

# e3i Employability Case Study



## Alternatives to Law - Speed Dating style

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Faculty: Student and Academic Services

<b>Subject group:</b>	LLB Law Law and Psychology Law and Criminology
<b>Number of students involved:</b>	40 per session
<b>Elements of the employability framework addressed:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of autonomy</li> <li>• PDP</li> <li>• Work Related Learning</li> <li>• Reflection on use of knowledge and skills; transfer of these to the work environment</li> <li>• Career management skills</li> <li>• Preparation for specific professional areas</li> </ul>

### Description of learning and teaching approach adopted

A novel 'speed dating' style event, taking the format of different external organisations (employers) presenting on a rotational basis, to small groups of students.

Representatives bring supportive literature/stands for visual display and takeaway materials, including promotional 'freebies'.

### Development of the Idea

- SHU Careers Adviser linked to Law, Judith Peel, keen in my role to present students with alternative options within a Law degree, to balance a preponderance of careers information and support routing LLB graduates towards becoming a solicitor or barrister.
- 'Impact', a joint Yorkshire Universities initiative providing additional support particularly to minority ethnic students but also those with other identifiable needs e.g. first generation university entrants. Sheffield Hallam Impact Project Officer/SHU Careers Adviser, Annette Baxter, recognised the LLB cohort of students as an appropriate group.
- Criminal Justice Board (CJB) - both advisers had attended an evening event with South Yorkshire Criminal Justices Board with whom we formed a partnership in delivering these events - as they too were keen to meet the diversity agenda and law students an appropriate cohort.

### Where?

A comfortable, light, airy, informal setting chosen to host and deliver this novel style event made Forgers catering outlet at Heart of the Campus, Collegiate Crescent the chosen venue.

### When?

4 - 6pm Thursday evenings.

To date, three Alternatives to Law events, the first taking place in November 2005 and two further events in the academic year 07-08.

### How?

#### November 2005

The first event was a speed networking event created with representation of three of the CJB agencies and two locally based central government employers. The event was structured so that the five employer representatives would present their 'pitch' to five groups of approximately 10 students. The seating arrangements were informal - chairs placed randomly around the five designated tables. The format of the event adhered to a procedure that the employer

representatives would 'rotate' on to the next group and table - delivering their informal presentation five times in total.

The strictly timed exercise required 10 minutes of presentation on the organisation, the work, the roles, the opportunities and requirements etc. A further 10 minutes were given for students to engage in dialogue and questions to the representatives. A stop watch and whistle were essential tools to the smooth running of the process the 'whistleblower' charged with managing and controlling the rotational procedure.

As an organiser I can report that the atmosphere was vibrant. The interaction and activity within the room was constant and engaging - not least because this first event (an unknown entity) drew far greater numbers of students than anticipated. Overall a great achievement in that it reached that many more people and gained praise from employers and students alike, as well as recognition of this new style of event.

#### November 2007

A change of personnel at the CJB during the 06 -07 academic year postponed repeat of this event until November 2007. Exactly the same format was used but scaled down to four representative organisations and limited reliance on student marketing and the 'Impact' dimension.

This second event produced lesser but more appropriate numbers attending. The feel of the event was more subdued, while not diminishing the value of the content, the enthusiasm and the energy put into and gained from the event.

#### February 2008

In February 2008 the same partnership event with the CJB was repeated though limited to just two of their representatives taking part giving scope to invite other 'alternative' employers to attend. One was a local law recruitment agency able to inform law students about other roles in law practices and the other a leading national property and construction company.

This event had a less vibrant, slightly more intense feel. Insight gained from the employers presentation made them realise that it was a real possibility to work in disciplines seeming quite unrelated to a law degree.

#### Employability objectives and intended learning outcomes

1. To introduce, inform, inspire students to a range of career options related to law - demonstrating wider alternative routes other than becoming a solicitor or barrister.
2. To gain wider and more in-depth understanding of career choices and pathways.
3. To impress upon students the need and availability of work experience and voluntary work opportunities.
4. To provide students with the opportunity to engage with representatives by asking questions and advice in the group situation.
5. To introduce and create a comfortable and controlled environment for networking.
6. To develop a programme which could subsequently be adapted and diversified.
7. For students to gather and take away supportive literature and information and also to realise the importance of electronic communication as organisations post their opportunities on their websites.

#### Outcomes

1. Students engaged with professionals in different sectors to understand and relate to their own career choices and potential pathways.
2. Students noted and reflected on differing skill sets required for various roles and sectors.
3. Enabled students to feel comfortable talking to employers yet also provided insight to employers of student issues and concerns.
4. Encouraged students to take the initiative to make speculative contacts and approaches for work experience, as well as being made aware of advertised opportunities.
5. Insight gained from employers students may not otherwise have 'signed up to', made them realise it was a real possibility to work in disciplines seeming quite unrelated to a law degree.

#### Description of and tips for good practice; lessons learned

The first of these events went down in Careers Service history as one of the few events that has ever produced over-crowding! The reason for this achievement was the recruitment of student helpers to market and promote the event - their 'carrot' being they would act as hosts to the employer representatives creating an ideal networking opportunity! This request to engage student volunteers was made verbally at an evening law society event we attended at the start of the year - a good time to capture enthusiasm and engagement which has a tendency to wane as the year progresses. The students gave their names and contact details there and then - and Annette subsequently invited them to a meeting to provide more information on their role and to firmly enlist their support.

The number attending reduced to a small but committed group of friends who used their own ideas and initiative on how to advertise and promote the event to all years. The students produced ticket sized flyers to hand out, made announcements in large lectures and succeeded in producing an audience. They were allocated in pairs to an employer to host and assist on the day and briefed by us beforehand on how they could show an interest in that organisation, its opportunities and possibly further contact or work experience. These students made a significant contribution to the success of the event having a sense of ownership from the start and keen to make it work. They provided extra practical support on the day and engaged in the networking process making it work for them as well as impressing the employers with their support, interaction and contribution to the smooth and efficient running of the event.

The style of the event required students to engage and be a key part of the delivery themselves by asking questions. Some briefing or examples of questions could be prepared for students (we had some to hand) but we encouraged autonomy by largely leaving students to identify their own requests and posing these directly to the employers for the benefit of the whole group. In the main this worked well, with the speakers adept in covering any gaps in dialogue by adding detail or clarification. We circulated informally around the groups and were able to prompt or promote further questioning as appropriate, though being aware this can deter student autonomy.

The 'sign up' in advance service offered by netWORK advertising the event was used (as well as the Law Careers blackboard site). This provides some advance notice of interest and attendance but only half of those signing up usually attend on the day. This means of advertising also drew the attention of some other 'related' courses e.g. criminology students - they had identified particular organisations of interest to them - but were considerably less interested in law related 'other areas'. I would

suggest confining an event of this type solely to the target audience.

Employers/organisations bringing stands/information also serves to give the event a visual presence. It should be noted that students were very keen to follow up the knowledge gained with the takeaway information - I think because it was provided at the right time and place.

Stick to time and ensure students stay to hear all speakers.

Could be adapted to any appropriate 'grouping' of careers or sector delivered to an appropriately targeted audience.

Particularly good for 'all years' to engage in this style activity as the broad range of information in this case was not targeted for placement or final years but for any student ready to receive the insight and opportunity. Targeting all years, or primarily earlier years only, may provide a particularly good focus for those disciplines that don't include work-based learning but where related work experience is a key component to decision making or even a pre-requisite for entry at a later stage. A development currently in discussion with the Criminal Justice Board is to focus a future event entirely on voluntary or work experience opportunities which would serve to also lead students to experience of real world activities.

#### Key points of any feedback gathered or evaluation undertaken with students or staff

Feedback from students rated it a great success and exhausted employers remained very encouraging and enthusiastic to repeat the proceedings at future events - though, at our first event, expressing a preference for fewer numbers.

Key words referred to in the feedback include:

- groups/questions/decisions
- options/opportunities
- alternatives/different areas
- information/websites
- selection processes/work experience

#### **What did you find most useful about this session?**

*Good information because before this session I was really unsure about what other alternatives there were to the Legal Practice Course.*

*It has helped me make a decision what career I would like to do.*

*All the general info. Also available work experience.*

*Hearing about the different areas within a legal environment.*

*The long time to ask questions.*

*Giving an idea of other careers which I never really knew about.*

*Able to ask questions.*

*Small groups, able to ask questions easier.*

*Good group sizes, I think everyone felt comfortable.*

*Information on placements in Youth Offending Teams.*

*They had answers to my questions, which allows me to progress.*

*Discussing relevance of work experience.*

*Hearing about the different areas within a legal environment.*

*The fact that each talk wasn't too long, avoiding us being inundated with information.*

*Hearing about different options.*

*Hearing about job opportunities I've never thought of before.*

*Able to ask questions*

*Links to websites, individuals in law firms.*

*Recruitment websites being given.*

*Finding out more info on careers that aren't usually referred to in the normal course of our degree.*

*Being able to ask questions to someone who is actually involved.*

*Provide more detailed analysis.*

*Information given of different options.*

*Helpful in explaining selection processes especially.*

**What other events/workshops would you like the Careers and Employment Service to offer? Other suggested job/career titles to cover?**

*More workshops like this*

*Wider variety of representatives*

*Prison service/psychology jobs*

*CV help*

*Probation, criminology based ones*

*Other careers in the criminal justice system*

*Police High development scheme*

*General medical council scheme*

*More events with a wider variety of representatives present*

*Probation service, more legal representative*

#### Resources used

Advertising/promotion

Assigned helpers?

Prompt questions/briefing sheet for students?

Display tables for literature

Refreshments prior to the event for visitors

Stopwatch and whistle - stick to time!

This information can be made available in other formats.  
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