

## NOTES ON LEARNING & TEACHING CONSULTATION GROUP WORKSHOP (22.05.03) ON DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH THE CURRICULUM

### Presentations

1. Jean Fawcett (Director of Undergraduate Development) discussed the place of employability within the overall undergraduate curriculum scheme and possible approaches to developing employability - see addendum 1
2. Barbara Page (Employability Unit) provided an overview of curriculum-based employability development, and case studies were presented by Nigel Marlow (Department of Psychology) and David Faulkner (Department of Computing, Communications Technology and Mathematics) - see addendum 2
3. Colleagues from the Careers Service - Sally Elks, Neelam Thapar, Eddie Tunnah and Eric Whittington - explored approaches to careers development through the curriculum and highlighted the services and resources offered by their unit - see addendum 3
4. Len Holmes (Department of Management and Professional Development) looked critically at the skills agenda associated with employability, proposing instead his "emergent identity / practice" model - see addendum 4

### Discussion: key issues

- Many of our students are mature and already have experience, so they may not want things too prescribed. The challenge is to apply the undergraduate curriculum "framework" so as to be appropriate to the range of students.
- Having to develop students' personal attributes and skills sought by employers, as well as academic outcomes, implies two different marking schemes [i.e. criteria for assessing students' PDP/progress files, and criteria for academic work]. It was suggested, however, that we are offering "enabling" opportunities to students, so should not compromise on assessment. We are asking students to reflect on the *academic process* (not personal traits), and this reflection should be approached in ways appropriate to the subject area.
- Concern was expressed, nevertheless, that assessment of employability/transferrable skills is a "minefield", and many lecturers do not feel confident here, i.e. there needs to be concerted "staff development".
- "Communication skills" involves more than writing standard English; we should help students to understand that it is about different practices in different contexts. We also need to move from a "classroom" model of skills development (i.e. divorcing "skills" from students' lives); the focus should be on lifelong learning [occurring in all settings, not just within the university].
- Adequate time and resources must be made available to enable the creative planning and innovation, as well as the enhanced student support, that is necessary for delivering the new undergraduate curriculum. In reply, it was noted that lecturers should be prepared to accept the challenges of working in the context of Londonmet and our students; but that we do have to review resources to try to "to ensure a good university experience for all students".

Having heard the various presentations, staff attending the workshop were generally impressed by the good practice. It was therefore suggested (in the concluding plenary) that the undergraduate curriculum scheme would benefit from further integrating work already done in the Student Services, Learning and Teaching, and Employability Development sectors of our university.

## ADDENDUM 1

Key points on Employability Development by Jean Fawcett, Director of Undergraduate Development

- The new University Undergraduate Modular Scheme (UUMS) aims to provide consistency of challenge and opportunity for student experience.
- Employability is one of the main aims running through the undergraduate curriculum, in the sense of the **holistic development of graduates** through a discipline-intrinsic approach and the incorporation of **Personal Development Planning [PDP]**.
- There are **three explicit opportunities** for such development built into the curriculum: the HE orientation module, the Intermediate-level module focused expressly on employability, and the Honours-level project. But **the employability strand should be integrated throughout each course**, in ways appropriate to the subject.
- A related matter is how to integrate "**career management**" in the sense of helping students to grapple with who they are, where they are going, and how to get there.
- There is also the need for **liaison with employers and professional practitioners** about developments in the world of work and how these could inform curriculum development.
- We should aim to build **work experience** into all undergraduate courses, as properly organised, credited and compulsory modules. This could entail
  - live projects
  - professional practice modules
  - work shadowing,
  - business enterprise modules, or
  - simulations/case studieswith academic underpinnings and with employer/professional advisers helping with the assessment.

## ADDENDUM 2

### Employability in Higher Education

Presentation by Barabara Page (Employability Unit)

*"employability" is about good learning'*

HEFCE Enhancing Student Employability Coordination team (ESECT)

- see website: [www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?id=17224](http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?id=17224)

#### **Employability contexts: need to consider**

- Employability and students' educational experiences before entering higher education
- Transition into higher education
- The undergraduate curriculum and employability
- Employability and transitions from higher education to work
- International perspectives on employability

#### **What employability - good learning - means:**

- progressive development: from structured and supported experiences to autonomous/self-determined and ill-defined issues [see section B below: development of group working]
- range of experiences within and without Londonmet
- assessment as learning - variety of assessment methods
- varied delivery: involvement of/with the external 'world' - practitioners/employers; placements [see below C: examples of practitioner involvement] - variety = the spice of life
- '.....mainstream learning, teaching and assessment practices that can systematically foster the complex outcomes of learning that employers value.'
- '...an emphasis on programme design to foster complex, valued achievements.'

#### **Employability: what it can include**

- Subject knowledge and understanding & subject-specific skills
- Abilities e.g. communication, team working, problem solving, focus
- Attributes: initiative, creativity, flexibility, self confidence
- Knowledge of organisations/'real' world

Sparkle!

And (ESECT)

- Understanding
- Skills
- Efficacy - how students see themselves - malleable (able to learn from new opportunities) or fixed identity
- Metacognition - reflection, awareness of the processes of learning

## **Employability and our students:** the Graduate Employability project

Stakeholder perceptions of non-traditional graduates identified issues surrounding:

- Self-awareness
- Focus
- Self presentation
- Communication
- Self confidence
- A background of information
- Social & cultural aspects

**BUT placements help:** 85% of students strongly identified improved self-confidence as major effect of accredited, structured placement.

## **Developing employability in the curriculum** - see section C below for examples

Year 1: initial contacts

Year 2: semi-structured involvements

Year 3: placements and open-ended research projects

requires the PROGRESSIVE development of:

- abilities and attributes
- reflection and self-knowledge - self confidence
- external awareness

### ***using the subject as context***

with coherent and structured, subject-related careers information, advice and guidance offered co-curricularly throughout a student's course of study

## **Employability in the curriculum: case studies**

(1) The live project - working for clients - Nigel Marlow (Consumer Psychology) [see below D]

(2) Developing abilities for PBL - Dr David Faulkner (Communications Technology) - see website URL: [www.unl.ac.uk/newcurriculum/ex.shtml](http://www.unl.ac.uk/newcurriculum/ex.shtml) for year 1 introduction to PBL in Electronics.

## B: Example of progressive development of project group working

***Beginning in year 1***

***→ and arriving in the final year***

Self-determined groupings of peers → random groupings incl. interdisciplinary  
and taking lead in inter-year groups

Project specified and activities indicated → project ill-defined; no actions given

Regular monitoring and recording of  
student progress

→ group identifies actions required and  
self-monitors against group-  
determined criteria

→ minimal supervision –  
academic/employer `consultants` available

Supported self-reflection and planning

→ individual reflection and action planning;  
self-assessment

*Project context:*

Discipline-based with employer input to abilities development  
and/or subject content, and assessment

## C: Example of the progressive development of professionalism and employer involvement

Employability will be developed progressively throughout a student`s course of study, for example,  
at:

*Level C* Introduction to employability/professional requirements; reflective learning.  
Provided by: group projects, simulations, case studies, involving  
employers/external practitioners in the classroom, structured company visits.  
Identification of abilities & attributes required for successful subject learning.

*Level I:* Identification and development of professional attributes in external  
organisations;  
Achieved through, for example, live projects, work shadowing, coaching.

*Level H:* Working as a professional.  
All students should take a `near graduate` professional placement, or work  
on a research project/dissertation, preferably with an external organisation.

## **D: The 'Live' project - Nigel Marlow**

~ a final year module in the BSc Applied Consumer Psychology course ~

### **Origins**

The Applied Consumer Psychology degree (Course Tutor: Nigel Marlow) offers a scientific approach to explaining consumer behaviour and was the first undergraduate course of its kind in the UK. The course is broadly based, covering consumer psychology, marketing, and consumer science. It integrates an understanding of consumer behaviour with aspects of marketing and research methodologies and seeks to develop the knowledge and skills sought by major employers.

The final year module - *Psychology of Consumer Analysis* - was inspired by the subject-based, advanced level module 'Work placement for professional experience' available to all undergraduates at the university. *Psychology of Consumer Analysis* provides a subject-contextualised, employment-related experience for students, whilst also offering benefits to the supporting employers. It is a practical opportunity for students to develop and apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during their degree, prepares them for graduate employment, and provides them with vital, constructive employer input.

Students undertake independent, small-scale consumer research projects with companies and produce two written reports - an academic report and a commercial report for their organisation; they also give an in-company presentation.

At the start of the 12 week assignment employers visit the university to outline their activities and requirements and to agree a project with each student. These require students to act as a 'consultant' and tackle real-life business challenges, producing solutions for genuine problems and products.

The project involves, typically: negotiation with employers and creation of a client/customer relationship, development and analysis of questionnaires, qualitative analysis, time management, self organisation and reflection, and the development of communications skills - communicating effectively in context. They are expected to take responsibility for their research project; accessible support is provided, when needed, through a combination of employer contact and in scheduled meetings and regular e-mail communication with tutors.

Academic assessment is through a written academic report which incorporates evaluation and self-reflection on each stage of the project; employers assess the commercial report and presentation.

Recent projects have included: the effects of colour in the evaluation of perfumes; evaluation of company IT training programmes; consumer expectations in the evaluation of beverages, and a comparison between experiential and conventional advertising.

### **Involving employers**

The support and co-operation of employers is integral to the module operation and students need this contact to develop their understanding of business practice. The module was originally set up with the backing of a few local businesses - existing contacts of the Course Tutor. Now, good working relationships have been established with a mix of employers from both local and national organisations e.g. Bass Industries, Fast Marketing, Coutts Retail Communication, and Islington Council - providing a variety of organisations and products for student projects. New employer contacts are always being sought.

### **Outcomes**

Students are extremely positive about the experience:

*``Helped me to put together lots of things from my course - practical work instead of mountains of theoretical info`*

and

*`Thinking that a company was really interested in what you said was so scary - but he [the employer] was really good. I learnt a lot - it made me more confident in what I could do.`*

Employers too have welcomed the involvement, enjoying the contact with students and also appreciating the opportunity to contribute to the development of an expert workforce.

*`We feel that we gain fresh ideas and input and like the enthusiasm of the students. It's exciting seeing what can be achieved in a relatively short time - but this is what's required if you want to work in the industry - a rapid response to clients` requirements, and effective action!`*

As a direct result of their experiences on the module, two students have established their own agencies and another is also considering setting up in business.

Employability (in this example) is developed through:

- active engagement with employers
- employer assessment and feedback
- self-reflection
- developing time management, communication skills
- putting theory into practice - real assignments

## ADDENDUM 3

### Careers development through the curriculum: issues, approaches and resources

Sally Elks, North Campus  
Neelam Thapar, City Campus  
Eddie Tunnah, North Campus  
Eric Whittington, City Campus

- u Introduction - Graduate Employability / Changing Labour Markets
- u University of Reading Careers Management Skills
- u LAGREN - a Case Study
- u What the Careers Service can offer

#### Introduction

*“The employment market is changing in ways which make it more important than ever for students and graduates to take personal responsibility for managing their own career development throughout life”.*

Introduction to the QAA Code of Practice for Career education, information and guidance (2001)

*“Many students do not pay sufficient attention to developing career management skills early enough in their period of study ..... From research undertaken for the review, it was clear that those who appear most in need are often those least likely to use their Careers Service”.*

Developing Modern HE Careers Services (“Harris” review, 2001)

#### University of Reading Careers Management Skills Package

- u Careers Service Unit (CSU) Award Winning Website
- u Bought by over 40 HEIs (20 “new” universities)
- u 5 credit module taken during Year 2 by all undergraduates
- u Comprises 3 - 2 hour workshops
- u Supported by on-line resources

Learning Outcomes - students will be able to:

- u identify, assess and articulate their skills, interests, values and personality traits in the context of career decision making;
- u develop careers information retrieval, research and decision making skills, using a variety of sources including the internet and interviews;
- u recognise and write an effective application; identify the purpose and processes of recruitment and how to perform effectively.

The 3 workshops:

- u comprise a mixture of taught material and individual and group exercises;
- u are delivered by careers and academic staff;
- u are spread across a semester

Web Site Resource - the 3 workshops are supported by a comprehensive website, comprising 3 major sections:

- u finding your profile (identifying strengths, abilities & interests)
- u finding the fit (matching strengths, abilities & interests to the world of work. The labour market)
- u effective applications (CV, application forms and interviews)

Additional Feature:

- u allows a progress file to be developed as the website is worked through;
- u links are made to interactive psychometric and personality testing websites;
- u extensive links to websites of professional bodies, general and specialist recruitment agencies

Assessment - 3 pieces:

- personal career profile;
- job study;
- standard application form or CV

Detailed marking criteria are supplied

Pilot at North Campus - The Reading classroom material has been piloted:

- with graduates attending summer workshops;
- with a large group of Law students

The web-based material will be more widely piloted over the forthcoming year

## **LAGREN (Law Graduates Employability Network)**

The need:

- Increased competition in the legal employment market
- The emerging gap between academic achievement accessed through widening participation initiatives championed by universities such as London Guildhall University, and entry into the legal profession
- low student morale and lack of awareness about alternative careers

Background - LAGREN was established by London Guildhall University in August 2000 with the aid of project funding for two years from the HEFCE Innovations fund

Aims:

- To enhance the *employability* of Law undergraduates from disadvantaged groups both in and outside the mainstream legal professions;
- To address the *initial barriers* to entry to the profession;
- To develop pathways to *alternative job opportunities* in which legal skills can be deployed

Achievements

*Integrated portfolio provision - something to suit all needs*

- LAGREN has made an enormous impact on students' career development.
- 1999/2000 - Careers Service saw 247 law students for 1-2-1 sessions. Between Oct 2000 - July 2002 Careers Service, City campus had seen 850 law students for guidance, including email
- In a student audit, at the end of Year One of the project (180 students), there was a strong correlation (73%) between having seen a careers adviser and engaging in at least one other career development activity (eg networking, outdoor clerking, charity work)

Outreach Work

- Over 260 legal work experience opportunities were generated within a six month period. Most opportunities come from solicitors (47%), NGO/charities (16.6%), Courts and local authorities (10% each) and Law Centres (8.5%)
- Established partnerships with:  
Environmental Law Foundation, Disability Law Service, Klegal, Law Centres Federation, Court Service, Crown Court Group, BBC, Simmons & Simmons (mentoring)
- According to audit students took up at least 137 work experience opportunities, 35 % of which were paid in some way. 55% of these opportunities came from solicitors firms, 18.3% from NGO/Charities

Customised training

- Out of 130 student who completed the paralegal training course, there were 83 positive reported outcomes with over 50% in paid outdoor clerking positions

### Graduate Link

- 104 students were allocated mentors from alumni

### Experience Matters

- In partnership with GTI Specialist Publishers Ltd, we published a careers handbook for law students to be an inspirational and informative guide using former graduates from the University as case studies/role models

### Challenges

- Paid vs. unpaid work
- Student attendance
- Managing change and expectations
  - attitudes
  - thinking out of the box
- Communication -work place behaviour

### Benefits of LAGREN model

- Highly replicable in other academic departments
- Concentration of a portfolio of services in one academic discipline as opposed to a more dilute generic approach
- A new model of professional development for student lawyers which recognises all students have different needs and those with non traditional experience will need greater support at transition
- Developments of high quality work experience in the legal sector replacing and complementing generic part time work
- Something for everyone - broadens cross selling, access and motivation
- Careers guidance linked to anticipating needs, focussing action planning towards students making informed choices

### The Future

- The Department of Law, Governance & International Relations have continued with LAGREN and the Project/Outreach Manager is now reporting to the academic department with close links to Careers
- The Careers Service Job Shop is active in also generating and advertising opportunities generated with on line access
- Plan to do longitudinal studies
- Currently investigating methods to integrate and add value to the law curriculum to enhance employability
- Careers guidance by students is still in demand and we continue to help students focus on their aspirations and unlock their potential.

## CENTRAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR CAREER MANAGEMENT

The core principle is that we can customise our delivery to fit the particular needs of the Department, the course and the students. Basically we are offering "pick and mix".

### **Self-assessment**

Using skills inventories, psychometric tests, personality inventories, workshops on self reflection, and specialist careers guidance software such as prospects planner, these will lead to the production of a CV.

### **Occupational knowledge**

Students to be encouraged/organised to visit employers, to work shadow, to research job studies. The Careers Service can supply occupational information and can help students via "The Graduate Link" scheme and The London Metropolitan Employment Service (previously the Job Shop).

### **Graduate Labour Market**

This would involve looking at the supply and demand for graduates and why employers recruit them. What do our graduates do? What is the national picture?

### **Jobs**

Where to find them and how to get them. This will include job search and application methods. The Careers Service can supply material and run workshops.

### **Action Planning**

for a career and life after university.

### **Information**

The Careers Service has a wide range of material that academics can access, including:

#### **1. The Graduate Link Scheme**

This is a database of over 600 ex-students who have offered to help the Careers Service by speaking to current students either individually or in groups, at their workplace or in the University. They write articles for Careers publications, visit Departments and can sometimes help with work shadowing and work experience. Requests for contacts - Penny Darby at City campus.

#### **2. Occupational Information**

- (a) Information booklets which include:
  - (i) Sector briefings, e.g. voluntary sector, information technology sector, etc;
  - (ii) Special interest series, e.g. *Your degree, what next?*
- (b) Signpost sheets, e.g. *Your degree in Information Technology, what next?*

#### **3. First Destination Information**

The Careers Service collects data on what happens to our graduates when they leave and this can prove invaluable in giving students realistic ideas about the job market.

#### **4. Information Relevant to the 'Jobsearch'**

- (a) Examples of CVs
- (b) Examples of application forms
- (c) Examples of psychometric tests

Videos are available on how to complete an application form; interview technique; and how to prepare for an assessment centre.

## **5. Information on skills, including exercises that can be used with students**

There is, of course, much more, including a computer-aided careers guidance programme, information on postgraduate study, etc.

Whatever it is that you need, we will try to help by supporting your work with students.

Our contact details are:

### **Careers Service**

City campus, 8 Goulston Street, London E1, Tel 020 7320 2380

North campus, 166-220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB, Tel: 020 7133 2286

**The Careers Service strongly recommends the following as an excellent reference source:**

### The Directory of Employability Resources

Published by the Learning and Teaching Support Network. Available from The Network Centre, Innovation Close, York Science Park, Heslington, York YO10 5DQ. Tel: 01904 754555.

Price: £7.50 [www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre](http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre)

The Careers Service has a number of reference copies for any academics who wish to come and look at them and discuss the possible use of the material. The main contents include:

1. Curriculum Development, including skills development through the curriculum and career management skills within the curriculum;
2. Extra-Curricular Development, including work experience;
3. Destinations of HE leavers;
4. Labour Market information, including skills needed for employment and recruitment trends.

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## ADDENDUM 4

### Reconsidering Graduate Employability

Len Holmes

#### Employability

- Meaningless unless connected to issues of *employment* outcomes
- Too narrow: focus more broadly on post-graduation lives

#### Approaches to Employability

- perspectives
- paradigms
- programmes of research
- frames of reference
- 'schools' of theory
- regimes of truth
  
- eg phlogiston

#### Graduate Employability: competing perspectives

- Skills agenda - possessive-instrumentalist model of skills
- Emergent-identity/ Practice model (a.k.a. Graduate Identity Approach)

#### Skills Agenda: Assumptions

- possession and use of skills explain employment outcome
- skills may be inferred from observable behaviour/ performance
- behaviour/ performance is objectively observable
- skills as real? or skills as theoretical constructs?

#### Skills Agenda: Fatal Flaws

- Multiple listings and models
- Lack of empirical reference
- Similarity of terms does not equal similarity of meaning
- Can not explain differences of employment outcome (ethnicity, age, class, type of institution)
- Ignores issues of social & cultural capital

#### Graduate Identity Approach

- developed from work undertaken via Enterprise in Higher Education @ UNL
- convivial with other developments eg situated learning theory
- takes account of issues of social and cultural capital
- key issues:
  - Performance as interpretation of activity
  - Pre-requisites for interpreting performance
  - Inter-relationship of practices and identity

### Emergent Identity

- not an entity, a process (identification/ identifying)
- interaction between:
  - identifying by self (claim)
  - identifying by significant others (affirmation/ disaffirmation)
- giving rise to modalities of emergent identity

### **Claim-Affirmation Model of Emergent Identity**

#### Reconsidering Skills

- skills language provides a form of warranting identity claim
- skills terms are generalised modes of expressing practices

#### The Double Warrant

- claiming right to be considered as worthy of employment in graduate occupation
- claiming right to be considered for re-entry to HE at advanced level

#### Implication for the Curriculum

- curriculum level intervention too limited: *total experience*
- emergent identity at entry: transition to undergraduate
- articulation of assessment and other activities in terms of practices
- enabling students to express their warranting of their claim *to be seen as a graduate*

Relational Skill & Learning Website: <http://www.re-skill.org.uk>