

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Employability (e3i)

Employability Project Summaries 2008-9



Contents

Introduction David Laughton	p. 2.
Exploring Student Perspectives on the Employability Aspects of Geography Courses at SHU Andrew Jobling	p. 4.
Exploring Student Perspectives on the Employability Aspects of Their Courses Anne Nortcliffe	p. 5.
Student Perceptions Of Employability Colleen Smith	p. 6.
Supported Independent Learning (with South Yorkshire Police) Craig Patterson	p. 7.
Exploring Student Perspectives on the Employability Aspects of Their Course: HND Real Estate Jill Fortune, John Grant and Bee Gan	p. 9.
Exploring and Developing the Concept of Employability with International PG Students Gudrun Myers	p. 10.
Employability on BA (Hons) Social Work Studies Programme - Student Perceptions Jane Foggin	p. 11.
Student Assessment of Perceptions of Employability Skills Development in the BSc Mathematics Degree Course Marion Gerson	p. 13.
The Skills Passport: A Student Evaluation Melissa Jacobi	p. 14.
Gaining Employment Through Effective Interview Skills Melanie Bryer, Pam Holland and Anna Lowe	p. 15.
Students and the Workplace - What Skills do They Really Need? Fiona Phoenix and Rob Wilson	p. 17.
Online Placement Diaries: Exploring Student Perspectives On Employability Simon Clark	p. 18.
Student Perspectives On Employability In English Tom Rutter	p. 19.
Embedding, Enhancing And Integrating Employability Website	p. 20.

For more information on the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Employability (e3i), visit the CETL website at <http://employability.shu.ac.uk> or e-mail e3i@shu.ac.uk

Introduction

David Laughton, Director e3i CETL

As part of the work of the Centre for Excellence for Employability at SHU (e3i) we have, over the last five years, researched and evaluated the feedback from employers on the skills and attributes organisations desire to see in the graduates they recruit. We have used this information to provide guidance to colleagues on how course design and the curriculum students study can reflect these perspectives, alongside the traditional discipline/subject matter focus. We have been guided by the understanding of employability adopted by SHU from the work of Mantz and Yorke (2003):

“A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.”

In summary, we feel a curriculum for employability and employability from a student perspective means being able to demonstrate, utilise and apply the following:

1) Understanding

- (a) Subject knowledge and expertise relevant to a (number of) vocational sector(s) which allows graduates to perform effectively in line with employer expectations.
- (b) Commercial awareness - an awareness of the current issues affecting businesses and organisations, insight into how businesses and organisations operate, why they perform as they do, the potential opportunities for them to develop, what drives and motivates the people who work within them; an understanding of professional contexts, associated ethical practices; international and global contexts.
- (c) An understanding of the role and importance of social relationships in the context of individual and organisational effectiveness.

2) Skillful practices

- (a) Key skills: cognitive/intellectual; subject specific; professional; Sheffield Hallam Key Skills: Communication - Writing Skills, Oral Communication Skills, Visual Communication Skills, Information Skills; Information Technology; Working with Numbers; Working with Others; Improving own Learning; Solving Problems
- (b) Reflection: explicit reflection on the use of

knowledge and skills in order to identify what is appropriate for different contexts eg: operating in different groups; using subject knowledge in work tasks; writing reports on the course and then in employment (to encourage students' ability to see how their skills and knowledge might be transferred).

- (c) Career Management skills - opportunity awareness; decision making; transition skills (including job application skills). These enable students to pull together and make sense of their experiences in order to identify and attain their future goals.
- (d) Enterprise skills – visioning, exploration, originality, imagination, synthesising, business acumen, entrepreneurship, risk-taking, innovation, creativity, opportunity seeking.
- (e) Research skills – an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of research approaches and the ability to choose, justify and apply these appropriately in a given context.
- (f) Lifelong learning skills – learning how to learn to support adaptation to new and changing situations.

3) Attributes, attitudes and behaviours

- (a) Self-efficacy - beliefs about personal qualities, positive attitude to work, lifelong learning/continuing personal development, personal motivation, enthusiasm, responsibility, adaptability, ethical approach *in a professional context*.
- (b) Emotional intelligence - defined as "...the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships," (Goleman 1998, p 317). Emotional intelligence is linked with performance in organisational settings through the link with personal and interpersonal skills. It is also linked with an understanding of diversity in organisations and society and the ability to engage proactively, empathetically and supportively with a diverse range of individuals in a variety of settings.
- (c) Leadership and professional behaviours - ability to vision, motivate and enthuse others towards a desired goal in an organisational or project setting, use of initiative and a proactive approach.

4) Experience

Of the workplace and organisations, through work based learning and voluntary work, raising awareness of employment contexts and issues, and supporting the

development of work related skills and knowledge. This may take place as part of a programme of study, or be extra-curricular.

Background To The Case Studies

Having undertaken this work, we were conscious that the student voice in the discussions around employability had not been as strong as that of employers, governments and universities involved in research in this area. We felt that this was an omission and problematical in the context of students actively developing employability skills and attributes – it would be difficult for educators to fashion employability learning experiences and pedagogies without a prior and deep understanding of learner perspectives in this area. By way of responding to this issue, the e3i CETL offered resources during 2008-9 to fund small scale research/investigation projects focused on student perspectives on employability. Eighteen projects were eventually funded, and thirteen of them are written up as brief case studies in this booklet.

The case studies are written in a common format, including the following sections: what is the project?; key outcomes of the project; pedagogic changes; impact on students; impact on staff; and further research. This allows the reader to draw comparisons between the projects and aggregate understandings in relation to key themes and issues. The outcomes of the projects have been varied, but ultimately they have all contributed to educational development to support student employability by providing deeper insights into how employability teaching and learning is actually experienced by students. This has (or will in due course) allow tutors to sensitise their approaches to teaching and learning to encourage deeper engagement with and understanding of the employability aspects of their courses by students.

The projects as a whole have generated a number of outputs: resources/designs for resources that can be used to support student learning; ways of involving students in generating personal understandings of employability; methods of researching student perspectives on employability; specific curriculum changes; methods of involving/engaging staff in employability development; interventions which have had a direct impact on student employability. As such they can be used to inform further discussions and developments amongst other programme and module teams when exploring the nature, process of and possibilities for change in this context. The booklet is provided with this aim: to inspire and inform the discussions of colleagues involved in similar developments. We hope you will find it helpful.

The case studies have been produced by Joanne Luhrs, e3i Research Assistant, based on information provided by the project leads.

Exploring Student Perspectives on the Employability Aspects of Geography Courses at SHU

Andrew Jobling

What is it?

This project consulted geography students at SHU with a view to engaging them in the process of enhancing the employability aspects of their courses. It was particularly concerned with how to most effectively embed employability within a discipline that, while of relevance to a wide range of possible future careers, may not be seen as immediately vocational. The project was coordinated by Dr Andrew Jobling in consultation with other Geography staff members and students. Following a review of sources addressing the employability agenda within the discipline of geography (drawing in particular upon materials produced by the Higher Education Academy's Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences Subject Centre (GEES)), student perspectives on the employability aspects of their course were solicited initially via staff-student committee meetings, tutorials and then focus group and a survey.

Key outcomes of the project

The project has provided a greater understanding of attitudes of SHU geography students towards the employability aspects of their course and facilitated greater reflection on employability issues by both staff and students. It concluded that the SHU geography programme does have much to offer with regard to employability, e.g. through providing strong core subject knowledge and a wide range of learning and assessment formats that develop strong transferable skills. This was recognised by students who in particular valued the field work and 'hands-on' element of the course. However, it was also recognised that there were a number of areas in which the employability aspects of the programme could be enhanced.

The project stressed the need to make the employability aspects of the course even more visible to students, to develop ways of promoting deeper reflection by students on the knowledge and skills they acquire as the course progresses, and to provide students with the conceptual and communication skills to enable them to articulate their strengths to potential employers. It also recognised that there is scope to provide more structured careers management advice and planning; and that it is also important to ensure students are more aware of the employability-related opportunities and support available more generally at SHU.

Pedagogic change

It is proposed that the development of the employability aspects of geography at SHU includes both an effort to enhance the contribution made towards employability

across existing teaching as well as through providing additional work-related learning and access to careers management advice. The project recommends that the employability aspects of all modules are reviewed by tutors and made more explicit to students, including a greater effort to encourage active reflection by students on how their learning relates to employability. Work-related learning parallel to the curriculum will be more systematically integrated into tutorials and PDP activities across all levels.

Impact on students

As a spin-off from the project, a careers' 'event' was organised in conjunction with the Learning Hub and Careers Office for level 6 undergraduate students. It is intended that similar events are organised in the future. It is planned that all geography undergraduate students will receive a more structured and coordinated focus on employability in tutorials and PDP activities this coming year. It is intended that students across the programme will benefit from ongoing effort to enhance the employability provision in all geography modules.

Impact on staff

The project has facilitated greater and more informed reflection on the employability aspects of the SHU geography programme by staff and a more coordinated effort by different members of staff in relation to these. This is both as a result of greater understanding of student perspectives and engagement with Higher Education Academy GEES subject centre materials and events that have allowed a fuller understanding of contemporary perspectives on what constitutes best practice in the discipline. Hence, the project has also facilitated staff development. As indicated above, the project has also strengthened and developed links between geography, administration and careers staff in relation to employability issues and how to strengthen these.

Further research

It is intended that the project is part of an ongoing process of reflection on and enhancement of employability within Geography. One possible area for future development is around work-based learning and how to best expand and integrate this into the overall programme.

Exploring Student Perspectives on the Employability Aspects of Their Courses

Anne Nortcliffe

What is it?

This project investigated student perceptions of what they think employers want, and compares it with what employers 'really' want. By comparing the probable mismatch between these surveys, we can see where we need to target our efforts to align the two. A follow-up survey compared the perceptions of students who have been on placement and those who have not. This identified whether student perceptions have become more closely aligned with those of employers, leading to improved student employability. The outcome is that students become more aware of what employers see as being important and desirable employability attributes.

Key outcomes of the project

The project has enabled us to identify student perceptions of employment skills and any mismatch with that of employer perceptions. The majority of the students recognise the importance of all employability skills surveyed. However, there needs to be stronger emphasis placed on their ability to work independently; to work under pressure; to be adaptable; to apply attention to detail; to take responsibility and make decisions; and to plan, coordinate and organise.

Pedagogic change

Modular assessments/activities in group-work are to continue as students perceive that team-work, communication and time management skills are important employability qualities that we justify for group work assessment in developing these key skills. There is a need to emphasise, for example, in a group-work assessment that students who demonstrate to take the initiative and lead will develop skills in taking responsibility and decision making; planning, coordination and organising; and adaptability. Students also need reminding of what skills an individual assessment or activity can develop.

Impact on students

The project has helped us to appreciate that the message of the importance of employability skills has entered the student consciousness, particularly the value of communication and team working skills. However, all SHU students need reminding of the importance of other employability skills, their role in employment, and experiencing these skills.

Impact on staff

Staff are to continue as previously, providing group and individual assessment, activities and experiences, highlighting the key skills the students will develop and their relevance and importance for future employability. Curriculum design of new module/courses should continue to highlight where and which skills will be developed throughout a course, and their relevance for future employability.

Further research

Future research would be to ask first year students during intro-week their perceptions of the importance/desirability by employers of employability skills to ascertain if SHU is developing student understanding of employability skills or not.

Student Perceptions of Employability

Colleen Smith

What is it?

The aim of the project was to elicit student views as to their perception of 'employability' and to improve the curriculum so that 'employability' (and the students' perception of it) is further integrated into curriculum design and delivery. The methodology used for this project was a focus group, in which twelve students were asked to participate. The discussion was recorded and transcribed. The twelve participants were all level 6 undergraduate law students who were taking clinical modules and included students from the Law Clinic, Mooting, Law in the Community and Law in Practice modules. The students were given some information and a set of questions prior to the focus group. The anticipated outcome of the project was to produce 'tools' to enable students to reflect upon what they are learning in clinical modules and to recognise more specifically how their 'employability' skills are being enhanced.

Key outcomes of the project

It became clear that there was a direct link between the ability to reflect and employability, but more importantly, the ability to reflect and the students' perception of employability. The findings indicated that students recognised that reflective techniques helped them to become more self aware, critical and evaluative, possess a deeper understanding of their actions and reactions, and gave them the ability to improve future performance. In addition, the findings recognised that key skills such as communication, client care, team-working, adaptability, leadership and reliability were crucial to employability. Coupled with reflection theory and the research findings, improvement and expanding reflective skills to all clinical modules seemed the way forward and therefore the Reflective Learning Pack was produced.

Pedagogic change

The learning pack is to be used in the teaching of all clinical modules. This will directly affect around 160 students. It is then anticipated that it will be utilised from 2010 in a year one (level 4) core law module. This will affect a further 250 students. From 2010 a new degree is being proposed for the law department which is a four year exempting degree. It is anticipated that clinical teaching will pervade throughout the whole of this degree. The target number for its first year is fifty students. The learning pack will be used throughout this degree. If the learning pack proves to be successful there is no reason why it cannot be rolled out to non law degree programmes.

Impact on students

It is hoped that the learning pack will build upon and enhance students' reflective skills and impact upon their employability skills. As reflective students they will be able to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, adopt strategies for improvement, gain a wider perspective, and see the impact of law on society.

Impact on staff

Guidance will be given to the staff who will be using the learning pack, in the form of a training workshop, and a tutor pack will be designed to run alongside the student learning pack.

Further research

It is intended to take this work forward by expanding the use of the learning pack beyond clinical modules to other law modules and further to non-law modules, in addition to working on an interactive online resource.

Supported Independent Learning (with South Yorkshire Police)

Craig Paterson

What is it?

This project set out to evaluate student interest in embedding police practice into the criminology curriculum whilst also evaluating the potential for integrating work from other areas of the voluntary sector in the future. 275 completed student questionnaires were analysed and this data was supplemented with data collected from a focus group comprising students who were interested in taking the Supported Independent Learning module. The data collected from students will help ensure that future relationships with criminal justice agencies are constructed in a way that enhances the overall student experience through the creation of relevant student support mechanisms. The project team set out to do this by creating a new module that integrated police volunteer work with academic study and supported this through the use of e-learning and blackboard in order to enhance the future employability of SHU graduates.

Key outcomes of the project

1. The construction of a new module entitled Supported Independent Learning (SIL) which will enable students to integrate volunteer work with their academic study. From September 2009 this module will focus on encouraging reflective practice amongst level 6 students who volunteer as Special Constables.
2. The module begins the process of embedding work-based learning at level 6 for criminology students. This will help students to develop their ability to reflect on their learning, take control of their own learning and develop autonomy. The criminology subject group is looking to extend student opportunities in this area through the construction of relationships with other areas of the criminal justice system.
3. The construction of an interactive website for policing students which will be hosted by SHU. This is taking place with the "Higher Education Forum for Learning and Development in Policing" in order to generate a "Virtual learning Community" for prospective students as a part of ongoing collaborative developments between the Police Service and Higher Education Institutions (Skills for Justice, 2009).

Pedagogic change

The 'Supported Independent Learning' module introduces students to the day-to-day work of police officers in order to generate a holistic understanding of the Police Service

through accredited practical experience. The module requires students to take up voluntary positions with South Yorkshire Police as Special Constables. The module will employ a range of learning and teaching methods to help the students contextualise their experience of police work and achieve the learning outcomes, though the predominant mode of study is self-directed learning. In relation to this, students have a responsibility to complete the initial police training and a minimum of 16 hours per month (or 4 hours per week) as a volunteer for South Yorkshire Police. The students will undertake a work-based assessment that focuses on a reflective consideration of their experience of working with the Police Service.

Although students understand the importance of developing employability skills, they prioritise their work according to credit received. A model that teaches academic modules alongside accredited practice has the potential to both improve employability whilst also enhancing the performance of students who struggle with traditional academic skills or teaching methods. The core, short term objective of this project was to develop a "Supported Independent Learning" module that could work in conjunction with the pre-existing policing module and thus meet both the university's and students' demands for a greater focus on employability. The medium term aim of this initiative has progressed into creating a reflective practice module that can be combined with other criminal justice areas at level 6 when student awareness of employability is at its peak. Over the long-term this should see a multitude of employability strands (Prisons, Probation, Justice, Crime Prevention, Victims) being embedded into the criminology student's experience of undergraduate study.

Impact on students

The Police Service is in the process of developing new links with universities across the country in order to increase the proportion of graduates it recruits. This presents further opportunity to enhance the employability of SHU graduates. It is essential that SHU maintain the high quality of the student experience throughout this process through ongoing liaison with partners and developments in teaching and learning. A collaborative approach such as the one outlined here needs to be easy to use for both staff and students if it is going to work effectively. The project requires the continued engagement of staff members to set standards for student engagement because of the increase in learner autonomy. One mechanism of achieving this is through the use of blackboard and other modes of e-learning systems, in particular, interactive Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and wikis. This presents the opportunity to develop a flexible, student-centred approach to learning and development that enhances learner autonomy, although it should also be acknowledged that this is liable to present additional resourcing issues.

Impact on staff

The small number of students undertaking this module during the 2009-10 academic year means that the immediate impact upon staff should be minimal. Two members of staff are due to undertake the teaching during 2009-10 and any further decisions related to teaching and learning will be taken after an evaluation of the initiative. The recent departmental restructuring could also help developments in this area with the mixture of law and criminology provision being ideally suited to the educational requirements of the Police Service. This is an area of development that may be considered in the future. It should also be made clear that providing opportunities for SHU's undergraduates to work with the Police Service represents a different approach to many universities who teach police recruits on foundation and undergraduate degrees. These approaches have a significant impact upon staff resources and the structure of the academic year.

Further research

The SIL module will be evaluated throughout the 2009-10 academic year with a specific focus on student perspectives on employability and the impact of partnership work on the student experience. No funding has been obtained for this work as yet.

Exploring Student Perspectives on the Employability Aspects of Their Course: HND Real Estate

Jill Fortune, John Grant and Bee Gan

What is it?

The focus of the research was to gather student views in respect of employability prospects for graduates. However, we believe that the research provided valuable insights into the student experience beyond this. We communicated with students in both years of the Real estate HND, transferring students in year two of the Business Property Management degree and the third year of the Property Studies (top up) degree. The restructuring of modules and improvement of the delivery style will enhance and improve awareness of the opportunities offered by the course to students.

Key outcomes of the project

The project has informed the revalidation of the HND in Real Estate. Data from student interviews, meetings with industry experts, professional body representatives Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and key employers was used to inform the development of a new route on the HND in Real Estate. The new route is designed to equip students for career pathways in Real Estate in fields related to energy assessment management. All HND routes and new modules were well received by employers who confirmed that they would be keen to recruit graduates who had developed skills and knowledge as indicated by the proposed modules and particularly the new route on offer.

Pedagogic change

During student interviews comments from students suggested that not enough information was available regarding alternative career pathways within Real Estate. The focus has been on the Undergraduate degree accredited by RICS, using the HND as a stepping stone to this. Students also found that some modules did not seem to be explicitly related to property. As outlined above, new routes have been created and through engagement with employers and RICS, the course team has a much clearer insight into the alternative routes into employment or further study, particularly in the residential factor. The research indicated a positive experience in relation to building confidence and skills for employment and it is expected that this will be continued with the newly revalidated programme. At present the students do not spend time on work experience. This is something which they indicated they would value. The introduction of a 20 credit placement module may be considered in the future but due to the time constraints of the revalidation it was not possible to develop the idea further at this stage.

Impact on students

In the long term graduate recruitment is expected to improve, particularly for students joining the newly revalidated programme in September 2009. The findings of the research will be disseminated across the Department of the Built Environment, particularly in relation to other HND courses where the RICS Associate grade applies, albeit against differing competencies. Students on the Real Estate programmes at Undergraduate or Postgraduate level may be impacted by the project. Each year approximately 200 students are recruited to Real Estate courses.

Impact on staff

One of the modules on the HND course has been redesigned and renamed to reflect that the HND can prepare students for the world of work. Business Planning, Strategy and Communications is now Business Planning and Professional Development. This module has been rewritten in response to student comments from this research project. It will be necessary for each module tutor on the course to be made aware of the requirements of the module so that students are encouraged to reflect on all modules, their overall development and how this learning transfers and applies in the world of work.

Further research

The opportunities for further research will be focussed on evaluation of the new route and continuing dialogue with industry and employers and alumni once they are employed in the field. These collective experiences of employers and graduates would feed directly into course review and future modifications/revalidations.

A journal article is planned and where possible the project team would like to take advice on the applicability of their findings externally. However, the view from an industry expert is that the new route on the HND provides Sheffield Hallam University with a competitive edge for career pathways for graduates in the field of energy assessment. Careful consideration of what information is disseminated and where will be necessary to preserve this edge.

Exploring and Developing the Concept of Employability with International PG Students

Gudrun Myers

What is it?

This project investigated international PG student beliefs regarding employability and their understanding of how the assessment on their MA/MSc courses contributes to developing their employability. Two focus group discussions were held with a mixed group of international PG students, including one UK student, where the concept of employability and its link to assessment were explored. Currently a suitable format for a student self-audit is being explored with a group of graduate diploma students.

Key outcomes of the project

The projects had four main outcomes:

1. A greater understanding of the variety of student views that exist, some of which share aspects of our assumptions and others that veer away markedly from our own interpretation.
2. A greater understanding of the relative ignorance on the students' part of what skills different assessments require based on the lack of exemplars and specific descriptions available to them in the course brochures, leading to an incomplete understanding of how these assessments may support the development of and evidence for employability. These labels do not allow students to identify the skill sets that they would be developing, and how they link in with their previous learning, for example, are they complementary? Do they reinforce and refine existing skills? etc.
3. Development of closer working links and an aligned approach with colleagues researching other aspects of PG student learning.
4. Piloting of a suitable format for student self review using focused learner questions for potential use online or at recruitment events.

Pedagogic Change

In order to engage students earlier they will be provided with interactive pre-arrival material which will allow them to undertake a self-audit with the identification of strengths and weaknesses and to produce a simple action plan for their MA/MSc studies. The self-audit could also be incorporated into the recruitment activities abroad, where appropriate, making the introduction to Sheffield Business School (SBS)/SHU courses more accessible and linking them to the prospective students' goals and aspirations and engaging them actively. Ideally, staff teaching on the

MA/MSc courses will make reference to this self-audit at induction and reinforce the skills development that happens in the various modules and assessments.

Impact on students

In the short-term, students learnt about conducting focus groups on employability, supporting their understanding of research methods. After the first focus group the participating students then conducted their own with their colleagues on their course and brought the results back to the second meeting. In the longer term, it is hoped that earlier student engagement with their course will result in a better understanding of what is expected from them and what SBS/SHU offer in terms of opportunities for the development of employability. Also, whilst engaging on the course, employers' expectations and alumni experiences will provide further guidance to the skills set, attributes etc. needed to obtain graduate employment.

The concept underlying the pre-arrival materials outlined above would be suitable for all students intending to come to SHU, whether they are from the UK or abroad, undergraduate or postgraduate. In the first instance, students on the MBA, Masters programmes in Tourism and Marketing will benefit. This will involve between 200-250 students. After the initial introduction of the first set of pre-arrival materials, to be rolled out, tested and fine-tuned between September and December 2009, the approach is to be extended to all PG courses in SBS. Based on current enrolment figures this will involve around 550 students.

Impact on staff

The main aim is for relevant staff to work more closely together and to work along similar lines regarding the development of student employability. This means that PG leaders, PG tutors, MART, the international co-ordinator with responsibility for employability, and other staff involved in this area collaborate, the main two areas being the linking of pre-arrival student engagement with on-course study and finally career orientation and support. The latter will be in collaboration with the central Careers Service. The working out of connections at the transition points will be an on-going process involving all staff mentioned above.

Further research

The next stage of the project is the piloting of the pre-arrival materials and testing their appropriateness. In order to get a detailed overview of the development of employability from pre-arrival to getting employment it would be extremely useful to do a longitudinal study of a number of students from different cultural backgrounds.

Employability on BA (Hons) Social Work Studies Programme - Student Perceptions

Jane Foggin

What is it?

The BA (Hons) in Social Work Studies (SWS) course scores highly in national league tables in respect of students finding employment very quickly after completion of the course. In order to build on this evidence of success, the subject group was keen to investigate what sorts of activities students consider the most effective in helping them achieve employment. One of the outcomes is the feedback of findings into ongoing course review, design and LTA activities in order to embed employability strategies and develop strategies for raising student awareness of those "added value" attributes that the BA SWS equips them with, and how to transfer these to the jobs market.

Key outcomes

From the findings, it is possible to begin to conceptualise different orders of employability skills. At the bottom level (tier 1 - skills and knowledge) is the wide base of all the kinds of skills and knowledge students can gain from their university experience. However, only some have developed the next level up (tier 2 - reflection); these are the meta-skills such as self-analysis, use of feedback, ability to reflect and then become more aware of one's skills and knowledge. This is an essential layer as students need these abilities, not just for their future practice but specifically in order to be able to articulate their skills and knowledge to employers, both through written (CV and applications) and oral means (presentations and interviews). In addition, there are a number of skills needed for overall career management, which few students articulated directly though some made comments about the need for information not just about the jobs market but about post-graduate training and education as their careers progress. We have conceptualised this as tier three career management skills. The most interesting finding from the project has been that **all** students have at least **some** ideas of the ways in which the course contributes to building employability. However, no student has a comprehensive overview of this, and the opportunity for dialogue with peers and staff therefore generated some valuable insights for students. One of our key learning points is about how to offer opportunities for reflection and dialogue about employability skills for students at key points throughout the course.

Pedagogic change

We have recognised that PPDP (Personal and Professional Development Portfolio) was not given a high profile by respondents to the survey, yet when mentioned in the focus group, the participants recognised that it was

an ideal vehicle for supporting a learner's growth in employability skills. This suggests that the course team may not be giving PPDP a high enough profile with students, or that this is not happening consistently. Students need help to understand PPDP as a core process in collecting evidence of building skills throughout their three years on the course. There are two roles that are key to supporting PPDP: the year tutor and the professional tutor for each student. Firstly, year tutors have the responsibility for addressing PPDP and employability at induction and in the year group meetings that happen each semester and feed into the course committee meetings. This will be achieved through the production of guidance for year tutors. A guidance document is already in draft form and will be refined in order to ensure that all staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Secondly, professional tutors have the responsibility for supporting their tutees with PPDP processes and activities, across their time on the course. Each tutor should be able to conceptualise the links between course activities and the building of employability skills, and thus be able to support and encourage students to reflect on what they are learning about their own development, in ways that build the development of the second-level skills. In order to achieve this, guidance and employability will be incorporated into the draft tutor handbook that is currently in development. This guidance will be greatly informed by the findings of this project which will be used to support the implementation of the new feed-forward strategy.

Impact on students

One way to address the shortfall in students' overall awareness of employability skills is to have an improved system in place to flag these up to students and to make the embedded employability strategy more consistently visible. The intended outcomes of this will be to widen students' awareness of their own skills, their abilities in reflection and self-awareness, and to demonstrate the range of possible employability skills and knowledge provided through the course curriculum and through other sources of help in SHU. There will be the introduction of an additional standing agenda item about employability skills and related PPDP activities to be introduced and piloted at the year group meeting that happens each semester to encourage collective discussion as a peer group.

Some immediate benefits can be reported upon for some of the students who were participants. The initial consultation with recent graduates in August 2008 produced a suggestion that some interview preparation should be offered in Semester 2 of the third year and this has been implemented for this year's third year. The timing of specific sessions on CV writing and interview skills will be reviewed in order to establish the most effective scheduling within the structure of the final year. Further links will be established with the central career

guidance services too in order to ensure that students are fully aware of the range of services available to them. The project was conducted with students from all three years of the BA (Hons) Social Work Studies, which has an intake of 90 each year. The key outcomes will lead to pedagogic changes implemented in all three years of the course, and therefore the number of future students to benefit will be potentially all of them, when the changes recommended below are implemented during the 2009-10 academic year.

Impact on staff

Given that the majority of members of academic staff are likely to take on the professional tutor role to some students, there is a need to ensure that all staff have a full overview of the range of employability skills and how these are supported and developed across the course curriculum. The role guides will be implemented during 2009-10 and will be reviewed and evaluated at a team event in semester 2. The staff group collectively has a range of specialist knowledge that is relevant to career choices and future training and progression for candidates. We need to explore ways in which students can access that expertise more systematically. Changes will be evaluated through 2009-10 in order to track progress and to inform further developments. They will be included in the LTA Development plan for the department so that they are visible and are regularly reviewed through the year.

Further research

We plan to conduct some follow-up focus groups with the 2nd year students who were in the group this time in order to track changes and follow them through into their transition to employment in summer 2010.

Student Assessment of Perceptions of Employability Skills Development in the BSc Mathematics Degree Course

Marion Gerson

What is it?

This project ran within two courses, BSc (Hons) Maths and Maths with Stats. A team of 8-10 students from level 5 lead the project, supported by the lead tutor. The students were volunteers and for them the project replaced the employability element of a 2nd year module. The outcomes from the project included the production of a video on employability for maths graduates, reports on 1st, 2nd and final year student perceptions of how employability is (or is not) embedded in the maths courses, and finally a presentation which includes the video and a summary of the findings.

Key outcomes of the project

The project had two main outcomes.

1. A survey of Maths students' perception of the Employability skills they had learned from their course, with recommendations for changes to the maths degree as a result.
2. A video of interviews with individual students from all three (taught) years of the maths degree exploring their motivations, expectations and the extent to which they felt Employability had been enhanced during the degree. Sections of this video will be used in discussions and in career and Employability sessions with students at different levels.

Pedagogic change

1. Continuation of the good practice that has recently been established at level 4.
2. Bringing the use of Student and Academic Services back into teaching at level 5.
3. Using teaching and assessment methods (e.g. group work, report writing and presentations) at level 5 to enhance Employability skills.
4. Demonstrating and asking for a professional style of email when appropriate as a pedagogic outcome.
5. Introduction of career guidance at levels 4 and 5 in time for career-motivated choices of options and decisions about placements to be made at levels 5 and 6.

Impact on students

The students who carried out the project benefitted directly in that they substantially developed their own employability skills and almost all gained placements, partly as a result. This was the stated motivation of some for taking part in the project. In the long term it is anticipated that maths students on this degree course will be helped to gain more employability skills, make more realistic choices of options and have a better understanding of career planning and opportunities. The results of this project mostly relate to students on the maths degree at SHU. However, they may to some extent be transferable to students on maths courses at other Universities. 75 students entering level 5 this year will benefit immediately from the project. Assuming continuing levels of recruitment, this will be extended to 70-80 students in each successive cohort.

Impact on staff

Many staff associated with the Maths degree will need to take the actions related to the recommendations. The course team will need to consider how to enhance the development of Employability skills at level 5, with individual lecturers taking on particular aspects within their own modules. The course team needs to consider how to introduce careers awareness and guidance from level 4 onwards and create opportunities for students to consider their level 5 and level 6 options with career implications in mind.

Further research

It is intended that there will be an external publication of the report findings, perhaps informed by further data collection and analysis is planned for 2009/10. The video will be disseminated for use in maths teaching and may possibly be used in recruitment events.

The Skills Passport: A Student Evaluation

Melissa Jacobi

What is it?

The project aimed to evaluate the perceptions held by level 4 UG Sport Portfolio students of the newly introduced Skills Passport and associated Academic Mentor system. Students were central to the project, primarily through their participation in the evaluation of experiences of the Skills Passport and PPDP (Personal and Professional Development Portfolio) activities. Furthermore, a student was employed to facilitate the evaluation process, responsible for data collection and collation of results under the guidance of academic staff. A quantitative methodology was used, with students from all programmes being asked to complete a questionnaire which was devised to cover the following areas: introduction to, and prior experience of using, PPDP; level of engagement with the Skills Passport; perceived usefulness of the Skills Passport; and support systems (including the Academic Mentor role).

Key outcomes of the project

The outcome of the project is a tangible set of results reflecting the perceptions of level 4 students on the UG Sport Portfolio in relation to the PPDP and Skills Passport process. The different subject areas utilised slightly different implementation mechanisms, particularly in terms of the Academic Mentor role so the results of this evaluation will allow us to identify 'best practice' in terms of providing such support, as well as students' preferred tools and approaches to utilising the Skills Passport. The evaluation report is lengthy and wide ranging in content meaning we can make informed developments to the process for next year. Changes will be taken forward for implementation into the 2009-10 academic year.

Pedagogic change

Some examples of areas to investigate possible changes are:

- Consideration needs to be given to utilising an online reflection system, rather than all paper based reflection tools.
- Students need more support with meaningful reflection.
- The delivery of Academic Mentor sessions needs to be considered. One-to-one sessions were seen as being valuable by students but for some areas the resource implications are seen as prohibitive.
- Students thought that the layout and content of Skills Passport could be streamlined.
- Students need to see the *value* of the process and the tools at the outset.
- Across the Portfolio there needs to be

increased contact time with the process.

- The link between the Skills passport and the assessed Action Plan needs to be seen more clearly by students.

Impact on students

The immediate benefit of the evaluation will be to the 2009-10 level 5 students (who undertook the questionnaire evaluation), and new level 4 students within the ten programmes in the UG Sport Portfolio. They will see informed changes made to their PPDP provisions as a result of this evaluation. This will be in the region of 855 students by October 2009. In the longer term these students (and those who follow them) will benefit from increased personal development awareness, reflection skills and enhanced development of key skills as well as subject specific knowledge. With regard to transferability to a wider student audience, the findings demonstrate that at present the Skills Passport and Academic Mentor processes are still very much 'work in progress.' Wider dissemination may be possible in future years, but continued development is very much needed at this stage.

Impact on staff

Staff will be affected by this research due to changes in the way we organise the PPDP process. Particularly changes will arise in terms of the Academic Mentor role, which will affect the majority of teaching staff within the UG Sport Portfolio. An example of such a change *might* be increased training for the role next year.

Further research

Future research has already been discussed in terms of repeating the evaluation in coming years to help the future development of the PPDP process within the UG Sport programme. Hopefully this will have the opportunity to attract funding again. If not then the evaluation will have to be on a smaller scale.

Gaining Employment Through Effective Interview Skills

Melanie Bryer, Pam Holland and Anna Lowe

What is it?

The project helped us to begin to develop a range of electronic resources to assist our future graduates gain more expertise in making applications for relevant posts that ends in successful short listing and also to increase final year students' confidence and skills when being interviewed. Three disciplines within the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing (HWB) organised a series of employability events during 2008/09 involving Occupational therapy (OT), Nursing and Physiotherapy final year undergraduate students. In addition, a student poster competition was organised for any students from these subject groups with a theme of "Student Perceptions of Employability." We envisage that the resources developed in 2008/09 will add to the initial resources and provide a greater variety of scenarios and advice for the future. We also want students to explore how they can use their University inter-professional experiences effectively when answering interview questions that involve a multi-disciplinary focus as this is becoming more common in interviews, especially within an NHS environment.

Key outcomes of the project

The Occupational Therapy project involved developing a range of audiovisual and electronic resources for future use. These included final year student narratives for their experience of the interview process, from short listing to interview; final year case studies of undergraduates who had been successful in gaining their first post; employer narratives to explore what they were looking for from undergraduates at interview and during their first employment post and finally, a series of level 6 workshops to enable students to engage in role plays involving a variety of interview scenarios to develop their communication and problem solving skills and strategies.

The Nursing project team developed resources for student nurses to enhance their employability skills. The students developed these alongside the project leader who was a member of the Nursing subject group. These included videos, blackboard resources and a portfolio handbook. The feedback at present from the students and an NHS Trust indicate that these resources have helped improve the standard of candidates that have been interviewed recently.

In Physiotherapy, students perceived themselves to be more employable as a result of their project. Two evening employability sessions were held involving active student participation. This encouraged engagement with a range of activities to develop interview skills including role plays. The presence of local NHS employers during these

sessions added authenticity to the tasks the students were performing and also enabled these employers to spend time with SHU students and gain more insight into their skills and attributes.

The aim of the HWB student poster competition was to enable students to inform staff how they perceived the term employability and express what this meant to them. Poster abstracts were invited from the three subject groups. After short listing, the final 4 posters were displayed in the foyer of the Robert Winston Building to enable HWB students and staff to vote for their favourite poster. A prize-giving lunch was subsequently held for the winning groups of students.

Pedagogic change

In Occupational Therapy, the resources will be used by staff and students to support autonomous learning related to employability. This aspect of personal and professional development has been integrated into a new Occupational Therapy final year module that aims to encourage the transition from being a student towards becoming a newly qualified practitioner. This module commences in September 2009. In Nursing, the resources will be embedded into the new nursing curriculum and used by all student nurses and staff to facilitate classroom learning and self directed learning. In Physiotherapy, the findings suggest that students like the face-to-face contact that the evening workshops provide. Students also value the input of local employers into the sessions. In terms of recommendations, the timing of the session is crucial as they need to take place shortly before interviews for maximum impact. This year local NHS Trusts interviewed earlier than last year. For future years, timing of the evening events should correspond better. Learner autonomy was promoted through the use of the student poster competition.

Impact on students

In Occupational Therapy, feedback from student evaluations supports the use of these resources in helping them to understand the work involved in preparing for interviews using the perspectives and working experiences of their peers and to assist their own continuous professional and personal development subsequent to personal appraisal. As the employment situation is so variable that we cannot ascertain what impact these resources will have on employment statistics. However, students feel that they have more confidence and the uptake of SHU/OT graduates gaining employment is currently very good.

In Nursing, the students were audited and the results overall have been extremely positive. They have found the resources very useful and have felt better prepared for

interviews. Staff have also given positive feedback and the resources are currently being refined. Future audits will continue to review the current resources and help develop further material.

In Physiotherapy, the students' feedback indicated that they felt that they understood the employment process better as a result of the project. They felt that they could prepare for interviews more effectively and that they had increased confidence going into interview situations. The longer term impact is harder to measure as recruitment statistics are affected by so many variables and are steadily on the increase due to wider Physiotherapy employment issues. The project was aimed at all final year Physiotherapy students. Attendance was not compulsory but approximately 75% of students took part.

The students who submitted a poster developed a range of skills involving use of IT, increasing their creativity while thinking of the poster content and layout and self confidence while presenting their poster to an audience and gaining more self-esteem from the feedback they received.

Impact on staff

Occupational Therapy Staff have enjoyed working with students on these projects and having an opportunity and the time to develop employability resources to support a new curriculum. There has been an opportunity to work with staff from across the Faculty and the University, including the Careers Service.

Nursing staff have been very positive and the resources are available for all staff and students to access. Staff from within local NHS Trusts have also benefited from their contributions.

Physiotherapy staff have become much more aware of mapping employability issues throughout the curriculum. The employability issues dealt with in the project also sit within a level 6 module. However, students do not tend to engage well with this module due to competing demands from other modules at that point in the course. An effort was made by staff to clearly link the content of this project with that from the module and to signpost students to sources of further information.

Further research

In Occupational Therapy, the resources will be placed on Faculty and University websites, as well as hard copies being provided for loan. In Nursing there are plans for the project to be expanded and for further research to be carried out in the future. All resources will be accessible on blackboard sites and they will continue to be developed over the next year by the project leader for Nursing. In Physiotherapy, it would be interesting to follow a small sample of students through the employment process and record their experiences. It would also be interesting to ask the whole group via questionnaire in 6 months time, with hindsight, how useful the sessions were and to see if they suggested any changes. The work will be taken

forward and will impact on the employability strand that runs through the new revalidated course.

Students and the Workplace - What Skills do They Really Need?

Fiona Phoenix and Rob Wilson

What is it?

This project produced research-based evidence that can be used for the future development of the Sport Management related educational curriculum. Furthermore, it identified the skills and attributes required for graduates to be employable in the Sport and Leisure sector and produced a 'skills barometer' to help inform students about the skills required for specific industry related jobs. A final year undergraduate student undertook the project (it formed their UG Final Year Dissertation). They completed the research and disseminated the findings at a subject group level. The research sample was based on the following groups: employers of graduates, final year Sport Management/ Sport and Leisure Management alumni and Student Union representatives.

Key outcomes

Outcomes of the project have shown that there is a need to integrate additional sessions based on employability into modules, particularly at level 6. The research outcomes highlighted that both current students and alumni feel that they are gaining the relevant employability skills that are transferable in the workplace. However, it was also communicated that they are unsure as to how to present this to potential employers. Only 8% of current students had used the Careers Service and those that had did not feel as though it had been beneficial in discussing jobs within the sport and leisure industry. It is therefore important that the staff team consider how to embed such content into the degree programmes to ensure that our graduates have confidence to communicate their skills through professional CVs, interviews and presentations.

Pedagogic change

The level 6 module "Contemporary Issues in Sport Management" which runs across both semesters will have a change of content and focus within the second semester. These sessions will focus specifically on developing skills such as how to prepare for an interview, how to write an effective job application and how to prepare a CV. Additionally, the module will bring in external speakers from different parts of the sport and leisure industry to discuss career pathways and options alongside facilitating a more open pathway to the careers service.

Impact on students

The research relates specifically to level 6 students who will soon be going into the workplace. This will be

approximately 100 students each year. In the short term, whether they enter a sport or non sport related industry, the knowledge they will gain in how to communicate their skills more effectively will be beneficial across the board. In the long term, it will aid the progression and development of teaching within the Sport Management team as closer links will develop with different sectors of the sport and leisure industry. It is also possible to expand this research across the other sport-related degrees, or even more widely across the Faculty.

Impact on staff

Staff teaching on the Contemporary Issues in Sport and Leisure Management module will be the most directly affected by the research. However, this is not in a negative way. Essentially, it will entail changing materials and linking with industry partners.

Online Placement Diaries: Exploring Student Perspectives On Employability

Simon Clark

implemented in the Enterprise and Technology Portfolio for 2009-10.

What is it?

The aim of this project has been to build on the strong employability focus already deeply embedded within the Enterprise and Technology portfolio. Whilst on industrial placement, students are typically encouraged to complete a paper based record of their experiences throughout the training period, though the efficacy of this approach in terms of student engagement is an open question; fundamentally, does it constitute a real-time record? It is clear, however, that blogging forms an increasingly significant element of student culture and that there are some real practical benefits to offering students a facility to record their experiences on-line. The central thrust of this project has therefore been to extend the existing Online Progress File system used in years 1 and 2 to include the placement year. We have sought to encourage the students to explicitly articulate how they develop their skill set while engaged in a work based learning opportunity (typically a formal 48 week industrial training placement). The process of reflection on the student's learning builds upon the foundation developed in years 1 and 2, continuing on into the placement year. The way in which students progressively engage with reflection, time and career management, and develop skills in self efficacy by using the online PDP system have been explored.

Key outcomes of the project

One outcome of this project is that the maintenance of a learning diary as part of a professional development portfolio contributes to reflection, development planning and ultimately employability; this in itself is nothing new. The main outcome lies in the clear benefits of the online approach in that it:

- offers visiting tutors the facility to monitor student progress remotely
- is a real-time record of the student experience
- has practical advantages in terms of accessibility, cannot be lost etc.
- most importantly, it dovetails into the developing blogging culture and is therefore preferred by students over paper-based diaries.

The likelihood therefore is that more students will actively engage in and benefit from the learning diary and the PDP process overall, thereby enhancing employability.

Pedagogic change

The introduction of the on-line diary process has been

Impact on students

The central objective of the project has been to provide a mechanism for students to record their experiences on placement in real-time and to facilitate reflection. In the first instance, the on-line diary process has been rolled out to 300 undergraduate students in the Enterprise and Technology Portfolio for 09/10. More widespread application across other sandwich degrees in future years is already under consideration.

Impact on staff

The most immediate impact will be for staff, acting as visiting tutors, who are in the process of undergoing training in the use of the on-line progress files.

Student Perspectives On Employability In English

Tom Rutter

What is it?

The project was carried out by students on the BA English Studies degree within the context of the Developing and Applying Public Relations Skills module. As part of the rationale for the module, students in small groups are responsible for market research, publicising and organising events for specific clients, and for producing a range of texts to support these activities. Students conducted an analysis of the impact of work-based learning on past students' employability and job experiences. Also, current BA English students were surveyed in the light of the findings from this and their experiences and expectations regarding employability and work-based learning noted.

Key outcomes of the project

1. A 14-page booklet, "Bright Ideas for Employable Students", of which 1500 copies have been printed. Targeted at students on the English programme, this resource helps students to research career options and audit their skills; explains opportunities for work-based learning on English modules; publicises Hallam Volunteering as an opportunity to get valuable experience; and gives information about placements, application forms, CVs, covering letters and interviews.
2. A presentation at the faculty employability conference in January 2009 based on the findings of a questionnaire about students' awareness and use of careers services and work-based modules. A key finding was that there are "areas where students seem to be unaware of or avoiding the help Sheffield Hallam provides to assist their journey into employment". At inductions, returners' inductions, and at other points during the year, students are repeatedly reminded of the careers resources available to them yet they appear to be reluctant to take full advantage of their resources. The project was carried out by a third-year student on the Developing and Applying PR Skills module. She obtained an exceptionally high mark of 77% and was the first winner of the Dave Hurry Prize for exceptional student work in the field of work-based learning.

Pedagogic change

The English programme offers many possibilities for work-based learning, and SHU as a whole offers many careers resources to students. How can these be better publicised?

Impact on students

1. Students have an additional resource both to help them in their search for work after their degree, and to remind them of opportunities for work experience and work based learning offered at SHU and, specifically, within the English programme.
2. As the outcome of a work-based module, the booklet is a tangible advertisement of the experience that work-based modules can offer. The printed copies of "Bright Ideas for Employable Students" will be distributed to students at key points such as induction and module choice, and used as a marketing tool at open days etc.

Impact on staff

The project has raised staff awareness of the potential rewards to students of work-based modules and of the problem of student apathy towards the careers advice that is available to them.

Embedding, Enhancing and Integrating Employability Website

<http://employability.shu.ac.uk>



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Welcome to the e3i CETL



What we do
In 2005 HEFCE named Sheffield Hallam University a national Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in Embedding, Enhancing and Integrating Employability (e3i). The CETL aims to support and fund a range of projects in the university which are dedicated to contributing to the employability of its students. Please explore our website with the range of Projects and Resources.

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[Our Aims](#)

[What do mean by employability?](#)

[Conference 2010](#)

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[Useful Links](#)

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The e3i website has recently undergone an overhaul and moved to a new dedicated address at employability.shu.ac.uk

including the STARS online resource, and the Sheffield Hallam University Careers Central website.

The site hosts, among other things:

- Details of projects which e3i has supported since the start of the CETL in 2005, including case study reports from the projects.
- A range of resources, including e3i Evaluation and Research reports, the What's Next resource, and presentations and videos on the pedagogy and development of employability.
- Resources for use in course planning. These can be used in revalidation to assist in the embedding of employability skills in courses. These resources include the Sheffield Hallam University employability framework and an employability audit instrument to evaluate the employability aspects of courses.
- Presentations and details of previous conferences e3i has hosted in 2008 and 2009. The outcomes from the 2010 conference will be posted here following the conference.
- Links to resources which e3i has helped to develop,

