Employability Case Study

Enhancing Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Employability through PDP

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Summary

This case study is a reflection on the University of Worcester's (UoW) School of Sport and Exercise Science customised programme of Personal Development Planning (PDP), a vehicle for the development of student employability skills. This builds upon an established PDP programme at the university. The case study derives from initial research reported in The Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network's Link 11 and presented at the DCMS/Sport England Conference on behalf of the UK Standing Conference on Leisure, Recreation and Sport (UKSCLRS) in March 2004.

Context

It is generally acknowledged that Higher Education should produce graduates who are equipped to operate in a highly competitive, complex and dynamic workplace. One of the five stated ambitions of UoW is "to produce highly employable, innovative, professional alumni" *(*Strategic Plan 2004 – 2008).

If students are to reflect on their experiences and gather evidence of their personal and skills development, then these learning opportunities have to be recognised by the students and embedded in all aspects of the curriculum and student life. Therefore, the way forward necessarily involves an integrated approach within the whole university life of students - within the academic curriculum, student union activities, work experience and careers advice, as well as the PDP framework. Tomkins (2004) supported this view concluding that work experience (including community or live project work), practical modules and personal development planning were important vehicles in supporting the key skills development of students.

Rationale

In September 2001 the Student Qualities Profile (SQP) was launched within the Undergraduate Modular Scheme at UoW (Peters, 2001). The rationale behind the SQP was that it should support students in the development of their skills and, at the same time act as the focus for student planning, reflection, development and recording of achievement as they progressed through their undergraduate studies.

The identified student qualities include subject specific skills, transferable skills, and personal attributes developed through undergraduate study. The inclusion of personal attributes (not easily categorised as 'skills') is a key aspect, incorporating as it does personal development, an important part of educational growth as an undergraduate. The SQP elements were identified (through research with employer organisations, universities, and others interested in undergraduate education) as fundamental to graduate qualities and what makes graduates valuable to society. For SQP to be successful it was important that students understood that many of the skills they would develop in their studies were transferable both within and beyond academic study.

The SQP has the full support of the Worcester Students Union, supporting the SQP by providing training in transferable skills, opportunities to volunteer or participate in/organise sporting/non-sporting activities, and offering paid employment. It also provides a certificate, *Degree+,* for skills developed by students within the Student Union, and these can be added to the SQP. Thus the SQP, used to its full potential, will enable students to leave Worcester, not only more independent and confident, but also more employable.

The challenge facing academic and pastoral tutors is how to encourage students to engage with the process of developing their *qualities profile*. Students just embarking on a university programme tend to feel that preparing for employment is too far away to be of immediate concern, and that other issues are of higher priority, e.g. learning to cope away from home for the first time, developing a new social life, or coming to terms with the demands of academic work.

Objectives
Two years after the introduction (2003) student feedback suggested that engagement with the SQP was limited. It had been delivered through the Undergraduate Modular Scheme. The academic modules were assessed and contributed to the final degree classification, while the SQP in contrast was seen to be rather bureaucratic and not assessed, and so ultimately had no impact on degree classification. The primary reason for lack of student engagement was the lack of assessment, rendering it as not directly relevant. Nevertheless, after further consultation with the Careers Service and Student Union, the school decided that the rationale behind the SQP was fundamentally sound and decided to:

- Customise the SQP for the school.
- Incorporate this customised version into the subject programmes and the personal tutor system.
- Pilot the new system with the 2003-04 student cohorts.

Description
The customised version of the SQP developed into the School Personal Development Planning (PDP) system. It has now been run with two cohorts of students. The role of the tutor in delivering PDP is seen as pivotal, based on the premise that since PDP is a very individual process the personal tutor is the ideal person to promote discussion and reflection, as well as to guide students towards consideration of their future career plans. All students within the school are allocated a tutor. Tutors report that attendance at personal tutorials during the two pilot years has been generally good (around 90% for first years), though this has shown signs of slipping to below 60% for the second years).

The customised PDP system currently includes six skills:

1. Planning and time management.
2. Responsibility and independence.
3. Interactive and group skills.
4. Problem solving.
5. Reflection.
6. Communication and presentation skills.

These have been mapped onto a matrix which details the competences, abilities, capabilities and proficiencies of each skill:

Quality	D The Competence to…	C The ability to…	B The capability to…	A The Proficiency to…
Planning and Time Management	Meet imposed deadlines.	Plan own time within established deadlines.	Set and achieve targets over an extended period.	Select, apply and defend the most appropriate time management study.
Responsibility and Independence	Meet imposed obligations.	Be trusted and relied upon, though reliant on judgement of 'experts'.	Make own judgements and take responsibility for self.	Take responsibility for self and others.
Interactive and Group Skills	Comprehend and respond to direct communication. Perform supervised work in a group.	Assess own and other's strengths and weaknesses. Work in a group and assimilate own results into group projects.	Able to negotiate and persuade. Structure teamwork, including negotiation of roles and responsibilities.	Apply appropriate communication techniques. Co-ordinate group activity and carry forward an effective strategy.
Problem Solving	Recognise and comprehend basic texts and data.	Undertake problem solving with initial direction.	Apply an appropriate strategy to a specific problem.	Evaluate and improve problem solving strategies independently.
Reflection	Recognise external criteria.	Identify own strengths and weaknesses.	Self-evaluate to focus on personal development needs.	Continually apply reflective practice for personal development purposes.
Communication and Presentation skills	Comprehend and make statements of opinion. Present given information visually.	Analyse and produce a structured statement. Apply a range of visual communication techniques.	Give a convincing oral presentation and field questions. Evaluate and present effective visual communication.	Design and co-ordinate appropriate presentations. Design appropriate visual communication techniques.

Matrix of PDP Skills for Sports Graduates at UoW

Year 1

During induction week the new first year received a presentation explaining the rationale behind the PDP process and its practical implementation within the personal tutor system. Many of the intake were in fact already familiar with the concept as they had experience of recording their achievement from secondary school. In the first week of the first semester all students met with their tutor, a written record of which was kept by both student and tutor. In essence the purpose of the meeting was to establish contact, enable the tutor to find out more about the individual student and discuss the purpose of PDP.

Students were encouraged to have a meeting with their tutor whenever necessary, and were expected to book a second tutorial in the first week of the second semester. Grades achieved during Semester 1 would then be discussed along with the completion of a skills development sheet, (see below), which identifies current strengths and priorities for development. The first section was completed by the student who was then encouraged to reflect on experiences (including non-academic development) and to identify evidence that demonstrated skills development.

Tutorial Record Sheet

Student: Personal tutor: Academic Year: Semester: 1 2   Which semester for me: 1 2 3 4 5 6

Self assessment section: to be completed by the student
Planning and   **Time Management:**   Please circle D C B A
Responsibility   **And Independence:**   Please circle D C B A
Interactive and   **Group skills:**   Please circle D C B A
Problem Solving   **Skills:**   Please circle D C B A
Reflection: Please circle D C B A
Communication and   **Presentation**   **Skills:**   Please circle D C B A

(Discussion section: to be completed at personal tutorial)
What strengths and areas of development have been identified?
What other issues were raised?

Date of next personal tutorial:

Student initials: Tutor initials: Date:

Copy one: Student sends to registry   Copy two: Tutor   Copy Three: Student

Year 2

The second year of the PDP system included a focus on support for careers education. The aims of the School's Careers Strategy are:

- To promote awareness amongst UoW undergraduates and diplomates regarding the importance of enhancing their academic profile.

- To build on the importance of the PDP/key skills/ common skills in acquiring relevant skills and qualities attractive to employers.

- To promote the opportunities available for UoW undergraduates and diplomates to enhance their experience and knowledge base.

This is in line with the QAA Code of Practice on Careers Education, Information and Guidance which seeks to ensure that institutions are:

> "…meeting students' expectations in respect of their preparedness for their future career, and that they [institutions] are producing graduates [and diplomates] equipped to meet the demands of the employment market of today and tomorrow" (QAA, 2003).

Some of the ways which are used to implement the Careers Strategy through PDP are:

- Through the personal tutor system - tutors have advice packs on helping students to 'fill in the gaps', identifying opportunities for developing skills both within the academic setting and outside it.

- Employability/entrepreneurship skills are made explicit to students within the modules, and are highlighted within learning activities that can be used to enhance these skills.

Year 3

At the start of the first semester each year group attends presentations aimed at enhancing their employability prospects and experience of the curriculum. The emphasis for the third years is on PDP tutorials, the benefits of BASES membership, 'Bizcom' competitions and enterprise awareness events such as 'Enterprise Fest'. The focus of the third and final year PDP tutorial is the production of a personal statement, which is aimed at providing the students with a summative and comprehensive account aided by a checklist, which the students can use as a basis for job applications or to continue their studies at post-graduate level. The personal statement is an opportunity for students to provide evidence of employability skills gained during their time in higher education and to differentiate themselves for the job market. Early evidence from tutors suggest that though many students find this very challenging, a high percentage are using their statements as a supporting document for entry into the employment market.

Evaluation

Engagement with PDP

Students have reported most difficulty in the finding of evidence for the development of problem solving skills during the course of their studies. Tutors have tried to prompt and encourage

students to reflect on specific learning tasks undertaken during lectures. It remains an area where students do not feel confident that they are making progress. There is also a significant number of students who find it difficult to recognise the development of generic skills while following the curriculum. Indeed some students tend to compartmentalise skills and focus on the specific learning outcomes of each module. It appears that when PDP is used with undergraduates on non-professional programmes, specificity is difficult to establish. However, in contrast, those students who aspire to PGCE or other recognised career pathways quickly learn the value of developing skills, which they know will be either desirable or essential.

Assessment of PDP
The non-assessed nature of PDP is something which staff acknowledge needs to be tackled. It is worth noting that on many vocational programmes such as the PGCE Secondary Course, students are required to keep a portfolio (a reflective record of their development as a student teacher) in which they are required to write a series of reflective commentaries detailing their progress. These are submitted and marked (pass or fail) on three separate occasions. Since this is a fundamental requirement of the course, engagement with the process is altogether more immediate and the focus is maintained to the end of the course.

Both staff and students recognise the value of the school's customised version of the SQP and, in particular, the process of engaging with PDP (through the personal tutor system). Nevertheless we still question whether this learning should this be more formally accredited. Further development and a deeper level of engagement will only be possible when the value of the learning is acknowledged.

Discussion

Curriculum Development
As one of the desired outcomes of higher education is the preparation of graduates to participate fully in the world of work, so higher education needs to recognise and address the significance and incidence of self-employment in the development of employability aspects of the curriculum. The significant graduate interest in

business start-up has to be cultivated and assisted in order to reach fruition. More opportunities and support are necessary to establish graduates' small businesses. One such example at UoW is a recent successful funding application to the Mercia Institute of Enterprise for £10,000 to develop technology enhanced enterprise education (te3). The overview of the project can be found at the following link:

http://www.te3.bham.ac.uk/MainPages/Projects_Overview.htm?code=TE3019

Essentially the project is about 'Supporting Entrepreneurship' by designing and delivering two new modules both at Undergraduate and Postgraduate level within the Sports Studies curriculum. The aim is to develop both interactive online learning materials using WebCT, and to hold a day long 'Sport Fest' event, similar to that of an 'Enterprise Fest '.
The undergraduate model entitled 'Enterprise and Innovation in Sport' has been validated and delivered. One of the pieces of assessed work was the production of a brief business plan and the making of a business pitch to a panel of investors. The criteria attempted, where practicable, to reflect the assessment used in the first stage entry of the Bizcom awards as outlined in the diagram Plan for Entrepreneurial Skills (below). The Bizcom awards encourage students to think of setting up their own business by developing and testing either an idea for a business or a social enterprise venture. This joined-up curriculum approach with regional initiatives has proved successful with a group of year 3 sports graduates using the module and assessment as a platform to enter the competition. They won first prize!

The school is always looking for opportunities for curriculum enhancement in relation to employability. A recent initiative has been the appointment of an academic member of staff to the post of a work placement coordinator to further links between employers and the school. A project which came out of discussions at the Sport Employers Group (see below) and was identified through the School Careers Strategy, has just received funding. Its aims are to produce a multi-media DVD of selected local sport employers, to increase the career skills

awareness of sport students and to disseminate information given by employers on vocational opportunities available in sport. There are also plans to include the new enterprise module Enterprise and Innovation in Sport in the BSc (Hons) in Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management degree that is currently being validated.

Links with Business and Employers
In order to support and enhance curriculum development, the school recently initiated the development of a Sport Employers Group in order to develop a cluster of sport related employers willing to champion relevant workforce development and to engage with the skills, employment and productivity agenda in the sports industries. One of its main functions is to act as an advisory group to 'enhance and enrich student employability within the school'.

The school has also created a Business Enterprise Group whose mission is to develop a more commercially driven culture within the school which has at its core values of "courage, commitment, contribution and creativity." One of the roles of this group is to provide a forum for the key academic areas of the school and to focus on the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation agenda. This will enable the coherent development of intra-organisational and administrative infrastructures to facilitate knowledge transfer and innovation amongst staff and students. It is hoped that this will facilitate a more entrepreneurial culture amongst sports graduates to develop strong employability, enterprise and creative skills in order to prepare them to operate effectively in the knowledge economy.

In the future, it might be necessary to redefine skills for learning and employment and make them more explicit, so that they become interwoven into learning and teaching philosophy and strategies. This would necessitate giving students (for example) the opportunity to develop and gain a better understanding of self-employment in public and private sector business, knowledge of the business start-up process or employment in the SME sector.

The aim of the school is that our students will act as 'change champions'. Important developments such as business planning competitions (Bizcom), awareness events like Enterprise Fest and commercialisation workshops are incorporated into the academic programmes through working alongside internal groups such as alumni, the UoW business partnerships office, student services and careers. The diagram below demonstrates the framework used to incorporate such entrepreneurial activities into the curriculum:

High Level Plan

	Year 1 *Awareness*	Year 2 *Interest*		Year 3 *Decision*	Graduation *Action*
ECP	EnterpriseFest (delegate) Taster workshop in idea development	EnterpriseFest (delegate) 15 credit vocational enterprise module	Enterprise Summer School	EnterpriseFest (exhibitor) BizCom Graduate Enterprise	EnterpriseFest (speaker) EFS InvoRed
WIN	Junior member of development team	The Ideas Generator		Individuals and teams building business proposals	Mentoring CPD Student placement

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Plan for Entrepreneurial Skills (Corcoran, 2005)

Proposed Action

- Ensure that all elements of the drivers and support for skills development at school level (for example, the learning and teaching strategy, careers strategy, sport employer networks, and the students union) are making a valid, co-ordinated and transparent contribution towards the PDP of students.

- Review the matrix of PDP skills for sports graduates. It might be that we need to consider developing 'creativity' as a skill.

- Identify and make more explicit, through module outlines and during lectures, the links between learning outcomes, learning tasks and the development of generic skills and attributes.

- Endeavour to replicate a PGCE subject/professional mentor system for students.

- Establish more opportunities for the students to gather evidence of personal development.

- Continue and extend our external engagement with key stakeholders/ employers.

- Undertake a curriculum audit to identify and ensure the embedding of employability skills within the curriculum in order that they are made explicit to students within the learning experience

References and URLs

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Bizcom, Mercia Institute of Enterprise
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/mercia/bizcom/

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