

e3i Employability Case Study



Work-based Learning: Professional Communication

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Subject group:	Communications
Number of students involved:	75
Elements of the employability framework addressed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills development; • PDP; • Work- related learning; • Reflection on use of knowledge and skills; transfer of these to work environment; • Career management skills.

Description of learning and teaching approach adopted

Following an introduction in semester two of the first year - and a re-introduction at the beginning of semester one, year two, when the module actually commenced - career management skills (CMS) were taught in four two-hour sessions. These were:

- 1) Self-Assessment/Employability/What Employers Want;
- 2) Finding and creating opportunities;
- 3) Applications/CV/Letters;
- 4) Interviews/Self-reflection/Action planning.

These sessions were delivered jointly with colleagues from Student and Academic Services and were intended to both impart career management skills and to support students in finding and securing work-based learning opportunities.

The introduction of career management skills into the module was new for 2006/07. Previously, CMS had been offered as a separate module, but following a decision to drop it from the Media Studies course structure the four elements above were incorporated into Work-Based Learning.

Beyond the four taught sessions, students were invited to attend individual tutorials where their progress could be discussed and feedback given on early work towards the log book and report. Outside of tutorials, communication between students and their tutor was mainly via Blackboard and email. Students who preferred to receive feedback by email were invited to submit examples of work.

The students were required to keep, and later submit, a detailed log book, about their work-based learning experience. In addition, a second submission required them to reflect critically on the experience in a report, which also included an action plan.

Employability objectives and intended learning outcomes

- Demonstrate direct experience of a workplace or setting or activity in which professional communication is the main focus;
- Document growing preparedness for work;
- Demonstrate a capacity to reflect in writing on practical experience and performance;
- Demonstrate the application of the key skills of communication, time management and self-organisation.

Description of and tips for good practice; lessons learned

One of the main areas of difficulty has been in communicating with students. Work-Based Learning: Professional Communication is currently a 20 credit year-long module. As such, it carries hours for teaching and assessment, but none for visiting students who may be on placements. An added complication is that not all students will be engaged on work-based activities at any one time, and so the setting of deadlines for the return of information - what students are doing, for example - has not been possible. Currently, module guidelines state that information should be returned within two weeks of starting an activity. However, this is often overlooked by students.

.One possible solution to this is to make the submission of this information a requirement on a Pass/Fail basis under new regulations. This is being considered for next year.

A second problem occurs with students who have not found a suitable placement. As the module is currently year-long, this problem tends to become visible once semester two is underway. In-house projects have been used for some students in the past who have been unable to find anything else. However, the use of the Venture Matrix, potentially for any students on the module, not just those lacking placements, is being considered for 2008/09. The Venture Matrix operates almost as a virtual business park, where students from different courses can set up businesses and trade their skills and knowledge (<http://venturematrix.shu.ac.uk>).

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

Feedback from students in the past has generally been very positive, and a number of students have had offers of employment from the organisations they were placed with. Others have found that the opportunity to gain direct experience has been of great benefit. One student said:

'I'd say that the work based learning was invaluable to my CV as it gave me the opportunity to apply and get other work placements. I'm still finding the experience I gained useful now as every placement and bit of voluntary work you do is important when trying to compete against other people in the industry for jobs and placements.'

Although assistance is given to students in finding work-based learning opportunities (CMS, placement opportunities posted on Blackboard, etc), students are required to find their own placements. A few struggle to do this and feedback from this group is rather more negative, with more help in finding placements being a common request. For example, an anonymous comment was:

'It would have been more beneficial if we had more personal help for finding our placements.'

Careers staff, along with myself (the only tutor from the subject group) feel that the introduction of CMS into the module has strengthened it, and it certainly addresses, in part, the above student complaint. Student feedback seems to support this, in general. Again, an anonymous comment, this time on one of the CMS seminars:

'Found really good as gave us advice on how to find jobs. Really helpful.'

Resources used

The Careers Service of SAS, with their expertise and resources, are involved in the delivery of Career Management Skills:

https://staff.shu.ac.uk/sas/student_support/careers/

This information can be made available in other formats.
Please contact us for details.