65) describes an official arena in which there is a struggle for groups to transfer their 'bias' and 'focus' into policy and practice. 'Official discourse' expects to influence the performances and practices of teachers and students, thus shaping their pedagogic identity. Bernstein distinguishes between identities generated by 'centreing resources' managed by the state, and 'de-centred resources' generated using local autonomy, asking us to imagine a 'de-centred market' in which an education institution has 'considerable autonomy over its budget, the organisation of its discourse, how it uses its staff, the number and type of staff, the courses it constructs', provided it can attract sufficient students, meet performance criteria and optimise its position in relation to similar institutions (2000:69). Mr Bernstein, we don't need to imagine, you are describing the modern British university in a marketised and managerial context.

In this scenario Bernstein (2000:69) purports that management will distribute rewards and punishments as it monitors the effectiveness of its staff in relation to satisfying and creating local markets:

> Personal commitment and particular dedication of staff and students are regarded as resistances, as oppositions to the free circulation of knowledge…[which] constructs an outwardly responsive identity rather than one driven by inner dedication. Contract replaces covenant.

Bernstein's description suggests that the intrinsic motivation of academic staff is displaced by the performance and practice requirements of state and institution. This has some resonance with the work of Goffman (1997: 81) who suggests that in situations where behaviours and performance are underpinned by organisational expectations, individuals will find a way of developing 'underlives' where they may operate according to intrinsic motivations. 'Our status is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks' (Goffman, 1997: 90).

Indeed Barnett (2000: 101) suggests that academics are masters of 'the professional hoodwink' giving the appearance of accepting and conforming to external influences whilst retaining their own professional values and practices. Gleeson and Knights (2006: 288-9) find the tendency to stereotype professionals as strategic 'artful dodgers' potentially ignores the moral and ethical constructions of

professional identity. Research which emphasises the deprofessionalising tendencies of managerial pressures tends to 'caricature complicit or strategic compliance', whereas it might be preferable to 'reinterpret a view of professional habitus grounded in a pedagogic practice and civic action'.

In the context of professional or vocational HE programmes, one potential area of conflict is between the expectations of employers and academic staff. Watson (2000) presents a somewhat rosy view of the negotiated synthesis between academic and professional 'stakeholders' on professional HE programmes, but there are others who would suggest otherwise. Jeffs and Smith (1990: 126-7) are critical of a youth and community work profession that does not share a common understanding of theories of informal education and critical reflective practice. Theory and literature about youth and community work practice is scarce and inadequate owing to the 'romantic imagination' and 'anti-intellectual ethos' of many practitioners. They further argue that employers, validating bodies, academics and students fail to address key issues adequately, often justified by the fact that marketisation and the associated orientation towards training dedicated to a limited number of competences, have overridden the more discursive and critical process of education in order to create an 'appropriate' workforce.

Singh and Cowden (2006), writing about social work education, concur with the view that managerialism has resulted in a potential for professional practice being reducible to mechanical application of policies. They are concerned that formulaic forms of theory predominate teaching and they make a rallying cry for social workers to be 'transformative intellectuals' who will reclaim a critical praxis that favours dialogic approaches to promote social change over the deterministic and regulatory nature of current practice.

Barnett (1997) and Giroux and Searles Giroux (2004) appear to suggest that educators are not so much silenced but have become convinced by state ideology that education is now about job training and competitive market advantage. As Barnett (2000: 99) points out, ontologically we have lost sight of what it is to be a university, therefore we find ourselves in a state of 'epistemological mayhem' where 'anything goes provided it can find backers'.

Nicholls (2001) finds that the move towards managerialism has increased many of the tensions within the identity of the professional HE educator. She describes previous notions of academic freedom as inward-looking and self-referential within disciplinary boundaries. Academics need to look outside themselves and embrace the external world through research and scholarly activity which is framed by a shared concern with learning and development of professional self. Watson (2000) would argue that professionally accredited HE programmes have always engaged in this type of approach with some degree of success.

The scenarios outlined above indicate that HE teachers on professionally accredited programmes have a fundamental question to answer. Are they attempting to counter managerialism by transforming the HE curriculum, or are they concerned with transforming the professions for which they are preparing their students?

**Themes discovered in the data**

An initial pilot project was undertaken in order to identify whether the themes discovered in the housing studies research and those in the above literature were important to HE educators teaching on professional education programmes. The seven semi-structured interviews which might be more appropriately described as 'guided conversation' (Lofland and Lofland, cited in Fielding and Thomas, 2001: 124) were undertaken with a self-selecting sample and took place on the interviewees' own territory. These methods were chosen as the best proposition for allowing respondents to influence the agenda and speak in their own words.

The focus group of eleven educators from HE youth and community work programmes was also self-selecting and took place at the annual conference of lecturers in youth and community work. Whilst some of the themes arising out of the individual interviews were introduced into the focus group forum, respondents were encouraged to introduce their own discussion themes and the diversity of the group resulted in the introduction of a more diverse range of topics.

**Effects of marketisation and managerialism on HE and on the education professions**

A number of respondents felt that identity tensions were not as much between being and academic and being an educational professional, but between the academic and the bureaucratic or managerial role that was becoming an increasing part of the job of HE educator.

Many respondents felt institutional pressures to research and publish in order to improve the institution's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) rating. The timing of the pilot project, which coincided with the RAE submissions, might have influenced these responses, but it was clear that these pressures had been experienced over a long period of time, not just the recent past. Respondents did not tend to articulate an anti-research stance, in fact many lamented the fact that they had been unable to pursue their own research interests owing to lack of time within a workload dominated by student support and servicing the administrative requirements of professional bodies and the academic institution. A number of respondents felt their own research interests around workplace learning were not supported by the institution because they were not considered relevant to the RAE:

> People will talk about a vocational type of course in a disparaging way because they don't see a researching academic, they don't see the learning as potential research.

Whilst mangerialism and bureaucracy pressures were experienced with some resentment across the sample, this was only ever articulated in the context of the HEI and was not raised as a challenge emanating from the professions for which students are being prepared. It was felt by some that the idea of a professional training is a crucial responsibility that differentiates them from those teaching on other types of programmes:

> This is very much about a professional training as well as a university degree – you are having to balance both of those – the demands of being a teacher trainer alongside an academic career.

> There's learning for very specific purposes here and you can't necessarily indulge in something that you could indulge in if you were in a degree that wasn't bound within professional constraints as well. You've also not only to contend with the demands of the university …but to be professionally certified as well, being accredited by bodies as well … so there's these ideas and considerations that you have but I don't imagine you have the same in a degree like history where there's not that professional body telling you what has to be included as well,

Most respondents were keen to undertake research in order to inform their teaching practice and there was a belief that universities should be producing new practice knowledge through the research activity of academic staff, although most educators in the sample were not research-active owing to aforementioned time constraints:

> I think one of the difficulties on these sorts of programmes and one of the ironic things as far as I'm concerned is that we give advice to our students to take time, take stock, reflect and analyse and therefore move forward with logical application of their conclusions at whatever level that is, and then you look at your own situation and think it's a case of not do as I do, do as I say because we perhaps don't give ourselves that luxury or that time to do it which is probably a fault in the system somewhere.

Some who had started their academic careers in teacher training institutions that have since become universities explained how there is an institutional pressure to research and publish which was not there previously. It seems there is some resistance to these research pressures, but one respondent felt:

> It's a sad argument to have because the two have to inform each other.

There was a general feeling that educators on professional programmes undertake a great deal of research, mainly to inform their teaching. This research goes largely unrecognised by institutions because it rarely gets worked into publishable articles owing to the aforementioned time constraints.

There is evidence here to support Watson's view that professionally accredited HE programmes are supportive of Nicholls's idea that academics should be concerned with professional development of

self and embracing the external world through research and scholarly activity. It could perhaps be argued that a self-selecting sample of HE educators is likely to be interested in professional development and a more purposive sample might elicit responses more in line with Singh and Cowden's 'mechanical application of policies' or Jeffs and Smith's 'anti-intellectual ethos'. Whilst acknowledging that the significance of these findings should not be over-stated, there was undoubtedly a universal feeling from educators included in this sample that their willingness and desire to research education practice was frequently frustrated by institutional agendas which might be described by Bernstein as institutional and state requirements overcoming personal commitment.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

All individual and focus group respondents were asked directly how they would describe what they do for a living. Almost without exception the first response was 'teacher' with more diverse responses resulting from further exploration, the most frequent being 'facilitator'.

> I see myself as a teacher and lecturer first I have to be honest, and a researcher – I do research my own subject – but researcher in terms of producing research papers and things – that would be a second string.

> I definitely see myself as a teacher, whether that's a teacher because I'm teaching students or because I'm a primary teacher.

Some used the term 'teacher' to differentiate from 'lecturer' which was considered inappropriate for the nature of HE practice on professional programmes:

> Teachers kind of work in schools whereas this setting is different in some ways, and the whole notion of lecturing I think in my own mind conjures up a didactic way of working and I don't identify with that at all.

Individual and focus group respondents described a joy or a motivation from developing students as thinkers, teachers, community educators or youth workers:

> If I had a student who comes in at 2 o'clock and they actually go out a better teacher that's what turns me on and you see people who perhaps don't have confidence perhaps doubt their skills but have an openness and a willingness and I think well I could work with them and you watch them blossom and that's what I count as important.

> I like seeing people change, change for the better.

Many had chosen to move to HE because they felt this was the best way to make a difference to the quality of the education professions in which they had begun their careers. For some there was a clear intent to pass on their own practice experiences in order to create a more reflexive student practitioner:

> I think actually all my classroom experiences and my experience of work environments have been a basis of what I'm doing and where I'm going now through my action research routes … How I feel about what teachers should be doing, I base that very much on what I'm doing now and what I hope teachers are wanting to do now, so I see that very directly related to my own practice, where I feel that I've changed as well …and hopefully bringing those experiences to students and sharing that so they can see this is something that's relevant.

All respondents felt that they brought useful professional skills into the HE teaching context. This reinforced the idea that there was an intrinsic motivation towards teaching and development of students:

> One of the colleagues who was on the [HE teaching certificate] with me was from computer sciences and …I don't think he's ever not had a computer in front of him and had, you know, umpteen degrees in that but had never worked with people, never mind teaching students, so it was epiphany to him that you could put them into groups and get them to discuss something whereas to me that seemed bloody obvious.

There was a general sense that the nature and amount of academic and pastoral support offered to students is neither recognised nor valued. Some felt that time and space was not made available for student support and there was a sense in which the personal support for students goes on behind closed doors, often resulting in workloads that far exceed contractual commitments. Some individual respondents described days when the entire time was spent in the office on individual student support and days when they see only students and don't get a chance to speak to colleagues or to undertake other work. This was compared with a perception that educators from other academic programmes may spend entire days at home working on research projects and there was some antipathy towards institutions that valued research over student support.

A significant number of individual respondents felt that those who teach on vocational programmes were more student-centred than those who teach on non-vocational programmes, thereby offering students more academic and pastoral support:

> I think what the vocational HE academic, somebody who's come in from a practice background, I think they help ground those who have gone through an education system and never left it, I think they bring a reality and in one sense it's probably more those people, the vocational, who are more in touch with the widening participation agenda than the true academic perhaps.

It is perhaps unsurprising that HE educators coming from a background in the education professions would articulate a strong intrinsic motivation to teach and develop students. Of greater significance is the perception that those on non-vocational programmes are less likely to support their students. No evidence was offered in support of this perception. It must be acknowledged that educators from non-vocational HE programmes have not been included in this sample and this is potentially an area worthy of further investigation.

Relevance of curriculum to external world

Most respondents felt that they had managed to find ways to remain in touch with practice in the professional field and described the ways in which they achieved this. The main conduit was by making visits to students on placement and observing their practice. It was also clear that students would bring their own work experiences to the taught sessions at university and this was also seen as a key link with the workplace:

> You really do live that quite closely because you are working with them in such a close nature and talking through their experiences…for me that's the biggest thing that keeps me very aware of what's happening in the majority of practice contexts.

One educator believed that his role in HE is more of an intellectual process to make students aware of the politics and the debates that surround their practice. Workplace skills and competences need to be demonstrated by students but:

> …they do that from practice and within the tutorship of people who are actually embedded in that practice and that's why the practice tutors are so important … that's why I think it's important that people in the field in certain areas are given parity with academics ..I'm not a youth worker, not now, I stopped being a youth worker probably 20 years ago. My interest is in one sense not in the competences, not in my ability to deliver youth work, my interest is in developing adults to be able to go out and be equipped to work with young people.

There was a good deal of discussion about the balance between theory and practice:

> It's got to be real and they've got to see that something in here actually makes sense in the classroom and one of the biggest criticisms that we get is there's too much theoretical stuff, that it's not how to actually work in a classroom and deal with Primary 7, it's trying to find that balance of drawing on recent experience and being able to reflect in depth on that.

Three respondents believed that some HE educators have lost touch with practice and 'probably need to work on that' and one mentioned a context in which there had been a complaint about lecturers not being sufficiently in touch with practice. One respondent felt it important to recognise how easily one

can become disconnected from practice, particularly in the context of the stresses and pressures of working with children and young people. She felt it would be useful to go back into practice for a short space of time to reassure herself and others that she can 'actually still do it'.

Whilst there was some indication that the curriculum is under pressure to be more practice-focused, this in no way replicated the strength of feeling expressed by the educators in the housing studies sample. The housing educators felt their academic curriculum was under threat from the demands of employers whom they perceived as requiring more formulaic forms of practice-focused teaching. The education sample felt a similar tension, but were more able to envision an appropriate theory-practice balance. Possibly the key difference lies in the strong emphasis on reflective practice within the education professions, whereas there was little discussion of reflective practice from the housing sample.

Perceptions of 'Academics'

Respondents held clear views on the definition of an academic. There was a strong 'ivory tower' theme which tended to be directed at those HE lecturers who teach on non-vocational programmes:

> I suppose in my view [a true academic] is someone who is locked away in an office doing 60 per cent research and a little bit of teaching.

> I suppose I have visions of Michael Caine in Educating Rita in his ivory tower and just giving out all this information, I don't want to be *like* that but that's what my feeling is about what a traditional professor or an academic would be like.

Focus group members were more mixed in their responses. It was possible to detect that those who were newer to the HE role felt stronger links with practice. Three educators who had been working in HE for less than a year felt that their lack of educator experience meant that they identified themselves still as youth or community work practitioners. Within the focus group there was comparatively little debate on the definition of academic, but some discussion centred around the notion that the role of academic is becoming more associated with managerial and strategic functions. The group debated the existence of a type or caricature (suit and tie; bow tie; sherry; white; male) which some feel is a glass ceiling or a benchmark against which one is judged. Where individual respondents acknowledged their definitions of an 'academic' were not based on factual information but on perceptions alone, some focus group members gave examples of why they held these views. In common with the individual respondents, many felt that they would not match up to this caricature, although three of the eleven did feel they would describe themselves as 'academics' and two did not concur with the caricature.

Sense of self and identity

The theme of 'how others see me' was important, particularly to individual respondents. Some were concerned by the fact that they are no longer seen as part of the practice community, in fact five respondents expressed concern about how they are viewed by practitioners who have remained in the workplace context. This tended to be expressed by those who felt they had maintained links with practice:

> Another thing I find difficult is when you go into school and they treat you differently, they don't treat me like a teacher any more.

> People she used to be really friendly with in school now say 'well who does she think she is?'

Another respondent was more willing to accept that her role in HE did actually make her different from her former colleagues:

> There's definitely a tension there I'm seen as the ivory tower tutor, the researcher and the academic, I'm not seen as the teacher and there is kind of … 'well what do you know? You don't have 50 children running round your ankles on Monday morning', so it's more obvious for me now that I'm different from my peers.

In the context of teacher training, one educator felt that there had indeed been a negative misconception amongst school-teachers about HE-based teacher trainers. She finds that this perception is changing over time, however:

> I've noticed a few changes over the years and I think particularly so because of the way we work with schools. Sometimes teachers are seconded to work in the Centre [for Teacher Training] and all of those that do are quite shocked by the amount of time and effort we go to in our role. They just say 'this is not what we thought' they have this notion that we finish when the students finish, that it's quite an easy job to do, and they now realise just how complex and how driven we have to be to fulfil all those requirements.

All respondents were asked 'Are you an 'academic'?' and there was a general discomfort about using this term to describe themselves, which is not surprising in the light of the perceptions of academics articulated above:

> In one sense I would say I was a jobbing academic – jobbing in the sense that I'm still very much a pragmatist – I like making things happen – I'm an ideas person – I wouldn't class myself as an academic.

> I think of the ivory tower thing when I think of academics that's why I don't put myself there because I work too hard, but I don't think all academics are like that.

The idea that people felt they were somehow not worthy of the title 'academic' was a common emerging theme:

> I would have been reluctant to describe myself as an academic because I think that would be me ascribing myself some self-importance that I wouldn't actually be able to say would be a valid comment.  I think increasingly I could describe myself as becoming an academic and that would be because of the EdD and that's about going down a very different road that's research based and at a very different level of academic study. Again that's something that tends to be put upon my friends - family say you're the academic and it's putting you into that box of 'you're supposed to be intelligent' the whole time because you are working here and what you are doing.

> I don't think people are academics who are in teacher training.

> Well again it's a strange point because I was a non-traditional student and I keep thinking well, hang on a minute, somebody's going to find me out here – and I'm always studying…I suppose for my own self really…I've written a book, I'm writing two chapters in another book, I'm thinking well I must be an academic because I'm doing these academic things!

The validity of the perceptions of academics from amongst the sample has not been tested and there were respondents from the focus group who did not concur with the typical response, yet it cannot be denied that there is a strong 'them and us' perception amongst the educator sample. This was not limited to tensions within HE, there was also a sense in which some respondents felt acutely the lack of value or status placed on community education and youth work compared with HE:

> Community Ed has always been considered the Cinderella service, I think they *call* it the Cinderella service, but it could be that in Higher Education you have the fancy ceremony, the fancy robes and I think it's good that there are those who have attained have that but equally there's the stepping stones.

The fact that some respondents were concerned with how others see them resonates with the idea of the reflected or reflexive self. This is not a new concept and can be traced back to the work of early psychologists such as James (1890) and Cooley (1902) who developed the argument that individuals draw on social influences and the views of others in defining their identity (Tice and Wallace, 2003). Mead (1934: 7) described the community or social grouping to which individuals belong as the 'generalised other' and purported that an individual's view of his or her own self and identity will reflect the views of the generalised other. There have been many studies in the social psychology domain which have come to a variety of conclusions as to the significance of the generalised other. Tice and Wallace (2003: 103) conclude that Mead's view might have been too simplistic, finding that

research supports a revised theory that an individual's own view of him or herself might influence their perception of how others see them:

> It is people's perceptions of how they are viewed, not how they are actually viewed by others, that have the strongest impact on people's self-concepts'.

Whilst there was a strong sense that respondents in this study were aware of the views of the generalised other, it was also clear that they do not concur with how others see them. This phenomenon was not anticipated at the start of the research and is deemed worthy of further exploration. A future paper is planned, in collaboration with a social psychologist, in order to explore the data from the perspective of notions of self and identity.

**Conclusions**

The results of this pilot have been informative in influencing the focus and planning of more substantive research. Conclusions in this paper will be limited to those that might be of interest to practitioners involved in HE programmes which involve workplace learning.

There was a clear resonance with the literature on managerialism and marketisation of HE. This was articulated in two particular contexts – student support and the RAE. Respondents were frustrated by their perception that student support is not recognised or valued by HEIs and there were experiences of support taking place in invisible contexts which are not recognised in the educator's workload. The scenario here is more complex than Goffman's image of 'underlives' in which employees carry out their preferred tasks in the 'cracks' of 'solid buildings'. Clearly HEIs would not object to educators supporting their students, but there is insufficient recognition of this important task in explicit workload calculations.

Educators described the pressures of complying not only with academic regulations and bureaucracy, but also the added pressures of professional agendas and the requirements of professional accrediting bodies. This was described as a sense of responsibility to the professions for which students are being prepared and HEIs might consider whether workloads need to be adjusted in response.

Gleeson and Knights found Barnett's image of educators as masters of the professional hoodwink problematic in that it overlooked moral and ethical imperatives that underpin HE practice. It could be argued that respondents viewed both responsibility to the professions and student support in a moral and ethical framework and did not feel they could neglect either. Educators are not therefore choosing to work in the 'cracks', but are finding that the volume and nature of their work is not recognised by their employers. Walker's view that managerialism has displaced curriculum and pedagogy is true her in the sense that some elements have been displaced from explicit workloads into invisible work that often takes place in educators' own time.

In the context of the RAE, which is considered here in the context of Bernstein's theory of the performance and practice requirements of state and institution, respondents were frustrated on two counts. First, there was not a reluctance to engage in research and reflection as part of a project towards transforming practice. In fact Singh and Cowden may draw hope from respondents' comments about developing reflective practitioners. Frustration arose from the fact that educators on professional programmes were unable to find time and space within the context of the range of other demands around student support and professional agendas. A second frustration arose from the notion that the type of pedagogic research which some had managed to undertake was not valued by HEIs because it was not deemed relevant to the RAE. There was little evidence of Jeffs and Smith's 'anti-intellectual ethos', nor of the idea that educators now believe education is about job training and competitive advantage, as suggested by Barnett and Giroux and Searles Giroux.

The perceptions of non-vocational academics and the related themes of self and identity were important, if unexpected, discoveries and will be the subject of a future paper. It is worth mentioning that some individual respondents expressed issues around academic identity in a manner that indicated some personal insecurity, whereas others expressed resentment towards a group of people whom they perceived to be less engaged with teaching and student support. Some individuals expressed both. The spirit of discussions in the focus group was much more political, which perhaps reflected a sense of

collectivism not present in the individual interviews. The focus group also raised a more diverse range of issues to be explored in future papers.

The overarching message is that many educators on professional and vocational HE programmes feel that their work is not sufficiently recognised or valued within the context of HEIs and there is perhaps a need to address these issues within a collective, interprofessional context.

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# Work Experience: The Welsh Dimension

Jackie Cresswell-Griffith and Helen Hare
GO Wales

WORK EXPERIENCE:
*The Welsh Dimension*

Jackie Cresswell-Griffith
*GO Wales Programme Manager (HEFCW)*

Helen Hare
*GO Wales Worktaster Manager (Cardiff University)*

OVERVIEW

1. Who are we?
2. Background to GO Wales
3. Current focus GO Wales
4. GO Wales Work Tasters Programme
5. The future of GO Wales
6. Questions?

Who are we?

Jackie Cresswell-Griffith
GO Wales Programme Manager (HEFCW)

Helen Hare
GO Wales Worktaster Manager (Cardiff University)

Background to GO Wales

- Began in 2003
- Grew out of the merger of Cymru Prosper Wales and the Graduate Wales Database
- A partnership of the HEI Careers Services in Wales
- Managed by HEFCW
- Funded by WAG and EU Structural Funds
- In its 3rd phase and heading for its 4th

Current focus of the Programme

- Aims – employability and workforce skills
- Subsidised 10 week placements for students and graduates in Welsh SMEs
- Unsubsidised 10 week placements for students and graduates in all types of Welsh organisations
- Work Tasters
- Continuing Professional Development support for graduates in Welsh SMEs

GO Wales Work Taster Programme

- Grew out of a University of Glamorgan project – Experience Works
- Became part of GO Wales in April 2005
- Aimed at students and graduates for whom paid work experience may not be an option
- In last phase (21 months) we delivered 817 Tasters
- Currently aiming for at least 580 in 12 months

## Aims of the Taster Programme

Tastees
- To get HE students and graduates into SMEs and other organisations
- Help students and graduates find out more about career areas of interest
- Help students and graduates understand skills and knowledge requirements
- Help them build useful contacts
- Help them develop skills and knowledge

Hosts
- To trial a student or graduate
- To attract students to their company or profession
- Corporate Social Responsibility

## How do Tasters work?

- Students/Graduates register online (www.gowales.co.uk)
- Hosts contact local HEI and are assessed
- Worktaster agreed, Taster advertised
- Worktaster "matched"
- Taster begins
- Feedback and paperwork

## Engaging "Tastees"

- Drop ins, spotting trends in requests
- Colleague referral
- Piggy back Careers Events/Fair/Bulletins/Workshops
- "Previous" student diary and case studies
- Website (www.gowales.co.uk and Careers links)
- Work experience Ambassadors/Flyering/Posters
- Word of mouth
- Academic department buy in
- Work Experience Roadshow

## Engaging "Hosts"

- Networking event
- Warm Calling
- Encouraging Employer referral
- Heat on the Street
- Past Tastees now Employers
- General word of mouth
- Speculative letter
- Advising Employers

## Overcoming problems

- Expectation setting
- HOST issues
- TASTEE issues
- Paperwork
- H&S
- Insurance
- Minimum wage regulations

## Case Studies

*"The Taster sessions have been a really valuable part of our Forest School at Tremorfa Nursery. The Tastees been an extra pair of hands and valuable members of the team. They have all understood and took on board the ethos of Forest school thanks to the GO Wales briefing and the Tastees have helped towards the development of the children's confidence and self esteem. Thankyou for such great enthusiastic candidates!"*

**Carolyn Asante Headteacher Tremorfa Nursery June 2007**

## Case Studies

*"Tasters are by far the most useful and reliable way of finding out what it is really like to work in a certain industry. I'd definitely recommend Tasters, whether for someone curious about what a role really entails, to someone seeking valuable work experience for their desired career."*

**James Quinn, Cardiff University Finalist
GO Wales Worktaster at Triptych Marketing June 2007**

## What do employers think?

- Positive about the administration of the programme
- 60% received help to scope the taster
- 48% offered the student / graduate a placement
- 24% offered employment to the student / graduate
- 68% said the taster led to closer links with the University
- 84% are repeat hosts

## What do individuals think?

- 94% said the taster had met expectations
- 94% said the taster had enabled them to learn more about the sector / profession
- 82% said the taster had helped them learn more about the skills needed for the profession
- 70% said the taster had positively influenced their desire to work in chosen profession

## Where next?

- Current Phase being run without ESF support
- Preparatory work being undertaken to apply for Convergence & Competitiveness Funding
- Plans include placements, tasters and CPD for graduates in SMEs
- New elements including training for those wishing to work in SMEs and for potential freelancers

## Questions?

# UVAC

Adrian Anderson
UVAC

UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL
...championing vocational learning

## Introducing UVAC

Who we are
What we believe in
What we do

## Who we are

- An independent voice on higher level vocational learning for the Higher and Further Education sector
- Established by the sector for the sector
- Comprising over 100 members, including Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Colleges and corporate bodies

## What we believe in

- The value of learning gained by people during their working lives
- The value of experiential and reflective learning
- The importance of meeting the higher vocational learning needs of individuals and employers

## Our mission

- Our mission is to:

**Champion vocational learning**

## What we do

- We work with our members and others to influence the quality and value of higher vocational learning
- We research, provide information and organise events to support our mission

## What we do

- We support the recognition of prior learning
- We work with educational institutions and employers to enhance graduate employability

## What we do

- We encourage the use of National Occupational Standards
- We work directly with MEG to realise our objectives

## Some Recent Projects

- Widening HE Participation to Apprentices
- Recognising and Supporting Work- Based Learning at HE Levels
- Validating in-company Learning Programmes

**Next Step**

**www.uvac.ac.uk**

# NASES

Ruth Owen
University of Wales, Aberystwyth

**ASET Conference 2007**

**The Management of
Student Work Experience Qualification**

Ruth Owen, University of Aberystwyth
NASES Regional Representative (Wales)

**ASET Conference 2007**

## NASES Background & Overview

• First Job Shop set up in 1992
• NASES Executive 1999
• NASES National Office 2002
• Over 120 services (107 institutional members)
• Continued growth across the UK

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## Statistics

• Over 1.9 million students have direct access to a Job Shop
• Vacancies advertised and student registrations increased by 25% between 2004 / 2006*
• With 94% of services using email as the most popular method of advertising.

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## Factors affecting the sector

*Introduction of tuition fees*
• Students will work increasing numbers of hours
• Introduction of service culture, 'because I'm paying for it'
• Recruitment and retention important to institutions

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## Increasing numbers of students

• Growth in part time students
• Growth of non-traditional students
• Trend for students to live at home rather than on campus (as part of the traditional 'student experience').
• Growing numbers of international students

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## Other Factors

• Technology advances
• General job market and economic trends
• Increase in the number of external commercial agencies offering student employment services

## Research and Reports

- NASES Membership Survey - July 2006
- TUC / NUS All Work and Low Pay – October 2006
- Student Employment Survey – November 2006
- The Leitch Report – December 2006
- UNITE Student Survey – January 2007

## Research and Reports

- The Growth of Term Time Student Employment; An Example from America (November 2007)
  *Philip Sullivan – De Montfort University*

## What NASES offers:

- Annual training programme
- Annual 3-day Conference (July 2008)
- Online factsheets
- Business support helpline to members (Croner)
- The GUIDE textbook (available to buy)

### Coming Soon: …

- NSEW (National Student Employment Week)
  5th – 9th November 2007
- New NASES website (end of 2007)
- SEOTY (Student Employee of the Year) Awards
  February – June 2008
- The NASES Qualification

### The Qualification

Working with AGCAS and NCWE, NASES received funding from HECSU to development a qualification in Work Experience Management.

This will be launched in January 2008.

### Why?

- Roles benchmarked
- Professional recognition for the sector
- No current qualification fit
- Added value
- Academic recognition and credibility
- Career path and progression
- Aid Recruitment and retention to sector

### Who?

- Job Shops
- Placement Offices
- Volunteering Coordinators
- Interest from FE and schools sector
- Interest from employers managing internships and Graduates

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## How?

The Qualification will be delivered and awarded by:
The University of Reading – *School of Continuing Education*

A course leader is currently being recruited (Aug 2007)

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## How?

It will be delivered online
Via Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment

- In a variety of formats
- Timed release of materials
- Discussion boards
- On-line assessment
- Digital drop box

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1. The Recruitment Process
2. Career Development Learning
3. Employer Relations
4. Managing Financial and Human Resources
5. Enhancing the Effectiveness of your Service: Processes and Information
6. Marketing the Service

Encourage transfer and progression from Certificate through to Diploma

**Elements 1-3**
**Certificate** (60 credits)

**Elements 1-6 Diploma (120 credits)**

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For non degree holders APL scheme available

- Match your prior experience and learning against learning outcomes
- Gather direct/indirect evidence of prior experience
- Gather appropriate certificates/ course details as evidence of prior learning
- Compile a portfolio of evidence and submit

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### Costs

- £416 per 20 credit module (3 modules for certificate / 6 modules for diploma)

- NASES have received a bursary from NCWE which will be available (at this stage it is thought the bursary will be used to provide residential courses).

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**Any questions?**

Further information at www.nases.org.uk

Email: nases@liv.ac.uk

For course information email: p.a.t.mignot@reading.ac.uk

# Using e-Portfolios to Enhance the Placement Application Process

Gordon Crawford and Colin Turner
University of Ulster

## Introduction

The University of Ulster uses on-line tools to manage placement (OPUS, previously known as the Placement Management System (PMS)),[1] and facilitate the personal development process (PDSystem).[2]

This article explores how close integration of these systems allows students to express themselves more fully in the process of applying for placement.

## History of OPUS/PDSystem

Within the School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, Turner and Laird developed an application to facilitate the process of managing placement. The original version allowed primitive CVs to be formed by the student and use them to apply for placement. All these CVs fitted an identical style and only content differentiated them. Particularly within other schools who became interested in adopting OPUS, the requirement to use rich CV style and structure emerged.

As a parallel development the PDSystem was developed by McGivern and Crawford as a reaction to the findings of the Dearing report. The PDSystem incorporated a number of major features which significantly contributed to the placement issue, but the two we shall focus on for now are: the ability to create very rich CVs, based both from templates and from scratch; and the ability to create e-Portfolios synthesised from all the data the student has entered into the system. It is worth noting that unlike some other personal development systems, the PDSystem allows for the addition of all sorts of data: in particular it is possible to add all sorts of media files so that an e-Portfolio could, for example, have snapshots of an art display, samples of music, technical drawings and all sorts of other data besides plain text.

It was decided therefore that OPUS would lose its rudimentary CV support in favour of accepting the more fully featured CVs provided from the PDSystem. The two systems were closely *cosmetically* integrated to allow this to be done in a way that was seamless to the student. They perceived the two systems to be a single system.

However, these two systems were of different vintages, with different development approaches and fundamentally their designs were very different. The PDSystem had a very maintainable, more modern development that had come from the top down, whereas OPUS has been developed bottom up, in a more ad-hoc way, in an older paradigm, but was also significantly faster.

The lead developers of both projects (Turner, Crawford) decided to completely reimplement most systems learning these lessons to produce a fast, maintainable pair of systems. This was achieved, with the added benefit that now both systems were not merely cosmetically similar but also similar in their 'DNA'. As a result, much code could be shared to improve both systems and it provided the opportunity to share data more fully between both systems.

## Development Strategy

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1 http://opus.ulster.ac.uk (see also http://foss.ulster.ac.uk/projects/opus).
2 http://pds.ulster.ac.uk (see also http://foss.ulster.ac.uk/projects/pdsystem).

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In our redevelopment we designed our own, very lightweight and fast framework which would be common for both applications.

The applications do not communicate directly with the university infrastructure and in particular the student records system. Instead we created a small layer of web services that perform this task. This allows any other institution running the software to reimplement this small amount of code if they want this level of very tight integration.

The Application Process

The process of application in OPUS will now use CVs, cover letters and e-Portfolios.

Using CVs

OPUS will now handle CVs from one of three different locations:

1. CVs based upon templates from the PDSystem.
   OPUS will only permit templates to be used that have been agreed by the placement team. The PDSystem has a wide variety of templates, but some of them are totally unsuitable for preparing for placement, while others may only be suitable for students from particular disciplines. In addition CVs must be labelled by the student as being complete and may (optionally) require advance approval from their placement team before use.
2. CVs stored in the PDSystem 'CV Store'.
   The primary idea behind the template based CVs is that students will take the template produced CV as a useful starting point to produce a polished outcome that they will then save in the CV store. Of course students can store any CV created from scratch in this way. The downside of such CVs is, of course, their static nature. They need to be manually updated by the student.
3. CVs stored in the OPUS 'CV Store'.

Not all institutions using OPUS are pairing it with the PDSystem. Unfortunately it is no longer practical for OPUS to maintain a CV builder of its own as this has moved to the PDSystem. However, when OPUS is in standalone mode, it will allow students to upload CVs directly and these can be used for the application.

OPUS will show the student the list of their CVs, including any they cannot use, to help them understand why, and what they may have to do to have a valid CV to apply with.

Using Cover Letters

OPUS also allows for the opportunity to add some plain text in the form of a cover letter. Students can use this opportunity to try and indicate the key features of their CV or other documentation that presents them as a good candidate for the application.

Using Portfolios

This new feature will allow OPUS to use e-Portfolios from the PDSystem in the application process (in addition to a CV at this stage). An e-Portfolio can contain very rich information and presents it in a much more varied way, allowing creative students to reflect their multi-faceted nature in their applications.

In particular, as noted above, e-Portfolios can contain arbitrary types of data and so provide a mechanism for multimedia data like images, video and sounds to be propagated.
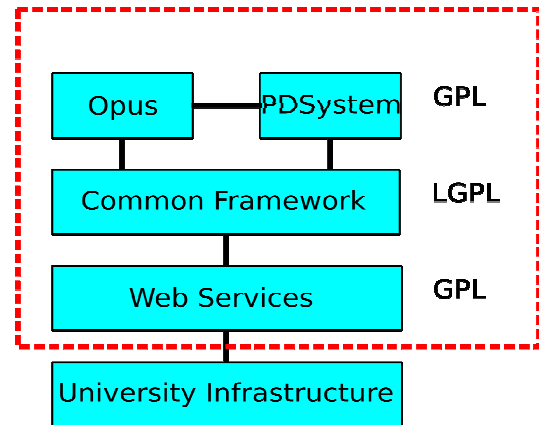


*Figure 1: The structure of the various components and their interactions*

Students normally share portfolios explicitly with named individuals (by way of an email address). They can elect to do this with internal users or external users (who receive a guest login) and can choose to share their dynamic portfolio, that will change as the underlying data changes; or submit a static snapshot of their portfolio at a moment in time.

Students must explicitly elect to allow a given portfolio to be used for placement applications. It is a fundamental principle of the PDSystem that data is personal and private unless explicitly shared. Once this is done however, a portfolio can be used in the application process as many times as desired.

Obtaining Software

All the software discussed here is available as free and open source software (FOSS).[3] This means that anyone can take the software and deploy it at no charge, or they can choose to enter into a support agreement. In addition, it is legal for anyone to modify or distribute the code if they so wish.

We have created a website to help manage the distribution and support process.[4] This website has projects pages for both OPUS and the PDSystem as well as other projects. You will find there:
- support for obtaining the source code itself;
- installation guides, FAQs and other documentation;
- mailing lists providing support for end users and developers;
- facilities to report bugs and or request support.

If you are interested in either system it is highly recommended that you subscribe to the opus-announce mailing list or the pdsystem-announce mailing list. Both of these will have extremely low traffic (less than 10 messages a year) but will announce new versions and other important updates and news.

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1. QAA (2001) *Guidelines for HE Progress Files, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education*.[5]
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3. McGivern, Crawford, Turner (2005) *Managing Personal Development On-line*, ASET Annual Conference 2005: Proceedings of the 2005 ASET Annual Conference, ASET 2005.
4. Laird, Turner (2007) *OPUS Online Placement Management Shifts the Paradigm*, World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) 15th International Conference, Singapore, 26-29 Jun 2007.
5. Laird, Turner (2007) *OPUS Online Placement Management Supports UK QAA Code of Practice for Student Assessment*, ASET 2007
6. Pyne, Crawford, Devenney, Doris, Houston, Laird, Turner (2007) *Managing Placements with IT and Online: Good Practice for Placements Guide - Volume 1*, ASET 2007

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3 Under the terms of GPL (GNU General Public License) v2, or (GNU Lesser General Public License) LGPL v2.

4 http://foss.ulster.ac.uk

5 http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progfileHE/guidelines/progfile2001.pdf

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# Embedding Enterprise in Work Placements at the University of Leeds

Rebecca Evans and Paul Elam
University of Leeds

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Work Placement Centre
Careers Centre

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Embedding Enterprise in Work Placements at The University of Leeds

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Work Placement Centre
Careers Centre

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**Background**

- Emphasis on skills
- Change to traditional approach
- Embed skills…
- ….rather than as an 'add on'
- Throughout University

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Enterprise at the University of Leeds is defined as: having ideas, acting upon them, recognising and taking advantage of opportunities to 'make things happen'. Integral to these are the value-adding teaching and learning opportunities of other related 'enabling' skills.

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- Networking
- Creativity
- Innovation
- Resource management

- Finance
- Marketing
- Intellectual property
- Business planning

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**Work Placement Centre**
CAREERS CENTRE

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Why did you feel enterprise learning would be good for your department?

*'Maths has always recognised benefits of teaching their students enterprise skills, but due to heavy workload and staff perceptions, had not quite managed to find a way to do so effectively.'*

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**Work Placement Centre**
CAREERS CENTRE

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Why did you feel a bid to develop enterprise learning would be good for your students?

*'Traditionally, there has been little scope in Physics for solving problems other than through exams, as well little scope for application of knowledge. An enterprise linked project had the potential to be less restrictive and would help with employability for students.'*

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'We are here to teach our subject specialism, not to include enterprise skills in the curriculum'

'That's got nothing to do with us'

'We don't need to teach our students skills'

'75% of staff are only interested in teaching our subject, they don't want to water it down with skills'

'Enterprise is a dirty word'

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## How Do We Do It?

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**No.1**
You are a large international organisation comprising of representatives from governments from 21 countries. Your role is as a peace keeping force, throughout Europe and North America. You have over 10,000 representatives and full-time members of staff.

**No.2**
You are a children's charity, with a Head Office in London and satellite offices throughout the UK. You also have trained staff currently working in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in drought ridden areas. You always have a team of people who are UK based that can be sent to critical parts of the world at a moment's notice.

**No.3**
You are a fast-food outlet, with your parent company in the US, with a UK Head Office in Swindon. Your target audience are predominantly young people and this is reflected in your recruitment policy. You employ mainly school leavers and some graduates in management training positions.

**No. 4**
You are a garage employing 8 people. You service cars, carry out MOT testing and offer a service to inspect cars for potential buyers. All your staff work on the same site.

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## Why?

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### Students

**• Pre-placement**
  • Introduction
  • Activities
  • Intrapreneurship

· **Post-placement**
  • De-brief
  • Reflection
  • How to make the most of your experience

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### Employers
• The benefits of enterprising students
• Increasing profile
• Encouraging employers to allow room for enterprise

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## Any Questions?

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Paul Elam

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# Broadening Horizons – Increasing the Menu of Opportunities

Rebecca Evans and Paul Elam
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'Broadening Horizons'
Increasing the Menu of
Opportunities

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### Introduction

• University of Leeds Strategy
• Current Provision
• Developments
• Work Placement - Quality Experience
• Q & A

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### Work Placement Centre Structure

• A Centralised Provision
   » Head of Work Placement Centre
   » Work Placement Project Officers x 2
   » Faculty Placement Administrator
   » Work Placement Support Officer
• University of Leeds Strategy
   » 'An education that creates excellent career opportunities'
   » Measures - % of students engaged in work placement activity
   » Definition (A work placement (both curricula and non-curricula) is defined as a planned period of learning supported by the university through preparation, on placement support and post placement debriefing sessions.)
   » Faculty commitment

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Briefly discuss the range of work placement and / or work experience opportunities you offer your students?

   » E.g. 12 month placement as part of their course

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### Current Provision

• 12 month placement
• Shorter course related opportunities
• Summer Internships
• Shell Step
   » North and West Yorkshire
   » 34 projects 2007 (29 in West Yorkshire in 2006)
• Enterprising Social Science (subsidised by the Economic & Social Research Council - ESRC)
   » 8 projects in Leeds and surrounding area
   » Undergraduates from a Social Science Background
• EPSRC Vacation Bursary Programme
   » Pilot summer 2006 - 10 projects
   » 10 projects 2007
• Knowledge Transfer Assistants (KTAs)
   » History
   » Currently 3 projects continuing
   » Enterprising Social Science
• Graduates Yorkshire Course Related Opportunities

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### Developments

• Innocence Project
• History Interns

• Module Development
• Research Opportunities – UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme)
• International Opportunities
• Erasmus Work

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## Ensuring Quality

- Strategy
  - Not solely concerned with increasing the numbers
  - Primary focus on increasing the quality of the experience to ensure that students who participate in structured work placements are able to reflect upon and learn from their experiences

- Preparation, On Placement & De-Brief
  - Pre Placement Briefing
  - On Placement – Placement Tutor and Work Placement Centre
  - De-brief
  - Ad hoc session from non-modular engagement

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Any Questions?

# Taking the University Challenge: Tensions and Dilemmas for Day-Release Students on Professionally Accredited HE Programmes at UWIC

Jan Huyton
UWIC

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Taking the University Challenge: Tensions and Dilemmas for Day-Release Students on Professionally Accredited HE programmes

Jan Huyton

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## Purpose of presentation

- Present initial findings of a study of the views of students on professionally accredited, day-release HE programmes
- What do the findings tell us about the role of HE in preparing our students for their occupational and academic futures?

2

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## Catalyst for research project

- Findings from 2003 investigation into 'Stakeholder Perceptions of Housing Studies'
- Tensions between educators (academic identity) and sponsoring employers (professional or practice identity)
- Lack of mediated communication between the two
- Concerns from some students that educators were concerned with their own research rather than links with practice
- Some didn't feel like 'proper students'

3

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## Student sample so far

- 3 students having completed BA Youth and Community part time
- 1 student having completed BA (Hons) Housing Studies part time
- 1 student having completed Diploma Youth and Community part time
- 1 student about to progress to degree level Youth and Community part time
- Ages
  – 50s x1
  – 40s x1
  – 30s x4

4

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## Student interviews

- Semi-structured interviews guided by clear themes:
  – Relevance of curriculum to practice
  – View of academic theory in the curriculum
  – Motivation to study
  – Do they/did they see themselves as students/would they identify themselves as academic?

5

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## Relevance of curriculum to practice

- Generally students were satisfied that the content of their studies had some relevance to practice
- Some concern that students not intending to progress to management or strategy roles in the workplace might find academic level not relevant or too challenging
- Interview sample had all been responsive to the transformative nature of academic study and reflective practice

6

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### Relevance of curriculum to practice

- Some students found their academic studies put them into a different mindset from others in the workplace, which was challenging when working with colleagues or service-users
- It was felt that university study does not teach the day-to-day mechanics of job roles, but there is an expectation from some students and employers that this will be the case
- All students had begun to move into management or strategic roles, having been inspired by their university studies

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### Relevance of curriculum to practice

- All students were satisfied that their educators were in touch with practice and were able to bring taught sessions to life
- All found a great deal of relevance to practice in what they had learned
- All were able to make the theory-practice connections in order to illuminate their own practice
- All spoke with great admiration about their HE educators, two mentioned the role of workplace tutors/facilitators

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### Academic theory in the curriculum

- Students had developed a deep interest in particular aspects of theory
- All could see the relevance of theory to their workplace activity, but found this was not a position shared by many colleagues or managers
- Few saw this as the most relevant aspect of the programme, but all found inspiration from learning about academic theory

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### Motivation to study

- All were initially motivated by a desire to gain a professional qualification, sponsored by their employer
- Initial motivation was career development
- Most had then gone on to develop a motivation for academic learning and development, some being frustrated that work or domestic circumstances don't allow for further academic study

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### Motivation to study

- Five of the six students differentiated themselves from other students who did not take their learning seriously, who did not appreciate the university experience and who failed to see the relevance of academic study
- This suggests a need to interview 'other students' in order to represent the views of less motivated students

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### Academics? Students?

- Many described how they felt like a student whilst they were at the university, but when the end of the study day arrived, it was obvious that they were different from the full-time students
- Social time
- Ability to use library and other facilities
- Domestic and work lives

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### Academics? Students?

I was brought up on [council estate] where a lot of people haven't got it and they think snob, and rubbing our noses in it. It's not normal to say you are an academic. I've got a great sense of pride, I come from a hard working background but not academically.

(Female former day release student)

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### Academics? Students?

The pomp and ceremony, cap and gown crap says elitist to me, and my background makes me say No!
[had been told] people back here where you used to live won't speak to you when you get your masters – who does he think he is?- it's a barrier. Maybe I should stop thinking of myself as a 17 year old failing in school. That's what school does, pass or fail, it's an extension of that

(Male former day release student)

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## Academics? Students?

There's a self-benchmarking thing that goes on within yourself. You have good marks you have poor marks it's still never given me the feeling I could be an academic. You do study philosophies but I could never generate those kind of philosophies like Mark Smith, possibly they think it but they expect someone else to come up with it- who am I?

(Male former day release student)

15

## What does this tell us?

- Is HE level always the right conduit to prepare for all job roles?
- Do employers and HEIs have a shared understanding of the role of HE programmes?
- Do we need to look at pitching academic levels more closely to occupational levels?

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## What does this tell us?

Day release HE study has a role in:
- Widening access to HE
- Training and motivating managers and strategists of the future
- Improving the confidence of students and helping to overcome the perception of academic elitism

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## What does this tell us?

- Would learning blocks be more helpful to students than day release?
- In the context of HEIs marketing themselves in an increasingly competitive environment, do day-release programmes market themselves sufficiently to government in the context of successful widening access to HE and creation of managers and strategists of the future?

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# Disabled Students on Placement

Francesca Cooper, Helen Pandeli and Jacqui Hanson
UWIC

## DISABLED STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT

ASET September 2007

**Francesca Cooper, Helen Pandeli, Jacqui Hanson**

**Speech and Language Therapy**

UWIC
Cardiff's **metropolitan** university
prifysgol **metropolitan** Caerdydd

## Outline

- Why we developed a system for disabled students (DS)
- Disability legislation & general considerations
- Description of support system from pre-entry to placements, including meetings with the DS
- Feedback from DS & what we've learnt
- Resources

## WHY WE DEVELOPED A SYSTEM

1 Demonstrate adherence to DDA

2 Discrimination & disadvantage. Intermission rates of DS & their placement concerns

3 Develop more systematic support for DS from admission to placements (QAA)

## 1 DISABILITY LEGISLATION & GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

## Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

Definition of disability

"[Someone who] has a **physical or mental impairment** which has a **substantial and long term adverse effect** on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities"

OR has had such an impairment in the past

I in 7 UK population have a disability

## DDA and HEIs

- Not treat a DS less favourably (DS not 'students with disabilities')
- Be **anticipatory**
- **Involve student**
- Formally agree support with funding body
- Recommend **reasonable adjustments / additional** (not 'special') support

NB public protection & potential ability to do the job override the DS's needs

## DDA and placement providers

- Adhere to DDA
  variable & ltd. profession-specific guidance

RCSLT (2006): 'National Standards for Practice-based
  Learning'. Shared responsibility between HEI, S & PP

*The student*
- *"will inform his/her HEI as to specific personal and/or
  health issues which may/will impact on the placement
  allocation"*
- *"has a responsibility for alerting the placement
  educator & HEI of any factors negatively affecting his/her
  learning"*

## DDA and disabled students

- Provide appropriate (medical) **evidence**

## Applicants with a declared disability

Anticipate possible 'reasonable adjustments'
  ensuring applicants are not offered places if
  they could not complete course due to the
  nature of their disability.

Focus on what student *can* do & identify
  support needed to reach their potential.

Will disability prevent applicant doing what is
  required for the job?

## Students with an undeclared disability

- **Undeclared, unconfirmed, unaware or
  undeveloped disability**

- **Do not identify with the label 'disability'** - may
  affect help they access *"[Concern] regarding my
  anxiety [being labelled] as a disability…"*

- **Choose not to disclose their disability** - may
  affect assessors' evaluation of placement performance.

- **Lack knowledge** of their rights & support available,
  disability assessment process and cost.

## 2  DISCRIMINATION & DISADVANTAGE:
## INTERMISSION & CONCERNS OF DS

## Experience of disabled SLT students

- Mobility
- Dyslexia
- Mental health
- Multiple impairements

Impact of disability is more important than
  label.

## High intermission rates of DS

**Withdrawal**
DS and Non DS similar

**Intermission**
DS  19.1%            Non DS  1.6%

| Reasons for DS (n=9) | intermission | withdrawal |
|---|---|---|
| Deterioration in health | 3 | 1 |
| Academic failure | 1 | 3 |
| Stress of course | 0 | 1 |

## Placement concerns

**All students concerns increased with placement experience**

**No difference concern rating bet. DS & non DS**(1-10, 1=no concern)

| | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| DS | 4.2 | 5 | 6 |
| Non DS | - | 4.8 | 5.2 |

**7/10 DS also had specific concerns re their disability**
*"I feel generally anxious, but am also worried about completing
  the placement successfully in relation to my disability, which
  has made me more anxious"*
Those DS with no concerns, had no placement experience (Y1)

## Responsibility to address placement concerns

**Student's responsibility alone**
40% DS            10% Non DS (excludes Y1 Non DS)

**Shared responsibility** (S, HEI, PP or combination)
60% DS            90% Non DS

HEI proactive support is important as DS may not seek help & feel it is their own responsibility to address concerns

## 3  PLACEMENT SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

## Aims of system

Encourage shared responsibility between HEI, PP and DS

Develop a transparent & flexible support system to plan for placements & document reasonable adjustments

Reduce students' anxiety prior to placements

Help PP plan for a DS student

Identify appropriate support for all parties

## Who is involved?

- **HEI**
  University Disability Service
  Course Admissions Tutor
  Course Disability Co-ordinator
     disseminates Disability Service assessment report to course team
  Course Placement Co-ordinator
  Course Placement Administrator
- **Disabled student**
- **Placement provider**

## Before the meeting

DS **invited for informal meeting** with course Placement Co-ordinator & Placement Administrator (after University Disability Service assessment)

DS given **'DS on Placement' pack**
- Explains support process
- 'Placement concerns' form:
  – what are your concerns?
  – rate them on 1-10 scale
  – are your concerns re. your disability or general?
  – how might you address concerns?
- Outlines areas to be discussed in forthcoming meeting

## Meeting procedure

- Placement Co-ordinator explains aim of meeting (planning, transparency, shared responsibility etc)

- Placement administrator takes notes, explains summary of meeting will be typed for DS to check & amend if necessary

- 30-45 minutes

## Meeting content

**Opening - general**
- What is the impact of your disability on you / your performance? (placement concerns form)
- What helps?

**Middle - specific areas to consider** (not all applicable)

**Close - summary**
- Summary & anything else?
- (Exceptionally: 'Might you need to defer the placement?')
- Open door policy                                    cont.

## Meeting content (specific areas)

- Mobility & access (transport, parking, distances to be walked)
- Mental/physical fatigue (session length, pace, attention, need for breaks & location of these)
- Software/writing/dexterity (laptop, digi-recorder, case notes)
- Organisation/planning (planning sessions, diary)
- Health & safety (hand washing, monitoring & responding to risk, lifting)
- Environmental (temperature, lighting)
- Other (no. & type of clients, support contact person, time with placement educator)

## After meeting

- PA types up summary, copy given to DS to check

- DS signs final version (indicating what info. & with whom it can be shared with)

- Copies for placement provider (PP), DS & HEI

- HEI informs DS and PP of support available before, during and after placement

## How the content was developed

- We aren't experts on disability!

- All course team wrote down possible problems for DS on placements

- Summarised as a list

- Piloted on a student, minor revisions

- Liaison University Disability Service re mental health

## Example summary on a DS sent to PP

- **DS name, date of meeting & staff**
- **Nature of disability (optional)** *e.g. Depression*
- **Impact of disability** *Sue is very sensitive, tearful and has difficulty sleeping. She is on medication, side effects include tiredness & short attention span. She has difficulty thinking on the spot & worries she may present as lacking in knowledge.*

  *She will advise the PE if she is having a particularly bad day e.g. due to lack of sleep*

## Example summary on a DS sent to PP cont.

- **What adjustments/ support needed?** *Sue's attention span is worse in the mornings, so afternoon discussions would be preferable. She needs additional time to collect her thoughts before discussions & to write up case notes. She would appreciate regular short breaks to regain her attention.*
- **How adjustments are to be funded** *n/a*
- **Who information can be shared with** *Sue is happy for this info to be passed on to the placement co-ordinators and any placement educators.*
- **Consent** *I, Sue Evans confirm that this info. is an accurate summary & it can be passed on to any Trust PCs & PEs involved in my placements (signed & dated).*

## FEEDBACK FROM DS & WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Students with no placement experience

- Students with some placement experience

## No placement experience Dyslexia

Presenting with memory difficulties
*"Very useful to be able to talk about concerns"*

We learnt
No classic 'type' e.g. dyslexia/depression so discussing impact important

## No placement experience Mental health

Depression
*"I feel a lot more confident about placement knowing that the PE will be informed of my concerns/requirements before clinic. This has been a very useful meeting"*

Anxiety
*"It was more useful than I expected and helped me to clarify the process of what I need to do to prepare for clinic. It was useful to get your insights!"*

We learnt
Beneficial for Y1 DS despite no placement experience

## Placement experience Multiple impairment

Visual, hearing & ? dyslexia
*"Very informal. Good chance to be able to air issues. Opportunity to think though strategies I use, as a consequence, more aware of other issues.*
*Positive feel about the meeting"*

We learnt
Impact of medication on performance

Difficulty obtaining dyslexia diagnosis in multiple impairment

### Placement experience
### Raynaud's disease

*"Really useful session"*

We learnt

Fluctuating nature of disability (much worse in cold weather)

Impact & how DS may present (lack of sleep, difficulty writing observations isn't lack of interest, when in pain may appear less enthusiastic)

Practical issues (parking, time to walk distances, prepare sessions, write up notes, lift equipment)

Consider flexibility re timing of placement/assessment (preferably when warmer)

### Placement experience
### Mental health (severe depression)

*"I found the meeting extremely helpful. I was provided with both support and practical ways in which to address my concerns. I feel much more positive regarding my placement now that I have sought support. My problems were handled with great sensitivity"*

We learnt

Student wasn't officially 'disabled' so we have since revised our procedures. The course team now direct any student with depression to Student Services & obtain GP letter (extra time etc)

### Conclusions - disabled students

- Unanimous positive response re pre-placement meetings

- Relief it is 'official'

- Reduced pressure what to say, when & to whom at start of placement (keen to impress on 1st day)

- Occasionally unrealistic expectations re. 'reasonable' adjustment

- All were happy for summary info to be shared with forthcoming PPs

### Conclusion – placement providers

- Able to plan placement to accommodate DS needs

- Better understanding of issues which may impact on variable performance during placement

- Liked personal style of meeting summary

- Felt supported by HEI should problems arise

### Conclusion - HEI

- DS don't want to be given preferential treatment.

- Practical considerations e.g. paired placement, client type, consider placement &/or assessment timing

- Fitness for practice e.g. severe depression & need to defer (benefit to DS and public protection)

- Meetings most useful with some placement experience otherwise difficult to anticipate types of problems might encounter

- Annual update? time vs. changing impact of disability & placement concerns increase with experience

### Resources

- Dept for Education and Skills (2002) 'Providing Work Placements for Disabled Students - A Good Practice Guide for Further and Higher Education Institutions'.
  e mail:     dfes@prolog.uk.com

- 'Supporting Dyslexic Students on Practice Placements'. University of Southampton.
  web:     www.soton.ac.uk/studentsupport/ldc

- Wray, J., Fell, B., Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J. & Coyne E. (2005) 'PEdDS Best Practice Guide: Disabled Social Work Students and Placements'. Hull: University of Hull

# A Knowledge Transfer Led Approach to Setting Up Student Placements

Harriet Robinson
King's College London

King's College London, part of the University of London, has over twenty degree programmes which have an internship as a formal part of the study programme. This is in addition to several study programmes in the Health Schools where placements are part of training under licence in statutory registered professions, such as medicine, nursing, midwifery and physiotherapy. King's College London Business is involved in encouraging and supporting the College to establish new study programmes with internships and provides support for academics, employers and students. It also plays a key role in informing College policy relating to employability, business liaison and student placements. This paper centres on how King's College London (also referred throughout this paper as 'the College') is using a knowledge transfer led approach to set up student placements.

## Introduction

King's College London is a leading UK University with over 19,000 students: some 13,069 undergraduates and 6,241 postgraduates. Within the health sciences many degrees at King's contain placements and over 3,000 students each year in medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, dietetics and nursing participate in work-based learning as part of their programme of study. The opportunity to undertake a placement is also an integrated part the following programmes at King's College London:-

Extra Mural Year (Sandwich Placement):-

- BSc (Hons) Biochemistry
- BSc (Hons) Computing Science
- BSc (Hons) Computing Science with Management
- MEng (Hons) Electronic Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Degrees
- BSc Pharmacology

Course-related short internship, work-based project or professional training module:-

- MSc Assistive Technologies
- MSc Aquatic Resource Management
- MA Cities, Culture and Change
- MA Cultural and Creative Industries
- MA/MSc Digital Culture and Technology (*)
- MA Digital Humanities (*)
- MSc Drug Discovery Skills
- MSc Environment, Politics and Globalisation
- MSc Financial Mathematics
- MSc Forensic Science
- MSc HRM and Organisational Analysis
- MA Public Policy (**)
- MA/MSc Risk Analysis
- MA (Hons) War Studies and related programmes (***)
- BA (Hons) War Studies – Junior Year Abroad (***)

(*) Subject to approval
(**) Mix of credit bearing and non assessed/ voluntary student placements
(***) Voluntary

*King's College London Careers Service*
Students' employability related enquiries are also handled via the King's College London Careers service which is part of the University of London Careers Service.

*King's College London Business*
King's College London Business is responsible for the commercialisation of research at King's, for developing new business partnerships and for managing research grants and contracts. King's partners are business and public sector. King's Business' activities include the identification of new opportunities, development of strategies for partnership, funding and/or commercialisation, marketing, patenting and intellectual property protection, licensing, mentoring spin-out companies, negotiation of

collaborations and contracts and management of clinical trails agreements. Within the Business Development Team they also manage opportunities for student work placements.

*Knowledge Transfer led student placements*
King's Business' employability initiatives relate to creating course related work-based learning opportunities, while non-course related placements are the responsibility of King's College Careers Service. King's Business has developed placement opportunities for new and existing programmes at King's and provides support to academics interested in setting up work-based learning modules. i.e. credit bearing modules. For the past two years, it has provided support to the School of Social Science and Public Policy (SSPP), including the new MA Public Policy set up in 2006/07. This paper will now discuss the factors influencing the development of placements on these courses in more detail.

*External and Internal Environment in the Policy Arena on student placements*
The following general factors are influencing the set up of the internships on the MA Pubic Policy:-

*Factors in the external environment:-*
- Number and concentration of potential host organisations in the local area - there is a high concentration of policy makers, government organisations, research institutes, lobbying organisations, NGOs, charities and think tanks.
- Perceived skills gaps and employer led demand for skills – there is demand for researchers with good quality research skills (qualitative and quantitative), political awareness and good communication skills.
- Trends in the public sector such as the expansion of the voluntary sector.
- Legal requirements such as employment law; course-related placement are exempt from national minimum wage requirements.
- International factors, for example the accession of Romania to the EU which lead to an EU funded training scheme to Public Servants/ Public Administrators who will act as change catalysts in the new Romanian Public Administration. King's College London hosted five Romanian Young Professional Scholars on the MA Public Policy, who were required to undertake an assessed 20 day EU 'stage' as part of their training programme.
- Economic factors – student placement contribute to income generation via student fees.

*Influential factors within the internal environment of the College:-*
- Fit with the College or School's strategies. For instance, the College is keen to enhance the student experience.
- Public Policy is part of the College's London Strategy and resonates with its International Strategy as well.
- Fit with School of Social Science and Public Policy's aspirations to grow and to increase the number of postgraduates within the department.
- Internships are attractive to students and may differentiate the College.
- Other universities are offering students course related work opportunities therefore King's may need to set up such programmes to compete to attract students.
- Student led demand for internships which enhance their career prospects.
- Support for internships from both the Head of School and Study Programme Director.
- HEIF funding available to support pump-priming activities and knowledge transfer activities.
- Potential for capacity in the long term, although sometimes students placements may be set up in niche market where there is a skills gap e.g. MSc Drug Discovery.

*MA Public Policy*
The MA Public Policy was a new MA programme at King's College London for 2006/07. The decision to set up the course builds on King's College's research strengths in the Social Sciences and is a result of monies being made available from its Strategic Investment Fund (a fund set up to develop research capabilities at King's). MA Public Policy is an interdisciplinary degree - students study two core modules in 'Comparative Public Policy' and 'The Policy Process', choose electives from a range of options offered in the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy and write a dissertation.

20 students joined the course in the first year leading to a dozen or so placements, half of which were assessed (Romanian Young Professionals Scheme) and half non-assessed/ voluntary. The MA Public Policy shows great potential to become a large degree programme and market research in the first year

into student placements has shown that there is considerable market demand and student interest in the idea of placements. Indeed, MA Public Policy seems to mirror the situation experienced by another degree programme on which the author has worked between 2002-2006, MA Cultural and Creative Industries in the School of Humanities, which became the largest MA programme in the School with 50 students all taking a credit bearing internship as part of the study programme.

Internships on the MA Public Policy degree take place in the policy arena; government departments, local authorities, think-tanks, research institutes, voluntary organisations, NGOs and charities. Organisations who have participated in the scheme so far included Policy Studies Institute (PSI), Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (formerly DTI), Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Jane's Information Group, Help the Aged, Chatham House, Accountability, Policy Exchange and 'Crisis'.

The internship takes place for a minimum of 20 days on a flexible basis. Most internships are unpaid but if the arrangement is recognised as a type of non-financial exchange where the organisations invest resources, accommodation, supervision, training and the student their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm. In most cases organisations cover expenses (lunch and travel). From time to time, opportunities for paid research assistantships also arise.

*Knowledge Transfer Support*
King's Business has supported the set up internships on the MA Public Policy for one year so far and support will continue in 2007/08. Assistance that is being provided includes:-

- Discovery and development of new links with organisations, gaining appointments with potential host organisations for discussing, scoping and negotiating opportunities that are of mutual benefit to employers', students' and the College's interests and needs. Leads have come via desk top research, via academics, via Business Development Managers and cross fertilisation of existing King's contacts.
- Supporting guest speakers and talks programme.
- Providing group briefings on finding an internship for students.
- Student support – reviews, action planning and advice.
- Producing internship marketing material.
- Advice on implementing best practice in relation to work-based learning.

*Implementing best practice*
The College has a code of practice for placements which follows QAA guidelines and internships are developed in accordance with these. For instance learning objectives and outcomes are agreed at the start of the internship and students are involved in developing their own ideas for the internship; preparation for placement takes place; and internships are supervised – when placements are assessed students receive a visit on placement from King's staff.

*The future*
The first year has shown that there is sufficient market demand, student interest and potential to embed student placement more firmly into the programme. A current question is whether this is a model that the programme wishes to pursue or not. Resources are available to pilot a credit bearing module which could provide a valuable proof of concept before embarking on more ambitious growth plans. To accomplish this a robust academic framework for internships which is academically rigorous would need to be established and new guidelines for staff, students and host organisations would need to be written building on this year's experience.

*Conclusions*
Firstly the paper has identified how placement practices can be transferred effectively within a School and how a cluster of Masters study programmes have been nurtured School of Social Sciences and Public Policy at King's.

Secondly, it presents evidence of successful knowledge transfer. Where new research centres have been set up e.g. King's Centre for Risk Management or the MA Public Policy which was the result of the College's strategic investment in research, we can see that the benefits are being directly fed into teaching and knowledge transfer activities such as student placements. This has a much wider benefit

for society and makes an economic impact via developing tomorrow's future policy makers both in UK and abroad and providing skills in new areas such as Risk Analysis.

In my ASET paper of 2005, I outlined a number of key considerations to think about when setting up course related student placements; it is worth restating them here as they remain relevant today. When setting up placements it is important to i) look at the fit with the strategy and culture of the HE institution, School and Department concerned; ii) availability of resources and expertise from within the institution; iii) importance of gaining buy-in from academics and senior management to the idea iv) establishing a process for managing employer relations and student expectations v) to state the value of undertaking market research. Here market research focuses on qualitative research undertaken via talking to potential host organisations and students.

In terms of Knowledge Transfer, this work has now been going on for five years at King's College London and provides evidence of the development of a successful knowledge transfer led approach to setting up student placements and demonstrates the effective use of resources provided by short-term HEFCE funding to set up sustainable models for meaningful course related student placements.

# OPUS - Support for Assessment

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*Abstract*— Effective management of all aspects of work-integrated learning and placement is a time-demanding and all-year-round set of activities. It becomes acute when students seek their assessment results with feedback as these features often determine their progression to the next stage of their course. Higher education institutions will have clear policies and guidance on how feedback and results are to be handled, but their management becomes burdensome when dealing with students dispersed on placements worldwide. In addition, the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has laid out specific 'precepts' to be followed for assessment of students. By considering the practicalities of assessment, feedback and results in the context of the QAA code, it soon becomes apparent that there is a significant managerial and administrative task to be undertaken.

OPUS (Online Placement University System) has been developed at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland to manage all aspects of work-integrated learning and placements. A specific set of features enables the placement manager to design, modify (when necessary) and implement assessment of students while dispersed on placement. Different assessors, including at the workplace, are enabled to complete securely their reports online with immediate feedback to their students.

This paper considers the philosophy within an assessment programme and demonstrates how OPUS facilitates its detailed design and easy implementation in support of the QAA Code of Practice, Section 6: Assessment of Students.

*Keywords*—**work-integrated learning, placement learning, code of practice, placement assessment, feedback, online.**

## Background

Following the recommendations of the Dearing Report [1] of July 1997, in particular Recommendation Number 24, the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) commenced the preparation of a 'code of practice'. Between the years 1998 and 2001 this code was prepared in ten sections, one of which was Section 6: Assessment of Students. Following developments in higher education in the UK and experience of operating the code the current edition of Section 6 was published in September 2006 [2].

Concurrent with the revision of the code of practice the authors were developing additional functionality to the OPUS system for the management of placements and work-integrated learning. Following successful implementation in 2001 and complete acceptance by students, staff and placement providers the basis was laid for adding the management of student assessment while in placement. The first application of these features was in 2002 with the work-based assessor online reporting being enabled in 2005.

## Assessment in Placement

'Good assessment practice is designed to ensure that, in order to pass the module or programme, students have to demonstrate they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.' [2], para 13. This sets the basis and rationale for any assessment programme associated with placement and may be elaborated into the following principles inherent in the programme discussed in this paper:

<blockquote>
a.    to test formatively progress towards achieving the intended learning outcomes,<br>
b.    to test summatively achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and<br>
c.    to assist the student in maintaining intellectual alertness while away from formal studies.
</blockquote>

Furthermore, Reference [2], para 14 states, 'To test a wide range of intended learning outcomes, diversity of assessment practice between and within different subjects is to be expected and welcomed.' Consequently, the design of a placement assessment programme should involve different assessment tasks. This leads to different assessors being engaged dependant on their qualifications to assess each task and thereby form a comprehensive and valid view on the student.

**Intended Learning Outcomes**

The assessment programme supported by OPUS in this paper has the generic learning outcomes as follows:

        a.    relate theory to practice,
        b.    experience and contribute to the employment workplace,
        c.    understand the activities, methods, procedures and quality of the organisation,
        d.    evaluate personal and transferable skills,
        e.    work with others, and
        f.    inform career choice.

These are designed to be applicable to a wide range of placement types and locations. In addition, the student is encouraged to identify three additional learning outcomes which are specific to his/her placement. These are to be identified by the end of the first month in placement and will be assessed in the student's final reflective report.

**Assessment Programme**

The assessment programme is designed to be multi-task and progressive throughout the placement period. These features are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

| Assessment Task | *Date Due* | Weighting | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student's Log Book | Continuous | Included within First Visit assessment | Maintain throughout the placement |
| Personal Development Plan | 4 weeks from start of placement | 0% | Involve the Industrial Supervisor |
| First Visit Report | By 30 Nov | 10% | Academic Tutor |
| Student's Technical Report | 31 Jan | 10% | |
| Student's Final Report | 31 May | 30% | |
| Presentation | Mid-late Jun | 10% | Dates to be advised |
| Final Visit Report | By 31 Jul | 20% | Academic Tutor |
| Employer Assessment | By 31 Jul | 20% | Industrial Supervisor |

**Table 1: Assessment Programme Timetable**

| Assessment Task | ***First Visit Report*** | ***Student's Technical Report*** | Student's Final Report | Presentation | Final Visit Report | Employer Assessment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relate theory to practice | | X | | X | | |
| Experience and contribute to the employment workplace, | X | | X | X | X | X |

| Understand the activities, methods, procedures and quality of the organisation | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluate personal and transferable skills | | | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** |
| Work with others | | | | | **X** | **X** |
| Inform career choice | | | **X** | | **X** | |
| Communication skills | | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** |
| Allocation of marks | 10% | 10% | 30% | 10% | 20% | 20% |
| Assessor | Allocated Academic Tutor | Allocated Academic Tutor | Another Academic Tutor | Panel | Allocated Academic Tutor | Industrial Supervisor |

**Table 1: Assessment Programme Matrix**

This programme will be used to demonstrate how OPUS supports the precepts of the QAA code for the assessment of students.

**Support of the Precepts of the Code**

The following analysis presents the precepts of Section 6 (September 2006 edition) and shows how they are supported by OPUS. There are aspects of some precepts which lie outside the capabilities of OPUS as they are policy or managerial action items. This, of course, would be the case for any traditional placement management system also.

A. Precept 1
**As bodies responsible for the academic standards of awards made in their name, institutions have effective procedures for**
   **i     designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards**
   **ii    implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this**
   **iii   evaluating how academic standards are maintained through assessment practice that also encourages effective learning.**

Much of the content and implementation of this precept rests with the higher echelon of management in the institution. However, for them to be assured that their policies and practices are effective they will need evidence and records of actual implementation. OPUS maintains current and archived records of student assessment with details of each report generated by the assessors. Review of these at any time can provide the evidence needed for audit or an in-depth evaluation.

B. Precept 2
**Institutions publicise and implement principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment that are explicit, valid and reliable.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, as follows:
1. *'to make information and guidance on assessment clear, accurate and accessible to all staff, students, placement or practice providers, assessors .....'*.
In OPUS this is achieved by preparing (in MS Word or other word processor) a comprehensive document which presents the philosophy and details of the assessment programme and placing a pdf view of it in OPUS | Resources. This ensures that there is only one version of this document and it is available at any time to all parties involved with the placement. Having published it in Resources no other communication of the details is necessary.

2. '*assessment is operated fairly ……. and that assessment policies and principles are applied consistently.*'
An approach to achieving fairness and consistency could be to have one assessor conduct all of the assessment for the students on placement. Of course, this would present an impractable work load and would be highly risky. The pragmatic and more effective approach is to involve members of Academic Staff and work-based assessors to assess student performance. To provide for fairness and consistency extensive guidance and exemplar statements are provided within the online report forms in OPUS and the guidance documents in OPUS | Resources. The configuration features of OPUS allow the higher administrative level to design the assessment task, define the assessor, assign possible marks and set a time period for completion (if necessary). It is appreciated that guidance in itself is not compliance so the actual assessment results are open to audit and adjustment where agreed between assessor and moderator.

3. '*verify that marks have been accurately recorded,*'
Traditional methods of transcription from paper-based reporting are highly error prone. Experience of the author shows that basic arithmetic is frequently beyond the grasp of highly capable assessors! With the OPUS approach the assessor only needs to select the mark for the component within the assessment task and the remainder of the calculations right up to the completed result are completed online. Arithmetic checking or tallying becomes completely unnecessary and the only task necessary is to input the final mark to the institution record system (for consideration and approval by a board of examiners). The placement coordinator or administrator may find it convenient to export the assessment data from OPUS to a spreadsheet for manipulation and analysis before forwarding results to the institution records system.

## C. Precept 3
**Institutions encourage assessment practice that promotes effective learning.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, as follows:
1. '*designing a 'feedback loop' into assessment tasks so that students can apply formative feedback…to improve their performance ….*'
The design of this assessment programme is progressive and substantially formative. This is enabled by OPUS features which present immediate feedback viewable online as soon as the report is completed by the assessor. Before using OPUS the author experienced considerable time delays, administrative load and fragmented responses in the effort to provide useful feedback to students on placement. With the features of OPUS the placement coordinator/tutor is significantly 'out-of-the-loop' on feedback, except for monitoring that the action has happened. The design of feedback in OPUS allows for allocation of marks and free text comments by the assessor. Any submitted work by the student (as paper copy) is not returned, but future developments may consider online submission and marking of student reports.

2. '*setting assessment tasks ….. that involve students researching a topic and producing work-based on their research.*'
Within this assessment programme the first submission by the student is a 'technical report' which is designed to enable him/her to research the underlying principles for an aspect of their work experience and thereby relate theory to practice. OPUS | Resources presents the full brief and guidance for the report and the online assessment report gives marks and extensive feedback for defined criteria. This feedback (viewable online by the student) is available well before they are required to submit their final report so that they may benefit from the assessor's comments.

3. '*involving, for example, employers …. in providing part of the feedback to students ….*'
A comprehensive report is required from the work-based supervisor towards the end of the placement period. This is completed securely online in OPUS by the supervisor and the contents are made available to the student on return to the University. This design feature (when the student may view the contents) is included so as to create circumstances which permit the work-based assessor to report objectively and to avoid confrontation in the eventuality of an adverse report. The student may view the comments and marks later in circumstances which may control any disappointment. Before implementing this reporting method in OPUS considerable difficulty had been experienced in collecting the work-based reports. OPUS online reporting for work-based assessors gives them instant access, especially valuable when an assessor works from several offices as they do not need to remember where they placed the form!

4. '*enabling students to experience a range of assessment methods ……*'
The assessment programme comprises student reports, oral presentation, interviews and summative report by the work-based supervisor. In all cases OPUS handles the allocation of marks and feedback to the student securely online and viewable while the student is enrolled on their course.

5. '*Other than in pass/fail assessments, grading criteria can be used to differentiate between students' performance.*'
The assessment tasks in OPUS are developed to present to the assessor exemplar statements of the nature of performance and the mark which it should be awarded. This approach educates the assessor, especially those in the workplace, and provides for consistency across different assessors. The aggregated marks will decide the placement outcome as either fail, pass or pass with commendation.

D. Precept 4
**Institutions publicise and implement effective, clear and consistent policies for the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of assessment panels and boards of examiners.**

Much of this precept and its explanation relates to higher echelon responsibilities, i.e., beyond the practice of assessing submitted work or interviewing the student. However, the explanation states: '*Making all relevant policies, procedures, processes and regulations available to students and staff in appropriate language is also important.*'
The facility offered by OPUS | Resources permits the placing of any pdf document necessary for information or action by any party involved with placement.

E. Precept 5
**Institutions ensure that assessment is conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard for security.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, as follows:
1. '*Clear policies and regulations covering all aspects of the conduct of assessment are key to this precept.*'
2. '*how deadlines for submission of assessed work are set and met and what penalties will be applied for not meeting them.*'
As mentioned above under Precept 2, the provision of a comprehensive document on assessment enables these items to be defined and placing it at OPUS | Resources makes it available to all who need it. It is appreciated that the higher organisation of examinations and coursework submission will be detailed in institution-wide documents. However, a concise statement of the rules affecting the student in placement is valued by all parties involved in assessment.

F. Precept 6
**Institutions ensure that the amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate measurement of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, as follows:
1. '*ensuring that students have clear information about timing of individual assessments and how they relate to one another and to the overall programme of assessment.*'
The provision at OPUS | Resources of an 'assessment document' allows the placement coordinator to provide this essential information to all participants. As this document is under the full control of this administrative privilege level it may be changed readily at any time. The placement coordinator may make announcements on the home page of students, staff, supervisors and organisation contacts to notify the approach of a submission deadline, or any other relevant information.

2. '*the need to ensure that students have adequate time to reflect on learning before being assessed.*'
The design of this assessment programme is such that the first student report is at 31 January in the placement year. This allows sufficient time from a start date during the summer until the report is prepared. In the few circumstances in which the start date is later a modified submission date is agreed. Again, OPUS | Resources provides the information and the 'notes' facility enables recording of any special circumstances or agreements of revised dates. OPUS | Notes is a facility which allows any participant to record a 'significant occurrence' and to define the readership. Any specific note is not editable subsequently.

G. Precept 7
**Institutions have transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, as follows:
1. '*Publicising and using clear criteria and, where appropriate, marking schemes, are key factors in assuring that marking is carried out fairly and consistently across all subjects.*'
The criteria within each assessment task are available to all participants prior to the assessment so that the student and assessor may familiarise with them. The reporting forms within OPUS have been designed to be informative and functional both before and after the assessment. While the 'assessment document' in OPUS | Resources give the details of the assessment programme the detail at criteria level is developed within the online form.

2. '*the processes governing and recording any internal moderation ....*'
All of the assessment tasks in placement are the equivalent of 'coursework' in that they are not formal examinations. As such the marks are made available with the feedback by the appropriate assessor. However, the student is advised on OPUS | Assessment Information as follows: '*Note that all results are provisional until confirmed by the board of examiners.*' This provides for an alteration of marks before the results are communicated to the University's record system following the end of the placement.

H. Precept 8
**Institutions publicise and implement clear rules and regulations for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, the most significant of which is as follows:
1. '*…. Students, staff and examiners are aware of the ways in which assessment results will be used.*'
The 'assessment document' placed in OPUS | Resources is used to define these details, especially progression and award criteria. It may have become apparent that this 'assessment document' is a vital piece of information and may be drafted to convey all the information necessary for all parties involved in assessment.

I. Precept 9
**Institutions provide appropriate and timely feedback to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement but does not increase the burden of assessment.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, the most significant of which is as follows:
1. '*It is good practice to provide students with sufficient, constructive and timely feedback on their work in respect of all types of assessment.*'
The details presented under Precept 3 elaborate the feedback provided from within OPUS. While the mechanisms are clear and easily used there remains the quality and timeliness of the feedback from each assessor. It is not uncommon for delays and lack of detail to occur in this process, by using OPUS or especially with traditional methods. However, the reporting function within OPUS provides visibility to the placement coordinator (operating with high level of administrative rights) to monitor assessors and take corrective action where feedback does not comply with accepted norms. The provision of 'guidance notes' at OPUS | Resources for assessors affords a means of informing and maintaining accountability and a basis for effecting compliance.

J. Precept 10
**Institutions ensure that everyone involved in the assessment of students is competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, the most significant of which is as follows:
1. '*meet the training needs of all those involved in assessment procedures and processes.*'
It is frequently a concern that new members of Academic Staff and especially the work-based assessor may not have the necessary level of competence to assess appropriately. Of course, the institution is in a position to train and develop the assessor capabilities of its staff but it is not in this favourable position with the work-based assessor. Nevertheless, the work-based assessor is required to be

(effectively strongly recommended to be) an engineer or line manager with responsibility in the workplace and to whom the student has been responsible for their work. In these circumstances 'guidance notes' placed in OPUS | Resources together with guidance on the online assessment form are necessary and adequate instructions for the conduct of the end-of-placement assessment of the student.

## K. Precept 11
**The languages used in teaching and assessment are normally the same. If, for any reason, this is not possible, institutions ensure that their academic standards are not consequently put at risk.**

OPUS has an inbuilt feature to accommodate documents of different languages. To date it has not been necessary to use this capability. More fundamentally, however, as the software code is 'open source' the code may be altered to present the details in another language other than English.

## L. Precept 12
**Institutions provide clear information to staff and students about specific assessment outcomes or other criteria that must be met to fulfill the requirements of PSRBs.**

When this is required the necessary information may be placed in OPUS | Resources. Furthermore, using OPUS | Configuration a specific assessment task may be designed and included in the assessment programme.

## M. Precept 13
**Institutions review and amend assessment regulations periodically, as appropriate, to assure themselves that the regulations remain fit for purpose.**

Any review will need evidence and records of application and performance. OPUS provides current and archived records which may be presented by cohort, group or course.

## N. Precept 14
**Institutions encourage students to adopt good academic conduct in respect of assessment and seek to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities.**

The QAA explanation under this precept identifies several features, as follows:
1. '*Students find it helpful to receive information and guidance about their responsibilities as active participants in assessment.*'
2. '*making sure that students are informed of the consequences of academic misconduct.*'
3. '*accepted and acceptable forms of academic referencing and citation and advice which promotes good academic practice, for example, making clear the need to avoid any suspicion of plagiarism.*'

The ability to convey information to all involved in assessment through the Resources capability of OPUS enables the placement coordinator to present information and advise of student involvement and conduct in assessment. In particular, specific guidance is presented on plagiarism, referencing and report writing.

## O. Precept 15
**Institutions ensure that assessment decisions are recorded and documented accurately and systematically and that the decisions of relevant assessment panels and examination boards are communicated as quickly as possible.**

Much of this precept relates to the communication of results after consideration by a board of examiners. However, one item of guidance of significance at placement assessment level is as follows:
1. '*When disclosing assessment results to students, it is helpful to have clear guidance about whether the result is final, or whether it is subject to confirmation .... it is important that they are not in any doubt about the standing of the results ...*'
As mentioned under Precept 7, a clear statement is presented when assessment information is viewed in OPUS. Figure 1 presents a typical part-completed set of results with the warning notice.

**Figure 1: OPUS view of assessment results**
(clicking on Assessment titles reveal detailed feedback)

**Summary**

This paper has demonstrated how the features of OPUS support the QAA Code Section 6: Assessment of Students. In essence the placement coordinator is able to design the assessment programme (in collaboration with the course committee) and communicate to all participants their involvement. As the programme runs he/she is able to monitor progress, without deep involvement, and intervene where necessary. The student has timely feedback for their performance with a running total of their marks. The placement coordinator is able to export the results and other data to a spreadsheet for further manipulation and analysis. In short, once designed and communicated, the assessment process runs with minimal involvement from the placement coordinator or administrator.

**Conclusion**

This assessment programme and its implementation through OPUS has been in service since 2002 with the last phase (workplace assessor reporting) coming online in 2005. The experience to date shows that significantly fewer queries are presented by assessors and students and the administrative load is cut to a minimum. While this paper has concentrated on only one feature of OPUS more detail on its capabilities may be found in papers by Laird and Turner [3] [4].

As OPUS is now open source and free software additional features and customisation of the software code may be developed by anyone to meet their particular needs. Fuller details may be obtained by visiting the web site [5]. The sister product, the PDSystem, may be viewed at the website [6].

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[1] Sir Ron Dearing, Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Inquiry), London, 1997.
[2] QAA, Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Section 6: Assessment of Students, London, 2006.
[3] R J Laird and C R Turner, "OPUS Online Placement Management Shifts the Paradigm" in Proceeding of the WACE Conference, 2007.
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# Using a Centralised Student Resource Area to Facilitate and Support Work Placement Activity at the University of Leeds

Kim McGuire
University of Leeds

**Work Placement Centre** — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

## Using a Centralised Student Resource Area to Facilitate and Support Work Placement Activity at the University Of Leeds.

Kimberley McGuire – University of Leeds

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**Work Placement Centre**
Careers Centre — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Work Placement Centre Structure

- A Centralised Provision
- 3 Areas of Activity
  - Students
  - Faculties
  - Placement Providers

- Head of Work Placement Centre
- Work Placement Project Officers x 2
- Faculty Placement Administrator
- Work Placement Support Officer

---

**Work Placement Centre**
CAREERS CENTRE — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Our Aims

- Provide students with a wide range of information to facilitate and support work placement activity.
- Provide resources that are self explanatory and easy to use so that students are able to make the best use of the information available in the resource area.
- Provide a multi-functional environment for students with varied learning styles.
- Provide a service that can support students through the work experience process.
- To ensure that all aspects of our service are defined by students, through continuous ascertainment of students needs.

---

**Work Placement Centre**
CAREERS CENTRE — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Ideas for Development

- **Student Focus Group**
  Developed in May 2007, to be repeated in October 2007 and take place twice each academic year.
- **Student Feedback Campaign**
  Carried out in 2007, to be repeated each academic year.
- **Work Placement Centre Staff**
  Our knowledge and observations

---

**Work Placement Centre** — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Key Developments

**Resource Room**

• Permanently staffed resource area to provide continuous initial information and advice to students.

• Refurbished to incorporate both a study area and informal area for students.

• New furniture and display stands in place to ensure that the information is displayed in a logical way.

---

**Work Placement Centre** — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Key Developments

**Resources Available**

• Full set of marketing literature covering all aspects of work experience with key information for students.

• PCs available for students to access online resources.

• Work Placement Centre website & Vacancy Handling System.
www.leeds.ac.uk/workplacementcentre

• Work experience guides, literature from employing organisations, company directories, industry guides, application information (CV/interview/assessment centre)

• International placement resources.

• Custom information developed by Work Placement Centre staff.

## Work Placement Centre — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

**Key Developments**

Re-organisation of Information -

• Information split into three sections:

Searching (including a subcategory for international opportunities).

Applying for work experience.

Making a difference through work experience.

• Information clearly labelled to add context to our resources.

## Work Placement Centre — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

**Key Developments**

Our Approach/Services -

• Work placement individual appointments offered each day, to be increased from September 2007.

• Book loan service.

• Telephone service.

## Work Placement Centre — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

**Summary and Aims for 2008**

• Increase in the number of students using the Work Placement Centre Resource Room and the resources available.

• Continuous ascertainment of student needs to inform the development of the resources and support we provide.

• Increase in the range of information available to students in the Work Placement Centre Resource Room.

• To provide a high quality, uniform level of service to each student that uses the Work Placement Centre.

## Work Placement Centre — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Questions?

## Work Placement Centre — UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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# The Student-Business Link: Realising the Potential of SME Placement

Philip Houston
University of Ulster

The Student-Business Link:
realising the potential of SME placement

Philip Houston
University of Ulster
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## Background

- Three year project
- Supported by Invest NI and HEIF
- Ten months remaining
- Main aim: to increase the number of opportunities for student work experience with local SMEs by 25%
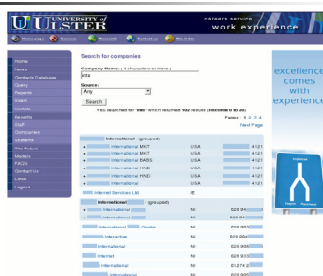
## Barriers

- SMEs are "time-poor"
- Finance issues
- SME perception of HE & graduates
  - Language & terminology
  - Lack of a track record of collaboration
- SME "ownership"
- Student perception of SMEs
  - "One-man band" syndrome
  - Lack of opportunity for advancement
- Internal "silos" of collaboration with industry.

## Where did we start?

- Three-year plan -
- Establishing a baseline: internal audit
- Changing perceptions: marketing campaign, forums & questionnaires
- Cross-faculty initiatives
- Building a website:
  http://workexperience.ulster.ac.uk/wedu
- Scaling-up the level of collaboration

## Establishing a baseline: online database



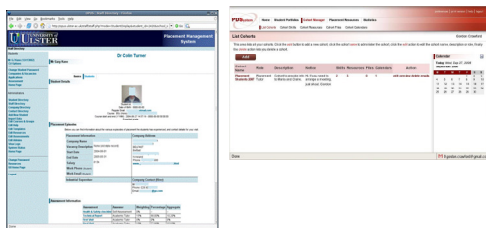## Changing Perceptions: SMEs & students

## Cross-faculty initiatives

- Committees & sub-committees
- Faculty employer liaison panels
- New flexible models of placement – short-term and part-time
- Pilot placements
- New accredited module for work experience (free to students)

## Building a website: online support



## Scaling-up collaboration: OPUS & PDSystem

# 'The Swings and the Roundabouts of Placement Learning': The Erosion and Enhancement of Skills and Knowledge

Simon Bedford
University of Bath

**Abstract**

This research into placement practice was conducted over a two year cycle to investigate the erosion and enhancement of skills and knowledge within Science undergraduates compared to their full time equivalents. Through a range of problem-based learning and standard testing *via* a V.L.E. these changes could be quantitatively gauged and calculated. This along with interviews, questionnaires gave supporting qualitative data. Comparison of these data with summative and formative assessment marks prior to and post placement were then analysed.

This investigation has shown that cognitive ability is somewhat linked to academic capability. Nevertheless, it also revealed that completion of a professional placement year does appear to increase problem solving capacity and organisational skills within students. However, there also appears to be an erosion of core subject knowledge following such a period of intensive vocational study compared to similar ability students on full time programmes of study.

Our research in this area over the past year has suggested that in order to redress these environment dependent deficiencies one has to provide a suite of blended learning resources that allow for them to become meta aware of their own learning. Hence this move will see if it is possible to establish a 'win-win' situation. Thus a series of open ended questions to stimulate students' problem solving abilities were created. The environment and the best 'atmosphere' for the learner were then studied.

These resources constitute video and animations, as well as walk through all the features housed within Moodles' virtual learning environment. In addition stand alone resources and context based materials helped to drive the learning and allow for learners to plan several moves ahead and thus see the consequences of their actions in true PDP fashion.

**Background to study**

As asserted by Reid and Yang (2002), problem solving happens in every field of human enquiry. Most definitions of problem solving agree that for something to be a problem it must put the problem solver in a novel situation, if the situation is a familiar one then it cannot be a true problem. The general concurrence is that a problem is *'a situation where at present you do not know the answer'* (Johnstone 1993) and therefore that problem solving is *'what you do when you don't know what to do'* (Wheatley 1984). It has been stressed that no frequently practised procedure or strategy could be considered to be problem solving (Ausubel 1978) and therefore that *'problems are not simply exercises'* (McCalla 2003). It is considered that some students learn how to answer questions algorithmically, in that they learn a process, or 'algorithm' to enable them to answer examination questions.

A wide range of practitioners have categorised problems into different categories and tabulated them. One of the most useful and widely used classifications came from Johnstone (1993), who suggested that there are three variables that can be applied to all problems. These three variables include the type of data given, whether it is complete or incomplete; the method to be applied to the problem, whether it is familiar or unfamiliar; and finally the goal or outcome of the problem, whether it is previously known or unknown. This leads to Johnstone's classifications of problems as shown in table 1:

| Type | Data | Methods | Goals/ Outcomes | Skills bonus |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Given | Familiar | Given | Recall of algorithms |
| 2 | Given | Unfamiliar | Given | Looking for parallels to known methods |
| 3 | Incomplete | Familiar | Given | Analysis of problem to decide what further data are required |
| 4 | Incomplete | Unfamiliar | Given | Weighing up possible methods and then deciding on data required |
| 5 | Given | Familiar | Open | Decision making about appropriate goals. Exploration of knowledge networks |
| 6 | Given | Unfamiliar | Open | Decisions about goals and choices of appropriate methods. Exploration of knowledge and technique networks |
| 7 | Incomplete | Familiar | Open | Once goals have been specified by the student, these data are seen to be incomplete |
| 8 | Incomplete | Unfamiliar | Open | Suggestion of goals and methods to get there; consequent need for additional data |

**Table 1; Johnstone's classification of problems, taken from Creative problem solving in Chemistry.**

The eight types of problem are not intended to be hierarchical, but a summation of all problems types that are relatively easy to apply.

It has been suggested that although academically able and successful students can do well in unseen examinations, they do not necessarily always understand the chemistry and concepts behind their answers (Heron 1986).

**The ability to problem solve is dependant on many factors, this investigation primarily aims to answer the following question; do work-based placements or more experience of real world problems affect a students' ability to 'problem solve'?**

This aforementioned ability can be investigated by asking students to study more open-ended type problems (the latter problem types in Table 1). This can be done by presenting students with a problem that can not be answered successfully by algorithmic means. The problem would need to be completely unfamiliar to the student (unfamiliar, in terms of context and goal) before being asked to solve it. Examination of both undergraduate and postgraduate, and full-time *vs*. placement students should unveil how well developed their respective cognitive skills are.

One suggested method of studying problem solving ability is through the use of problem-based learning (PBL). PBL is becoming an increasingly used educational method across the globe in an increasing number of disciplines. It is based on the conviction that learning is more effective when students are actively involved (Boud, 1997).

A number of relevant publications were reviewed and assessed based on the requirements and constraints of this project. Many PBL materials require a significant amount of contact time and also laboratory time which would be outside the realms of this investigation. The most relevant publication reviewed was Problem Solving in Analytical Chemistry (Crawford and Heaton), a publication by the Royal Society of Chemistry containing 55 separate problems. Each problem in this publication is listed according to Johnstone's classification of problems. The problems are designed for use in group exercises (e.g. tutorials), or for individual use. They are primarily aimed at first and second year

undergraduate students. The expected completion time for the problems varies from 15 minutes to two hours. This publication includes questions which require little contact from the tutor and thus ideal for VLE use in asynchronous mode.

The following areas were to be investigated,

- To assess the difference a placement year has on cognitive ability. To be achieved by asking the same four open-ended questions to second years (both chemists and natural scientists), placement students (both chemists and natural scientists) and final year students.

- To investigate whether students undertaking a PhD, which is the ultimate 'problem solving' degree, had a greater effect than having a placement year on cognitive ability.

- Investigate the effect of cognitive stimulation exercises and group work on the ability of students to tackle open-ended problems
- To give students both an MCQ to test their basic chemistry ability/knowledge and then ask them to complete a series of open-ended questions.

**Research mode**

Moodle was the chosen Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). VLEs are designed to *"add to traditional learning methods in order to enhance the learning experience of their users. Moodle runs as an interactive website with a number of features and activities designed to engage learners and promote collaborative, student-centred learning".[6]*

Moodle would give students access to the open-ended questions in distance learning mode and home mode. It was chosen for its ease of accessibility for students and for its ability to set out different tasks (to be able to set an MCQ, whilst also giving the ability to answer the longer questions with a journal style setting).

After the Moodle problem solving site was developed and the relevant students were enrolled on the course. The course layout can be viewed in Figure 1.

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[6] Moodle introductory Guide, accessed 26th March 2007.
http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/e-learning/guides/moodle/Moodle_student_guide.pdf

*Figure 1*

The course consists of the following parts
1. A brief explanation of the task and what is required of the students
2. A short MCQ (30 questions)
3. Examples of open-ended questions along with example answers
4. Four open-ended questions to be attempted by the students
5. An evaluation of the course and how students perceived the problems.

The MCQ questions were created to test a range of core subject knowledge that all students should be familiar with. These questions were all based on first and second year courses from the Chemistry programmes of study and core benchmark and RSC material.

It was decided to give students examples of what was expected of them when attempting the open-ended questions, as many of the students would not have been confronted with this style of problem before. The two examples chosen were questions designed by Tina Overton, Science Education Professor at the University of Hull. One of the questions required general science knowledge whereas the other was more applied in nature.

The open-ended questions were chosen from a selection developed over the duration of this project. They were chosen specifically due to their context and also as they required different types of assumptions to be made for each problem.

To prevent students spending time researching the *'best or perfect'* answer to these open-ended problems a time limit of 15 minutes was set per question.

Third year Chemistry placement students returned to Bath in March for the annual placement conference. Over these two days they all attended a workshop which contained a presentation on how to use the Moodle site and a description of this problem solving course. It was emphasised that many returning placement students struggle in the initial exams on return from placement and this Moodle course would help them to illustrate areas of chemistry they hadn't realised they had forgotten

Second year Chemistry, and Natural Sciences students majoring in organic chemistry, were targeted for a study to investigate the type of learning environment or 'atmosphere' required for the subject to problem solve most effectively.

The second year chemistry students were divided into 3 streams each with an individual workshop session. These workshops were used to trial different approaches to the open-ended questions, hence determining whether or not the approach affected either the nature of the solutions given or the students' enjoyment. The Natural Scientists had their own separate workshop group. Both these sets were pre-placement and so would act as the reference sample.

The way in which the Natural Science degree is structured requires these students to work more independently than Chemists and gives them grounding in more than one area of science (typically Chemistry, Physics, Maths, Biology or Pharmacology). These two aspects may suggest that Natural Scientists would do well even when answering the both the MCQ and long answer questions in an environment other than a workshop. To test this hypothesis the Natural Scientists were contacted detailing the activities and asking them to complete the 30 question MCQ, open-ended problems and the evaluation, all accessible via Moodle, in their own time.

In excess of a 300 hundred students were involved in this study with about two thirds being representative of the students from Chemistry programmes and the remainder of students on Natural Sciences programmes.
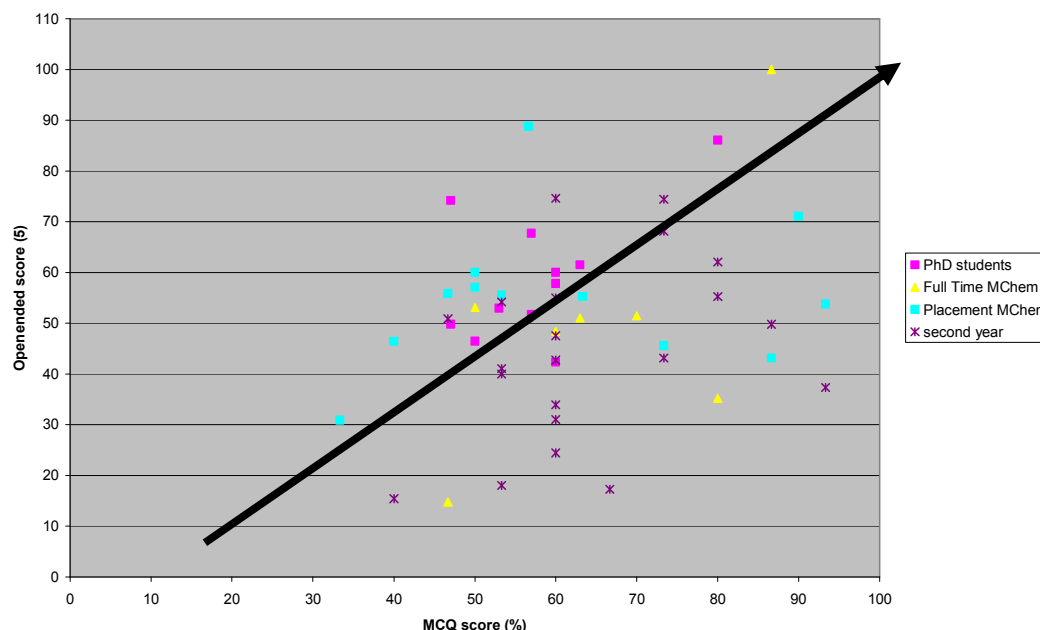
However, the numbers of students in some individual groups (i.e. 4th year full time MChem, 3rd year Natural Scientist placement students) are relatively low.[7] Therefore, whilst many conclusions can be drawn it is important to note that in some cases the data presented could be distorted by one or two anomalous results, i.e. the margin of error is larger in some groups than others. Hence, some results may not be completely representative of the cohort that the data relates to.

**Results and discussion**

Analysis of feedback, grades from both the MCQ and open-ended questions and workshop method were all evaluated using the statistics programme, SPSS.

Overall there was a positive correlation between MCQ score and the average grade given for the open-ended questions. SPSS generated data to support this and showed a significant correlation which can be seen in graph 1.

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[7] The main reasons for this being that either there were initially a low number of students registered for a specific programme of study, or participation in the problem solving course was limited.

*Graph 1: Positive correlation is shown between the average grade for the open-ended questions and the MCQ grade for all students.*

| Cohort | MCQ grade (%) | Open-ended Grade (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Year 2 Workshop 1 | 64 | 44 |
| Year 2 Workshop 2 | n/a | 48 |
| Year 2 Workshop 3 | n/a | 80 |
| Year 2 Natural Scientists | 64 | 32 |
| Year 3 Chemists (placement) | 52 | 40 |
| Year 3 Natural Scientists (placement) | 55 | 58 |
| Year 4 full time MChem | 65 | 50 (42) |
| Year 4 MChem with placement | 61 | 55 (58) |
| PhD | 58 | 59 |

*Table 2: ( ) results in brackets after moderation*

*Chemistry Workshops*
The difference in results between workshop groups only varied significantly when student-centred learning was introduced. Not only did this approach increase the quality of the answers given to the open-ended problems, it also appeared to give the students much more positive attitudes towards the task in hand.

> *"Very good, marvellous. Nice to see the real world being included in a chemistry lesson.*
> *(It does actually exist!)"*

The average grade for the participants in workshop groups increased on average by 34% with student-centred learning.

*Natural Sciences Workshops*
As mentioned previously, it is thought (Danili 2004) that students who can see interconnections and links between different knowledge areas obtain the best performance in written examinations. It is believed that this is due to them possessing a better ability to recall and utilise the information they have learnt. This would suggest that Natural Sciences students, who, undertaking a multi-disciplinary science-based degree programme, may be expected to have a higher cognitive ability. Consequently, it is possible to expect the Natural Scientists to be more proficient at open-ended questions. Although this is true of those students who are currently on placement, second year Natural Scientists students seem to have much more difficulty with the open-ended questions then their placement counterparts. Whilst the open-ended questions were not necessarily related to chemistry and were aimed for science 'graduates' as a whole the second year Natural Scientists appeared to struggle with this.

Some of the feedback received from the second year Natural Scientists indicated a general perception that they did not have the pre-requisite knowledge to answer the open ended problems. In reality the problems were specifically designed so that graduate level chemistry knowledge was NOT required, only a science-based discipline.

*Placement and Work-Based Learning Workshops*
It is possible to see a clear difference between students that went on placement and students who did not. This could be seen in data generated from both MChem 4th year students, as well as data correlated from all participants.

When comparing all data from second years up to PhD students inclusive, it is possible to see a mean difference of 7.2% in the average grade generated from answering the open ended problems. However, when comparing students within the same year cohort (in this case 4th year MChem students) it is possible to see a mean difference of 4%. Whilst this is still a significant difference, it is somewhat reduced. There were 3 anomalies present within the 4th year MChem data due to students transferring into the Bath programme from the closure of Exeter University Chemistry Department. As these had studies at another institution and had a different educational background these anomalous data points were removed and as a result the mean difference almost doubled to produce a value of 16%.

When considering the MCQ scores these are slightly lower for students who are currently on placement or who have returned from placement within the last academic year, showing a clear 'erosion' of core subject knowledge

**Correlation between grades and evaluation responses**

Participants were asked the following questions are completing the MCQ and open-ended problems,
- o A) Did you feel uneasy about the open-ended questions not having a definitive answer?
  Responses available for the students were:
  1. Yes
  2. Don't know
  3. No

- o B) How did you find the difficulty of the questions in the MCQ?
  Responses available for the students were:
  1. They were all really easy
  2. Some of them were easy
  3. OK
  4. Some of them were too hard
  5. All of them were too hard

Participants' answers to question A are listed in Table 3 along with the average grades obtained by the students who gave that answer.

| Response (1, 2 or 3) | Average grade (%) |
|---|---|
| 1 | 44 |
| 2 | 49 |
| 3 | 47 |

Table 3: Student responses to question A correlated to the average grade obtained
(**Red** Gradient)

Participants' answers to question B are listed in Table 4 along with the average grades obtained by the students who gave that answer.

| Response (1, 2 , 3, 4 or 5) | Average grade (%) |
|---|---|
| 1 | 80 |
| 2 | 64 |
| 3 | 57 |
| 4 | 52 |
| 5 | 28 |

Table 4: Student responses to question B correlated to the average grade obtained

These results indicate a clear correlation with perceived difficulty of the MCQ with the score obtained. This correlation is significantly reduced when comparing perceived difficulty of the open ended problems with the score obtained.

**Conclusions**

It has been shown that a limited amount of peer contact or support does not significantly affect students' ability to problem solve. However, when group work is introduced the resulting grades are dramatically increased. Not only do the grades increase, but so too does the positivity of the feedback. Students seem to prefer working amongst their peers to obtain a solution to a common problem. Knowing that their work is going to be presented to their peers also seems to stimulate students into trying to think around a problem to find an acceptable solution. This is backed by the current research into *'student centred'* learning approaches.

It appears as though there is a certain amount of problem solving embedded within the curricula; however, this is more prominent for those students enrolled on a placement programme. Students in their 3rd year of Natural Sciences (their final year) and 4th year of Chemistry programmes give the impression of having relatively well developed cognitive abilities with students having been on placement and PhD students having the highest cognitive abilities of all. The downside of this is those that have taken a year out on placement loose some of their core subject knowledge base with respect to those that pursue full-time programmes.

Finally, as expected, there appears to be a positive correlation between one's ability to problem solve and academic ability. Whether this is due to students of a higher academic nature having developed higher cognitive abilities though learning, or, vice versa is a problem within itself.

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**The Swings and Roundabouts of Placement Learning –** *The erosion and enhancement of Skills and Knowledge.*

**ASET Conference Cardiff 2007**

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## Introduction

- Bath has a long history of placements – Bristol College of Technology
- Send out a large proportion of students, in Science (>75% Chemistry)
- In 2003 Institutional Audit – Placement Degrees were seen as the 'Bath Brand'
- Mission Statement – 'Work Based Learning'

## Background

- Initially no placement threshold – Good!
- Introduction of MChem changed little–
- 4yr BSc became a 4yr MChem
- MChem threshold introduced – majority on placement were MChem, FT 3yr BSc
- Typically 0-3 Students FT MChem
- Increasing numbers – Exeter; 20% FT MChem

## The Issues

- In the Final Year S1 assessments MChem FT > MChem IT (MChem SYA?)
- The synoptic paper especially – core material from Years 1 and 2
- By the end of the degree this difference had gone in the written examinations
- Blurred; but overall MChem IT > MChem FT in overall degree marks and employment

## Hypothesis

- Periods of placement eroded core Yrs 1 and 2 knowledge and understanding
- Compensated by better Key Skills and professional skills acquisition
- MChem SYA should be effected less
- BSc IT Chemistry with Management should be effected the most
- MChem FT should do less well on project work which is mainly laboratory based

## Examining the Data

- Review current and past examination data for Final Year study per unit (core/optional)
- Compare similar 'mark averages' students in YR2 who went on IT, SYA and FT paths
- Keeping in mind programme differences e.g straight chemistry with drug discovery, or non traditional entry e.g Exeter or programme transfer, IB, overseas etc.

## Examining the Data

- Year 2 (not Year 1 which is foundation)
- IT, SYA and FT pathways
- Placement Type – project variation
- PhD and Post Doctorial students
- Interviews and Questionnaires
- F2F (conference) and asynchronous

### Lots a variables!

## Action Research: Project Studies

1. Professional Skills – Problem Solving
2. Key Skills – Team Work and Negotiation
3. Knowledge and understanding – Core Year 1 and Year 2 Material

*Only time to talk about this study!*

## What is Problem Solving?

What is a problem?

*'What you do when you don't know what to do'*

Johnstone[1] asserted that there are three aspects to all problems:

- Info/data provided or not
- Method/strategy to be used
- Goal or outcomes to be reached

This leads to Johnstone's classification….

## Johnstones' Classification Table[1]

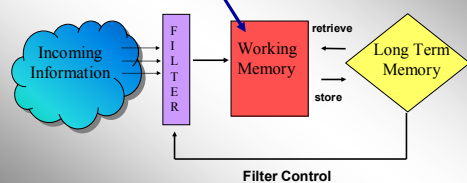| Type | Data | Methods | Goals/Outcomes |
|------|------|---------|----------------|
| 1 | Given | Familiar | Given |
| 2 | Given | Unfamiliar | Given |
| 3 | Incomplete | Familiar | Given |
| 4 | Incomplete | Unfamiliar | Given |
| 5 | Given | Familiar | Open |
| 6 | Given | Unfamiliar | Open |
| 7 | Incomplete | Familiar | Open |
| 8 | Incomplete | Unfamiliar | Open |

*Algorithmic*

*Open-ended*

## Information Processing Model

Fixed 7 (± 2) pieces of information

Incoming Information → FILTER → Working Memory

retrieve ← Long Term Memory
store →

Filter Control

## Cognitive load theory

- Working memory can handle limited number of elements

*Johnstone and El-Banna, 1986*

success rate / no of steps
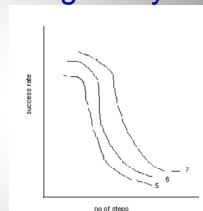
## Working memory and problem solving ability

- Subjects with larger WMC can solve problems with larger M-demand

*Johnstone and El-Banna, 1986*

success rate / no of steps

## Cognitive overload

- Long term memory allows capacity to be expanded by use of schemas or chunking
- *Intrinsic cognitive load* due to interactivity of different elements
- *Extraneous cognitive load* due to activity that interferes with learning
- *Effective cognitive load* helps learning and enhances motivation
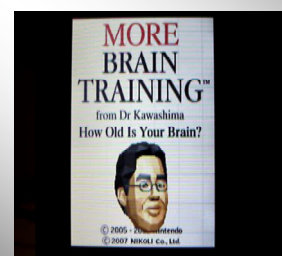
## Reducing cognitive load
### (Paas, Renkl, Sweller, 2003)

- Awareness of prior knowledge
- Present supporting information first
- Remove 'noise'
- Scaffolding
- Simplify problem, break down into steps
- Fading - instructions, worked examples, partial example, problems

## Improving Working Memory

MORE BRAIN TRAINING™
from Dr Kawashima
How Old Is Your Brain?

© 2005 - Nintendo
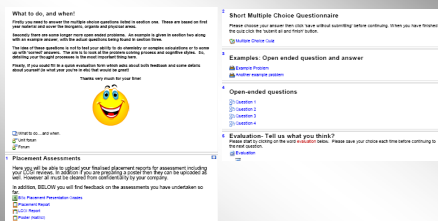© 2007 NIKOLI Co., Ltd.

## Project Aims

*To test and analyse the hypothesis that a placement improves problem solving abilities; meta-learning*

**Outcomes**

Creation of a series of open ended and algorithmic problems

Investigation into the best 'environment' for problem solving

Investigation into effect of cognitive stimulation

## VLE: Moodle



## Example 1



## Example 2

How many trees are required to absorb the same amount of $CO_2$ released by 1300cc petrol engined small car over a year?

Assume the car travels 18,000 miles.

Combustion of octane;

$2C_8H_{18} + 25O_2 \rightarrow 16CO_2 + 18H_2O$

Photosynthesis;

$6CO_2 + 6H_2O + hv \rightarrow C_6H_{12}O_6 + 6O_2$

## Example 3

Last year the former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko was fatally poisoned by Polonium-210.

Although Polonium-210 is a naturally occurring radioactive material the amount needed to have caused his death means that it most probably did not originate from the environment. If the Polonium-210 used was orgiginally produced from Radium-226 what else would have been produced during the fission process?

Polonium-210 was most likely chosen for its toxicity and difficulty of detection. Explain the reasoning behind these two properties.
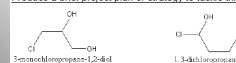
Click here for a hint.

## Example 4

Chloropropanols have been detected in many foodstuffs including soy sauce, acid-hydrolysed vegetable protein (acid-HVP) and many other flavourings. 3-Monochloropropane-1,2-diol (3-MCPD) and 1,3-Dichloropropane-1-ol (1,3-DCP) are the most commonly formed chloropropanols and have been classified as genotoxic carcinogens. These two chloropropanols are often formed during the manufacturing processes of the above foods. Analyses are performed to detect the levels of these contaminants with a reporting limit of as little as 0.05 mg/kg (5ppb). Naturally food manufacturers want to reduce the levels of these contaminants and if at all possible eliminate them altogether. Analytical chemists have been tasked with the job of finding precursors to the chloropropanols and the conditions required to form the chloropropanols during the manufacturing process.

*Produce a brief project plan or strategy to tackle this problem.*

3-monochloropropane-1,2-diol          1,3-dichloropropanol

## Conclusions

- Results indicate that there is a positive correlation between one's ability to problem solve and academic ability post year 2

- Peer contact, student-centred learning and placement environment affects ability to problem solve effectively

- The most developed cognitive skills belong to those students who have been on placement as well as those students embarked on a PhD

## Further Work

- Wider sample size, tracking one cohort over their entire degree programme (Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Open University PILS)

- Greater investigation into use of cognitive stimulation exercises and environment (warm-up and surroundings)

- Investigation into other factors that may affect cognitive ability (other than participation in a placement year)

*Complete other Project Studies*

## References

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## Acknowledgements

Miss Carol Martin, University of Bath

Professor Norman Reid, University of Glasgow

Professor Tina Overton, University of Hull
Mr Nick Potter, University of Hull

Students of University of Bath

Placement Providers

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## Questions?

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# Yomping The Nations – Enterprise Training for Students

Kirsty Chase

The Working Knowledge Group

**Xing (previously known as Yomp) – An innovative method to prepare students for placement**

For students to maximise their placement opportunity they need a good understanding of how an organisation runs, grows and develops, and how their role/s contribute strategically to the business or organisation.

Xing is a training toolkit and method that is used to rapidly prepare students for employment. Developed by The Working Knowledge Group and Cambridge University, it is now used by over 70 Universities in the UK.

"Xing is an excellent way to boost the commercial awareness, business language and employability skills of students from all disciplines.  The method engages students rapidly and can be facilitated by non-business specialists further enhancing its usability." - Paul Blackmore, Director of the Centre for Employability Enterprise and Careers, Lancaster University.

This workshop will demonstrate how Xing works, look at case studies of how it has been integrated within some of our licensed universities and discuss how it could benefit you and your students.

"The Working Knowledge Group have helped us to ensure that our students graduate with the confidence and skills needed to make a difference to the organisations they work for from day one. Xing and Flux are innovative educational tools that get young people used to the realities of business, the need for strategic objectives and the importance of being able to think and present on your feet." Professor Huw Morris, Dean, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School.

Delegate List

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| Ahmed, Yussuf | Loughborough University |
| Allen, Colin | University of Greenwich |
| Anderson, Adrian | UVAC |
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| Wood-Harper, Rachel | Graduate Prospects |
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| Hugh Tollyfield | HEFCE and DfES |

**ASET**
*Integrating Work and Learning*

**The Placement and Employability Professionals' Body**

ASET is the professional body for placement and employability staff. It has been at the forefront of developments in sandwich courses and other forms of work placements, in both higher and further education, for more than 25 years. We represent over 1300 academic and administrative placement staff at 90 HE and FE institutions.

ASET has been the catalyst for the development of guidelines in many areas and also the promotion and dissemination of best practice. We also seek to champion the general concept of work-based learning.

ASET is an educational charity run by work-based learning practitioners for work-based learning practitioners and offers support, advice, guidance and representation to all professionals who work in the sector.

As the leading organisation in the work-based and placement learning sector we seek to provide independent and influential strategic leadership for it.

Membership gives all relevant staff at universities, further education colleges and employers the opportunity to benefit from, and contribute to, a wealth of experience and expertise..

If you wish to discuss any aspect of ASET's work, please contact the ASET office or any of the executive members. Contact details are below:


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# ASET Conference 2008

The 2008 Annual Conference will take place between 2-4 September at Robbins Conference Centre, Plymouth.  More details are on the following page and please keep an eye on the ASET website for further news.

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# ASET Annual Conference 2008
## The Placement and Employability Professionals' Conference
## 2-4 September 2008
## Robbins Conference Centre, University of Plymouth

# Conference Announcement
# Working Globally, Working Locally

Annual Conference this year will address the challenges of working concurrently with the international and local work-based and placement learning markets. The conference is participatory, allowing delegates to share experiences and learn from each other.

The Conference is presented across three sessions each with a geographical theme:
- **Working internationally**; both with overseas students and placements overseas
- **National placements**; concentrating on good practice, preparing and supporting students
- **Local focus**; working with regional organisations, SMEs and the not for profit sector

This is a three-day conference with workshop learning, keynotes speakers and whole group discussions to develop knowledge in, and practice of, work-based and placement learning.

In order to provide a framework for the conference, presentations are arranged under themes; **international, national, local** and **research**. ASET is keen to disseminate the findings and recommendations of employability and work-based learning research including the work of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. A key feature of previous ASET conferences has been the opportunity to hear about work at a broad range of institutions, about new initiatives and projects, and of good practice systems – this conference will continue this strong tradition.

In addition to, and supporting the themes of, international, national, local and research; delegates can expect opportunities to engage with: legislative aspects, placement agencies, employer perspectives, foundation degrees and working with partner colleges.



More details at **www.asetonline.org/conf**

ASET

# Integrating Work and Learning