Examples of good practice

This is an Employability CETL resource which draws upon existing good practice in the faculty of Development and Society (D&S). It comprises examples of good practice, questions which teams can collectively consider and discuss as well as recommendations for addressing the employability agenda when writing for validation. It draws evidence from evaluative work on the validation documents submitted by course planning teams in 2007 and is intended primarily as part of a pack for teams preparing for validation.

Examples of good practice

Within validation documents, reflection is closely related to and articulated in the context of PDP processes. The tool for delivering reflective learning and teaching is frequently a progress file or e-portfolio. There are a number of educational purposes which the portfolio can be used for:

- A learning tool - developmental to students' ability to reflect
- A track record of achievement, which can be used to enhance CV writing and therefore employability
- Part of an accreditation process, where the portfolio is used to gain membership to a professional organisation

All of these features of portfolios contribute to enhance learners' employability and are constituent parts of employability provision for students. They are most effective however when they are applied in a way which complements each of these purposes. There is a danger in seeing e-portfolios solely as a track record of achievement, as this does not guarantee that abilities to reflect will develop in students, as demonstrated by research studies on reflective portfolio use (Duffy et al., 2008). Similarly, while using e-portfolios as part of an accreditation process would contribute to learners' employability, as demonstrated by courses in MSc Housing and Neighbourhood Management (2007), there are befits to be gained from a focus on learning and developing reflective ability to support this, in order to ensure students are not merely jumping through hoops. One good example comes from MA International Criminal Justice courses (2007) where the objectives of reflective activity are clearly articulated:

'Identifying and locating employment preferences and reflecting on how the process of study and learning is associated to the development of employability skills'

(MA International Criminal Justice, 2007: 18)

A preoccupation with describing the tool used to deliver reflective learning (e-portfolios, blogs, reflective journals, self assessment assignment sheets) is evident in much of the validation writing (BA Hons English, 2007: 13). This is understandable as e-portfolios and new platforms provided by technology expand the possibilities for making reflective learning accessible to students. It would be useful however to place an equal focus on discussing pedagogical models for developing reflective learning practice, the perceived outcomes of reflection to learners' employability and the assessment processes attached to this. These three aspects determine the way reflection is resolved as pedagogy and it would be useful for them to remain at the forefront of validation writing.

Questions to consider/discuss

Are there opportunities to further articulate within validation writing:

- Pedagogical models for structuring/understanding reflection (e.g. Jasper, 2003; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Gibbs, 1988)
- The perceived outcomes of reflection to enhancing learners' employability
- The way assessment of reflection is approached

Is the reflective process used in a balanced way to address all of the following:

- As a learning opportunity to enhance the students' ability to reflect;
- As a track record of achievement, which can be used to develop CV writing skills and employability;
- As part of an accreditation process, where the portfolio is used to gain membership to a professional organisation;

Recommendations for addressing the employability agenda when writing for validation

Some examples of good practice when writing for validation and addressing reflective learning can be found in courses

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which had articulated clearly the perceived outcomes of reflection to the learner's employability (MA International Criminal Justice, 2007: 18; MSc Real Estate Investment and Management/MSc Real Estate Construction and Development, 2007: 5).

There were a number of positive uses of reflective progress files articulated in the validation documents. In all of these cases there is a need to always relate them to expected outcomes, enhancing learners' employability: where the progress file develops students' ability to reflect, how would this ability enhance their propensity for lifelong learning once they are in employment? Where it is a track record of achievement, how would that influence CV writing skills and the ability to articulate these skills in a job interview? Where the progress file is used to gain membership to a professional organisation, how would this enhance students' understanding of the demands of the world of work?

References to definitive documents:

https://staff.shu.ac.uk/fds/workStudents/quality/defDocs.asp
[Accessed 24th February, 2009]

1. MSc Housing & Neighbourhood Management validated February 2007

2. MA International Criminal Justice validated May 2007

3. BA (Hons) English revalidated May 2007

4. MSc Real Estate Investment and Management/MSc Real Estate Construction and Development, DELIVERED IN PRAGUE validated May 2007

References:

1. Baxter Magolda, M. 1992, *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

2. Duffy, K., Anthony, D. & Vickers, F. 2008, *Are E-portfolios an Asset to Learning and Placement*, ASET: The Placement and Employability Professionals' Body.

3. Gibbs, G. 1988, *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods.* Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford.

4. Jasper, M. 2003, *Beginning Reflective Practice - Foundations in Nursing and Health Care,* Nelson Thornes, Cheltenham.