New Approaches to Work Experience

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Work experience is a feature of careers programmes in most schools and colleges. In this article, we present a typology of work experience which identifies models of work experience. We argue that most models of work experience have either ignored the influence of 'context' upon learning or have approached this issue mechanistically. New curriculum frameworks are needed to allow work in all of its forms to be used as a basis for the development of knowledge, skills and identity. We suggest that a model, which embodies the concept of 'connectivity', may provide the basis for a productive and useful relationship between formal and informal learning.

Models of work experience

Different approaches to or models of work experience embody changing responses to policy, to the learner, to skills needed and to pedagogy. The first four models we have identified reflect the influence of different economic, technological and social factors prevailing within European countries as well as different ideas about learning and development. We identify criteria to help us differentiate between the characteristic features of each model – and they can be viewed as part of an evolving continuum of learning through work experience. Although the models may be specific to different periods of economic and technological development and reflect changing educational ideas about the process of learning, they can and do co-exist in different countries. They are analytical rather than descriptive; no specific work experience programme fits neatly into any of the models and some programmes may contain elements of more than one model. The fifth model presents a new approach to work experience which is based upon the principle of *connectivity*. It displays innovatory features which are relevant to future approaches to effective learning through work experience.

The traditional model of work experience: 'launching' students into the world of work

The legacy of the technical-rational perspective on education and training is evident in the models of work experience traditionally associated with apprenticeship schemes and general education throughout Europe. Until relatively recently, a prime aim of apprenticeship-based work experience programmes was to mould and adapt students' skills in workplaces (Vickers 1995, Stern & Wagner 1999a, 1999b). By contrast, the school-based work experience schemes introduced in the UK in the 1970s tended to assume that students would unconsciously or automatically assimilate relevant workplace knowledge, skills and attitudes and internalise the implications of occupational changes occurring in the workplace (Watts 1983).

This emphasis upon both adaptation and assimilation in the traditional model of work experience is a distinctive feature of a technical-rational perspective on education and training. Students engaged in work experience have often been viewed as 'containers' (Lave 1993) into which various forms of social interaction can be 'poured' and it has been assumed that knowledge and skills can be taught quite separately from the context of their use.

These assumptions about learning are consistent with what Kindermann & Skinner (1992) have termed a 'launch' perspective on the relationship between people and their environment. In other words, it is the initial learning situation (school, college or vocational training centre) which largely determines what a person will do in a new situation: the earlier learning determines the trajectory of later learning, with the environmental influence being fairly minimal. Thus, from this perspective, the prime purpose of traditional models of work experience has been to 'launch' students into the world of work

Conceptualising work experience simply as 'launch', however, leaves little incentive to develop a theory of how students learn and develop through work experience and this has helped to maintain the divisions between formal and informal learning and academic and vocational education (Lasonen & Young 1998). As a revealing study by McNamara (1991) has elaborated in schematic form, it is not possible to reform the 'launch' model of work experience by trying to reform the content of the formal vocational education and training (VET) component of learning alone.

The experiential model: work experience as 'co-development'

During the second half of the 20th. century, many educationists turned to the work of Dewey (1981, 1986, 1988) for a philosophical basis for a curriculum critique of technical rational assumptions about education and training.

But, as Prawat has noted (1993), many American and European educationists have interpreted Dewey's important ideas rather narrowly as an expression of the idea that all stages and phases of education should be made 'relevant' to students and that there should be a more problem-based approach to education and greater use of inquiry-based models of teaching and learning. There has therefore been considerable interest in the psychology of education (Resnick 1987), curriculum studies (Michaels & O'Connor 1990) and adult education (Kolb 1984) literature in the extent to which the idea of practical problem-solving and experiential learning can serve as a strategy to promote higher order thinking.

In the case of work experience programmes, certain versions of experiential learning, specifically those based on Kolb's idea of the experiential 'learning cycle', were perceived in general education as providing a useful framework for understanding how students learn through work experience (Jamieson *et al* 1988, Miller *et al* 1991). One consequence of adopting this slightly broader perspective on work experience was that it placed the idea of a student's interpersonal and social development at the forefront of the agenda for work experience (Miller *et al* 1991, Wellington 1993). Two ideas lay behind this interest: first, it reflected certain educational aims, such as a desire to equate the value of learning more clearly with its practical applications (Watts 1991). Second, it reflected a growing policy interest across Europe in establishing education-business partnerships in order to assist students to adjust themselves more easily to the ever-changing demands of the labour market (Griffiths & Guile 1998, Stern & Wagner 1999b).

Re-thinking the purpose of work experience in order to take more explicit account of the *actual* trajectory of a student's development has led to greater dialogue and cooperation between education and workplaces. In many ways, it reflects Kindermann & Skinner's notion of 'co-development' between interested parties (1992). A gradual re-thinking of the principles of work experience along the above lines took place from the late 1980s in various European countries. Some of these schemes and, for that matter, some schemes in the USA (Stern & Wagner 1999b), as well as certain approaches to work experience introduced in the UK through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), began to take greater account of the process of student development.

This led to greater interest being displayed in three areas: first, the need for educational institutions or intermediary agencies, such as education-business partnerships, to negotiate clear objectives for students, workplaces and schools/colleges in advance of the work experience (Griffiths *et al* 1992, Miller *et al* 1991); second, the development of new pedagogic practices to assist students in identifying, possibly through the use of a de-briefing process after the work experience, the influence of the experience on personal and social development (Watts 1991); third, the long term benefit of evaluating work experience in order to identify how the work experience might have affected subsequent motivation and performance in school or college.

However, despite this fresh thinking about the purpose of work experience in general education, the mainstream curriculum in most EU countries was left broadly unaffected, with work experience effectively kept separate from it. Equally, the whole question of the relationship between theoretical study and work experience, even in countries with strong apprenticeship systems, was also left unresolved.

The generic model: work experience as an opportunity for key skill assessment

One of the main educational debates in Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s concerned the attempt to promote a greater sense of learner autonomy and self-discipline, particularly in low-attaining students, within general and vocational education programmes (Green *et al* (1999). These developments have led, in the UK in particular and to a lesser extent in certain parts of Europe, to the emergence of what may be referred to as a 'generic' perspective on learning. By and large, this perspective is based on the idea that it is, first, more liberalising and egalitarian to adopt a system which attaches prime importance to the 'outcome', the result, and does not prescribe the form of learning necessary to gain a qualification (Jessup 1990). Second, that an agreed series of common outcomes can be identified for any programme of study and on that basis it is possible to assess the learning that has occurred (Kamarainen & Streumer 1998).

In the UK, the notion of 'learning outcomes' has been associated with attempts to shift the emphasis away from traditional curriculum concerns with structure, content, and teaching 'inputs' towards actual outcomes (Young 1998). They have been viewed as a method that can be used to assist individuals to capture their own experiences and present such experience for accreditation (Ecclestone 1998; Usher *et al* 1997). Certainly, the notion of 'learning outcomes' has been subject to considerable criticism in the UK for its highly behaviourist and superficial assumptions about the process of human development and learning (Ecclestone 1998), as well as the assumption that neutral judgements can be made about the extent to which experience is equivalent to understanding or the development of occupational capability (Jones & Moore 1995).

Nevertheless, 'learning outcomes' have gradually become an accepted part of 16-19 vocational education and training in the UK. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has issued very specific guidance to schools and sixth-form colleges about the framing, definition, setting out and assessment of learning outcomes in relation to pre and post-16 work experience (QCA 1998). Furthermore, 'learning outcomes' are used within the UK's Modern Apprenticeship programme in order to provide evidence of the learning,

which apprentices may present for formal or informal accreditation, that has occurred during work experience (Fuller 1996).

As a result, strong emphasis has been placed in post-16 education upon a particular interpretation of student-centredness related to student autonomy and independence. In the case of work experience, this has been interpreted as planning a work experience placement and managing and evaluating the learning through the use of statements about 'learning outcomes' (Miller 1996, Oates & Fettes 1997). This approach to learner-centredness requires learners to formulate their own personal action plans for work experience. The plan serves as a type of contract between the individual, the workplace and the educational institution, thus facilitating student self-assessment and external verification of key skill development within a workplace, albeit in a rather narrow and mechanistic way (Ecclestone 1998).

In theory, the use of action plans generates a new role for teachers. They are required to assist students in assembling portfolios of evidence for assessment at a later stage. However, all too often, this consists of the application of a specific set of methodological procedures designed to facilitate the recollection of experience (Usher *et al* 1997). By virtue of the procedures having generally been derived from a meshing of the Kolb learning cycle and behavioural learning outcomes, they are assumed to be constant across all contexts and capable of guaranteeing the authenticity and validity of the experience (Ecclestone 1998, Usher *et al* 1997).

However, the idea of teacher/trainer-facilitated reflection is complex. First, it involves awareness of the assumptions (i) that 'experiential learning' is a natural category and (ii) that that the 'voice' of an individual or community constitutes in some way authentic knowledge of a situation. As Moore & Muller (1999) argue, the idea of 'experiential learning' and 'voice discourses' are themselves endowed with theoretical assumptions (in the present case, about how learners can be helped to make sense of their inter-subjective experience). Accordingly, the meaning and significance of experience depends not only upon the experience as such but also on how and by whom it is interpreted (Brah & Hoy 1989).

Second, it involves those in education or workplaces with responsibility for supporting the process of learning exploring with learners the extent to which experience is influenced by the constraints of its context. As Young and Lucas (1999) argue, this is likely to involve the use of concepts to provide a theoretical framework in which learners can reflect critically upon their experience. Eraut (1999) observes that, in order to use a scientific concept in a practical situation, it has to be transformed or resituated in a firm which fits the context. This is not a process of logical reasoning but rather of 'mulling over' the situation until 'something seems to fit'.

Thus, concepts and theories can be introduced to the learner by the teacher or trainer and deepened through conversation in order to facilitate the process of reflection. Moreover, as Prawat (1993) argues, 'ideas serve to educate attention'. In other words, learners need to be immersed in ideas as well as in the world of experience and it is the *process of mediation* that provides learners with a basis for connecting their context-specific learning with ideas or practices which may have originated outside those contexts.

The work process model

As stated at the outset, the aim of this paper has been to reconceptualise how students, whether engaged in post-16 general or vocational education and training programmes both learn and develop through work experience and also can be supported to take explicit account of *the learning which occurs within and between the different contexts* of education and work. Various attempts have been made, especially in the TAFE system in Australia (Billet 1993) and the 'dual system' in Germany (Attwell & Jennes 1993), to take greater account of the influence of the context of work upon learning and to avoid affording unmediated 'experience' a privileged place in work experience programmes. These attempts have not, however, gone very far in developing a curriculum framework which enables students to relate formal and informal learning.

One response to the classic problem of division between formal and informal learning has emerged from within the German VET tradition. The term, 'inert knowledge', has been employed to describe types of formal knowledge which have been taught to apprentices but which have not proved useful in practice, even though the knowledge itself may be relevant to work practices. Consequently, the concept of 'work process knowledge' has been introduced to assist apprentices and teachers in overcoming the dilemma of 'inert knowledge' (Kruse 1996). Work process knowledge has been defined as understanding the labour process in terms of the following dimensions: 'product-related, labour organisational, social ecological and systems-related' (Kruse 1996). The main distinguishing feature of the concept of 'work process knowledge' is that it draws attention to the importance of situating work practices in the actual context of the labour process. Thus, it has been argued that work process knowledge is fundamental to a VET curriculum. Apart from developing formal elements of a programme of study, including work experience, to assist the student in understanding individual tasks, activities or behavioural expectations, it has also been recognised that it is vital to develop a broader understanding of the actual work context (and hence employability). As Fischer and Stuber (1998) have argued, this combination of theoretical and practical learning prepares apprentices to engage more rapidly with new organisational forms of production and enables them to move into alternative work environments more easily.

The prime purpose of work experience, from this perspective, would be to help students *adjust* themselves

more successfully to the changing context of work through the opportunity to participate in different communities of practice. The idea of 'attunement' recognises that the development of any individual is affected by the task or activities which he or she is asked to undertake in a specific context and that the context, in turn, is also affected by their development (Kindermann & Skinner 1992). A key concern, therefore, is to ensure that students learn about the context in which they are working and are presented with opportunities to learn and develop within that context by adjusting or varying their performance as required. Only on this basis, it is claimed, will students fully develop the capacity to transfer the knowledge and skill gained in one work context to another. Attwell and Jennes (1996), however, have argued that work experience will not by itself promote work process knowledge and that it needs to be *mediated* – perhaps by the introduction of concepts, perhaps by subject knowledge – and that the process of mediation may take place within the workplace and company-training centres. They conclude, in relation to the German VET programmes, that these programmes will have to be further evolved to help students connect formal and informal learning more explicitly. They do not, however, provide any explicit guidance on how to achieve that objective, other than suggesting that students need to be coached to 'reflect-on' and 'reflect-in' action.

A connective model of work experience

Thus far, we have argued that, although each of the foregoing approaches has their own strengths, they are all beset by different weaknesses. We now go on to consider an alternative model of work experience - the connective model. This model is based upon the idea of a 'reflexive' theory of learning (Guile & Young forthcoming (a)) which involves taking greater account of the influence of the context and the organisation of work upon student learning and development, the situated nature of that learning and the scope for developing 'boundary crossing' skills. It also entails developing new curriculum frameworks which enable students to relate formal and informal, horizontal and vertical learning. From this perspective, learners need to be encouraged to conceptualise their experiences in different ways and for this conceptualisation to serve different curriculum purposes. This is very similiar in intention to what Freire has defined (Freire & Macedo 1999) as the role of the teacher - to create 'pedagogical spaces', in other words, to use his/her expertise to pose problems in order to help learners analyse their own experiences and arrive at a critical understanding of their reality.

We employ the term, *connectivity*, to define the purpose of the pedagogic approach which would be required in order to take explicit account of the vertical and horizontal development of learners. Supporting students to understand the significance of these two dimensions of development constitutes a pedagogic challenge, albeit a rewarding one, for teachers in educational institutions as well as those with responsibility for development in the workplace. It involves encouraging students to understand workplaces as a series of 'interconnected activity systems' (Engeström forthcoming) which consist of a range of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). In addition, it involves teachers and workplaces appreciating that work experience provides a range of very different ways of learning compared with how students normally learn in school (Guile and Young forthcoming (a)). Consequently, learners, teachers and workplaces need to ensure that work experience provides an opportunity for learners to 'learn to negotiate how they learn' in workplaces since this is critical to effective workplace performance (Beach & Vyas 1998) as well as to learn the new capabilities that are gradually being required in 'high-performance' workplaces (Guile & Fonda 1999). For example, work experience can provide an opportunity to develop the personal, social and behavioural skills that support personal and organisational learning. This type of 'horizontal development' goes far beyond what is usually referred to as key skill development since it is not simply concerned with problem-based 'know-how'.

Thus, learners will need to be supported to appropriate concepts acquired through vertical development, and which are external to the context, to mediate the relationship between their formal programmes of study and, for example, trends in labour and work organisation. They not only have to develop the capacity to participate within workplace activities and cultures; they must also learn *how to draw upon their formal learning* and use it to interrogate workplace practices. Eraut (1999) suggests that this could involve: use of prior knowledge, seeing the relevance of concepts, resituating the concepts and integrating the new knowledge.

These ideas about learning through work experience reflect our earlier comments that 'host' organisations ought to consider how they can provide 'environments for learning' (or opportunities to participate in 'communities of practice') if they are to maximise the learning potential of these activities for themselves and for learners. This implies a reappraisal of human resource development strategies, as well as management and developmental practices, by 'host' organisations and of pedagogic practice by teachers, since students and workers have to learn how to enter unfamiliar territory and work collaboratively in different communities of practice (Guile & Fonda 1999).

The implications of the above re-conceptualisation of work experience are evident in relation to the question of the 'transfer of learning'. The concept of transfer has traditionally rested upon the idea that learning simply consists of acquiring knowledge and skill in one context (a workplace) and reapplying it in another (another workplace). This concept lies at the heart of the UK and EU debate about key skills and key competencies. The main problem with this conception of skill and transfer is that it completely neglects the influence of context, resources and people upon

the process of learning and, as Engeström *et al* (1995) argue, misconceives the process of transfer. Once workplaces are viewed as 'activity systems', with their own divisions of labour, rules and procedures, it is possible to replace the notion of 'transferability' with the concept of 'boundary crossing'. This reflects the recognition that students engage successfully in different tasks and in different contexts by demonstrating what Reder (1993) has referred to as 'polycontextual skills'. Such an approach takes account of the fact that learning is a process both of self-organisation and enculturation (Cobb 1999) and that these processes occur while individuals participate in cultural practices, frequently while interacting with more knowledgeable others in workplace 'zone of proximal development'. At one level, learning through work experience 'calls for the formation of new mediating concepts' that assist learners in developing the forms of social interaction that support dialogic problem solving. In this sense, as Engeström *et al* further argue, 'boundary crossing may be analysed as a process of collective concept formation'. At another level, it involves learners in functioning as 'connective specialists' (Young 1998), using specialist knowledge and skill acquired in formal education to understand why certain types of performance are required in different work contexts and how to work with others to produce new knowledge. Thus, teaching and learning become more a product and process of interaction within and between contexts and the successful mediation of these relationships is based upon a recognition that learning involves the *negotiation of learning* as part of actual workplace experience. Some of these issues have been explored through a series of case studies in a research project undertaken under the EC Fourth Research Framework: 'Work experience as an education and training strategy: new approaches for the 21st. century (Griffiths & Marhuenda forthcoming).

Conclusion

This paper has analysed how students, whether engaged in general or vocational education and training programmes, learn and develop through work experience. We have argued that studies of work experience have tended not to address this issue but have, rather, perpetuated the idea that the actual work contexts within which work experience takes place are stable, unchanging, transparent environments in which students can easily learn and develop. We have therefore addressed the concept of 'context' as the starting point for considering learning through work experience and have argued that any analysis of work experience should take account of the following issues: first, the different types of context (e.g., education and work), different strategies within contexts and the influence of context on the process of learning; second, the extent to which students have to learn how to 'negotiate' their learning during work experience; and, third, the extent to which students must be supported to relate formal and informal learning, given that knowledge is unevenly distributed in workplaces. We have argued that most models of work experience have in effect either ignored these issues or have at best approached them in a very mechanistic way. On the basis of this analysis, we develop a typology of five models of work experience – the traditional model, the experiential model, the generic model, the work process model and the *connnective* model. These different models embody changing responses to policy, to the learner, to skills needed and to pedagogy and reflect the influence of different economic, technological and social factors prevailing within European countries as well as new ideas about learning and development. Thus, we suggest that they can be viewed as part of an evolving continuum of approaches to learning through work experience. We suggest that the fifth model – the connective model – provides a new curriculum framework that can take work in all its forms as the basis for the development of knowledge (historical, scientific), skills (intellectual, technical, practical and communicative) and identity (in particular, the development of the ability to act as a 'boundary crosser'). We suggest that this 'connective model' of work experience may provide the basis for a more productive and useful relationship between formal and informal learning since it addresses how work experience can enable students to take explicit account of *the learning which occurs within and between the different contexts* of education and work.

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Note

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The Future of Careers

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Introduction

Few management issues are as cliché-bound as that of careers. According to some pundits, 'careers are dead'. Employment relationships are supposed to be more transactional and short-term, and careers more mobile. Flexible organisational structures and processes call for employees who are adaptable and open to continuous learning. 'Onwards and upwards' is to be replaced by lateral growth. The new career is 'protean' or 'self-managed' though carried out in partnership with the organisation. Employability, rather than job security, is the watchword.

How much do the clichés match the experience of people in work? In this article, I will focus on two of the findings from my recent survey on careers which forms part of our annual Roffey Park Management Agenda research. Now in its fourth year, the Agenda provides a 'fix' on attitudes and expectations of employees in a range of cross-sector organisations. Of course, careers can be looked at from both an individual and an organisational perspective – and the interests served may be different. The Agenda attempts to do both. It looks at what employees believe they want from their organisations, as well as what they experience in practice. In this article I am focusing on what people believe makes them employable and on what two organisations are doing to help employees develop their careers. I shall also venture into the realm of punditry and make a few predictions based on my research about how careers will evolve in the next few years.

As Peter Herriot (1998) has pointed out, there are many types of individual career. It is therefore surprising how much consensus exists about some key features of the new career. One area of general agreement is on the subject of employability. For years now people have been told that organisations cannot manage careers and that people should develop their skills if they wish to remain employable. For 'employable', people have been encouraged to read 'able to get a job elsewhere'. One of the most striking findings is the extent of confidence which people are expressing about their employability. A resounding 98% of our respondents believe that they have now developed their employability to the extent that if the worst should happen, they believe they could get a job elsewhere, particularly in sectors where there is a buoyant job market.

Employability – a double-edged sword

For most of the Roffey Park respondents, employability does indeed seem to imply the ability to be employed outside their current organisation, rather than within it. 25% of respondents are currently looking to develop their careers in other organisations. This is hardly surprising since, as Charles Woodruffe (1999) points out, organisations which send messages that employees should develop their employability may come to regret it. 'Manage your own career' and 'develop your employability' may be understood by employees as a lack of commitment by the organisation to the individual in the longer term. Without this commitment from the organisation, many employees believe that their best interests are served by moving elsewhere.

A key element of employability therefore seems to be the market value and demand for an individual's skills. People report that becoming an expert makes them more employable, as long as that expertise is tempered by commercial acumen, effective interpersonal skills and pragmatism. Not all went as far as one person who described themselves as 'a key expert with rare skills – I can command my price'. Many people pointed out the transferable nature of their asset: 'IT skills- including IT management - tend to be transferable across industries'. Others spoke of their 'potential added value to other organisations'. While such mobility may be good news for individuals, the cost to organisations of losing key employees may be high.

Woodruffe suggests that the rhetoric of the new career will appeal more to people who see themselves as passing through the organisation than to those who stay. He argues that they are less worried by a half-hearted message of commitment to them, are more likely to have a transactional relationship with the current employer and to expect development opportunities. Ironically, perhaps the best development deals of all are enjoyed by people on various forms of short-term contract who negotiate what they expect from the contract up-front.

Of course, organisational careers are not independent of the broader technical, social and economic shifts affecting organisations themselves. Nor are careers merely matters to be negotiated between employers and employees. There are other interested stakeholders. Ironically, proposed

changes to the tax laws and pension arrangements in the UK may undercut the very job mobility and career self-management which the new career deal is supposed to deliver.

What employability means may vary in different industries and types of role. However, if this really is the beginning of the Information Age, the kinds of employment opportunities and the skills required, regardless of sector, may be different from in the past. Allred et al. suggest that five key types of skill, knowledge or aptitude are likely to be critical to future career success. These are:

- *A knowledge-based technical specialism, including computer literacy since being able to turn information into practical use will create competitive advantage.* People management will not automatically become the means to career advancement. Indeed, people managers may well work remotely from the people they are managing, maintaining contact via computer systems which integrate the Internet, fax and telephone.

- *Cross-functional and international experience.* Managers will need to be effective project managers and sufficiently aware of other functions' way of operating that they can create multi-disciplinary teams.

- *Collaborative leadership.* Since projects will be both temporary and ongoing, people's ability to integrate quickly into new or existing teams will be critical to success.

- *Self-managing skills.* Since there is likely to be less hierarchical management of knowledge workers, people will need to exercise self-governance, including the willingness to act ethically. Continuous learning will be essential, as will the ability to manage for oneself an acceptable work/life balance.

- *Flexibility, including the ability to lead on one project, and to be a team member on another.*

For our respondents, employability seems to be a mix of experience, track record and key skills. These include flexibility, people management skills, creativity, change management skills, team-working skills and openness to continuous learning. Most have built their employability though training, networking and challenging work assignments and a few have been helped by a mentor.

So organisations may be caught on the horns of a dilemma-of their own making. They may not be able to attract truly employable people without offering a development package. Yet retaining such people may be difficult since they will owe little allegiance to the employer, especially if the transaction, i.e. opportunities to build skills and experience, breaks down. Applying the 'manage your own career' message to talented individuals whom the organisation wants to retain may be unwise, especially if they are open to staying and building a relationship. Training and development geared to building internal employability may be the best option.

The organisational side of the deal

So while employees in our survey generally acknowledge that they are responsible for their own career development, how much are organisations playing their part in the career partnership? The organisational side of the deal is about providing or brokering opportunities and resources to enable the employee to develop their employability and ability to adapt.

The Roffey Park survey suggests that the organisational side of the partnership is lagging behind employee willingness to change tack. According to Hall and Moss this is only to be expected since it appears to take approximately seven years for an organisation and its members to reach an understanding of the new relationship. On the whole, our respondents were slightly less optimistic about career opportunities within their current organisation (60%) than about those within the sector as a whole (67%). The main reasons given for this were lack of opportunities for lateral growth or clear career paths, 'dead men's shoes', unimaginative career practices and lack of management support.

One of the ironies in our findings is that though people seem to be adjusting to the idea that career development means sideways as well as up, with 59% believing that their career will follow a lateral path, opportunities for lateral development are noticeably rare. So keen are people to take on lateral moves, that 81% stated that they would accept a lateral move even without a salary increase. This suggests that people are not only willing to take some risks but also want to break out of potential career bottlenecks. Clearly, though it would be in many organisations' interests to support such internal career mobility, not enough is being done in practical terms to make this possible.

And for the future?

Careers are not simply a little local issue between employers and employees. While an individual's expectations and aspirations may vary according to a range of factors including age, gender, race, location, type of industry, organisational experience, etc. careers as a whole reflect broader thrusts within a given society. It is perhaps in the deeper social trends that some of the sharpest ironies are to be found with regard to changing career patterns. According to Judy Rosener, mobility and flexibility will benefit both employees and employers. There will be a shift away from benefits being tied to a particular organisation. In future, benefits will need to be portable, adjusting to the demands of changing career patterns and providing freedom to move. However, in the UK, tax law and other changes appear to work against such mobility. Self-employed contractors may

well find themselves becoming 'employees' for tax purposes and proposed pensions legislation may limit people's career mobility and the age at which they can embark on a new career.

Similarly, according to Rosener, people can expect three to five careers in a working lifetime. Women in particular appear to have the advantage since they are able to capitalise on their intuitive attributes and work well within a network economy. However, the level of attainment is still tilted against women, particularly for top management roles. Until mid-2000, many employers in high growth sectors were striving to develop excellent employee relations in their bid to become an employer of choice for knowledge workers. With the current turbulence in the worlds of investment banking and telephonic communications, there has been a reversion to old style large-scale job cuts, even though the economic downturn may be temporary. The cost to latent employee commitment may be severe.

Some of the biggest frustrations were expressed by survey respondents who are in specialist roles. This is rather ironic since these are likely to represent the much heralded 'knowledge workers' whom organisations are said to be keen to attract and retain. On the whole scope for conventional career development through technical or professional roles appears limited. If people stay in specialist roles they are often squeezed out of promotion opportunities by generalists because the only promotion route available is through management. In many organisations, career paths are currently confused, making serious career choices difficult.

However, change does appear to be under way. One of the main shifts is that some organisations which recognise the value of these specialist knowledge workers are now attempting to retain and motivate them by offering a range of ways in which people can develop their careers without having to pursue a management route.

Looking ahead, the results of Roffey Park and other research suggest the following trends from which I hazard a few predictions:

- Most employees still hang on to the idea that career progression means promotion even if they are actively developing their skills and have given up the idea of job security with their current employer. Many still crave security and employers may find benefit in enabling employees to have some 'certainties' in so far as these are possible. Some organisations are already aiming to offer a degree of job security as a means of attracting and retaining the best. Organisations such as Hewlett Packard which respond to economic gloom by offering imaginative alternatives to redundancy may be the employers who win out when the economic climate improves.

- Since employees are becoming more confident about their employability, they are more likely to consider job moves now that the bonds of loyalty have considerably lessened. Increasing job movement and negotiation of career packages are probable.

- Highly employable people seem to now be looking for roles which appeal to their personal values, and money may not be the main consideration. More cross-sectoral job moves may be likely, including moves in and out of the voluntary and public sectors. People may increasingly choose to take career breaks or work flexibly in order to have more of what they consider important. Employers in the knowledge economy (especially those in the e-economy) are already recognising the need to attract skilled employees by having a well-articulated set of values which really work in practice.

- Work/life balance is becoming a major issue for many employees and is becoming a factor in people leaving organisations and looking for alternatives, including self-employment. People are less likely to be amenable to ongoing demands for long working hours and the implementation of work/life balance policies will become a business priority in organisations and professions experiencing skills shortages, such as the consultancies, nursing and construction.

- Employers are likely to have to develop 'revolving door' policies for departing employees whose skills are in demand and be prepared to negotiate appropriate deals to attract talent back into the organisation. This may be more expensive than having good development possibilities in place to start with.

- Flatter structures are likely to remain a dominant idea though 'knee-jerk' relayerings will be in evidence – however these are unlikely to last.

- Many organisations are regretting parting with more experienced/older employees and are now making early departures more difficult. The challenge will be to keep 'tired' employees motivated when they are unlikely to be attracted by another step on the ladder.

- The so-called 'post-corporate career' is really starting to happen and will become a more clear-cut trend as people's confidence increases. Career resilience is likely to be the key determinant of successful career self-management, linked with the ongoing quest for learning and new skills.

- The role of managers is changing and a variety of roles are now emerging. It is likely that generalist managers will become an endangered breed unless they are managing large and complex projects. It is probable that

generalists will need to develop some expertise of their own, if only in leadership, if they are to add value. Similarly, with regard to management styles, the old split between 'command and control' and participative management styles is blurring as there is increasing recognition that the role of managers needs to reflect current business conditions rather than popular fashion. However, a longer-term shift appears to have taken place with even traditionalists now recognising the need to motivate employees and to engage in teambuilding.

- Managers are in the front line of career matters and typically receive little practical help to enable them to make a good job of this. It is likely that wide spans of control will shrink to enable managers to really carry out the development sides of their role.

- Leadership will continue to be a key issue across all sectors- much craved by employees and generally perceived to be lacking in UK organisations. The e-commerce model of entrepreneurial leadership is likely to become a dominant fashion for a while.

- Organisations will continue to cast around for solutions to long term succession planning. Relatively conventional fast track schemes appear to be on the increase but it is questionable whether these will prove effective. Though people still aspire to onwards and upwards, they are often not prepared to make the longer-term commitment to the organisation that such schemes often require. Where fast track schemes exist they are often subject to a high 'churn' rate.

- High level technological skills will become a 'taken for granted' amongst younger employees. Older employees who have not kept pace with technological advances will become expendable.

Delivering the career partnership

'In those organisations where it has worked best, the new career contract does not represent a discontinuous corporate trauma. Rather it is simply an intelligent response to a turbulent and unforgiving economic climate. In this environment, 'success' comes disguised as an ongoing and difficult struggle, but one with a clear sense of values and vision, an appreciation of the crucial role of employees in achieving that vision, and a lifelong process of continuous learning'.

Hall and Moss, 1998

Since some of the major drivers of the changing career will continue unabated, organisations need to deliver their side of the career bargain if they want to attract and retain the best.

This is in everybody's interest because few people appear to contemplate a portfolio career and many employees still want to grow their career in the same organisation. If those people have both the skills and knowledge the organisation needs, maintaining an active career partnership makes sense. Similarly, attracting new employees who are increasingly discriminating about career choice means that organisations could lose out on the best potential employees unless they get their house in order with regard to their proposition for employees.

What do employees want from this partnership? Some of our respondents want greater flexibility; most want the chance of a better work/life balance, more reasonable workloads, a chance to grow on the job, and a challenge. The individual side of the career partnership has to include an intelligent assessment of respective needs, goals and opportunities and a willingness to learn continuously. Some employees may be willing to shift away from aspirations for 'onwards and upwards' if the organisation can supply the right degree of support for a different kind of career.

Most of all they still want to have a sense of future directions, both in terms of organisational strategy and career paths so that they can better develop their career to their satisfaction. Though Hall says that career planning does not really fit the new career paradigm, but job planning does, in practice our research suggests that people do want to know what routes are available to them so that they can start to navigate their way through the career jungle.

The key organisational players in delivering the organisational partnership are Human Resources (HR) professionals and line managers, including top management. Rather than fighting against the rising tide of mobility, HR professionals can help by developing relationships and joint ventures with various parties engaged in the mobile workforce. These include employable workers themselves, contractors, interim managers, consultants and employment agencies.

Creating meaningful career tracks, development workshops, innovative learning opportunities, enabling mechanisms such as competencies, job profiling, open job posting are only some of the possible aspects of an effective career strategy. Managing career management interventions may mean doing a few things well, rather than dispersing effort in a myriad of initiatives. A key challenge for HR managers will be to seize the opportunity to transfer the valuable skills and learning of incoming employees so that they become part of the organisation's culture and strategy. This change of focus from retaining the people who bring the knowledge, to the knowledge which they bring, makes Parker and Inkson raise the question: Should the HR manager become, or be replaced by, a KR manager (Knowledge Resource manager)?

Line managers need to be trained up to play their part in the career partnership. This is largely about coaching and being prepared to engage with employees' career concerns, focusing on helping people achieve their self-determined

career aspirations, not simply the organisation's interests. Line managers may need incentives and practical support - such as smaller spans of control - to enable them to help people with their development as well as performance.

Senior managers in particular need to take an active lead in developing new career processes. They should look for talented people of whatever age wherever they are based in their organisation. They should have a vested interest in doing this; after all, these people may be their future successors. Hurley et al. suggest that human resources practices should be changed to reward tenure. That way individuals with potential to reach the top can develop the core skills, flexibility and breadth of experience relevant to the organisation. Keeping people moving around the organisation should create both vertical and horizontal openings. Horizontal moves will keep employees learning and interested even when there are no openings for them at higher levels.

Looking ahead, organisations and careers must remain mutually supportive. Allred et al (1998) describe enterprises in the future in which individual work patterns will drive organisational form rather than following it. The 'post-corporate' career is a stage on from the current adaptations to evolving organisational structures. The employee's contribution is not dependent on the organisation, but mutually interdependent with it. The new dynamic creates constantly evolving networks and partnerships. Mutual trust and commitment will need constant enrichment. This means viewing employees and contractors as partners in a joint venture, rather than as human resources to be managed. For all concerned, the new career should be recognised as a do-it-yourself phenomenon. However, the smartest organisations are likely to be those which operate a real and meaningful long-term career partnership with talented individuals.

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Higher Education Careers Services - a Glimpse into the Future

Barbara Graham

Looking over horizons is a fascinating pastime, but where service to customers is involved, forward planning needs to be grounded in an understanding of their fundamental needs. This cardinal rule applies to forecasting the way ahead for higher education careers services as much as it does to any other form of future-gazing. In a period of intense scrutiny of careers services and rapid development of technology and instruments of assessment it is good to pause and ask some fundamental questions about what higher education careers services are trying to do for their customers and how they are going about it. This article reviews the role and future development of higher education careers services, giving an individual practitioner's viewpoint based on lengthy experience in a progressive, medium-sized university careers service.

A model fit for purpose

For more than half a century careers guidance for higher education students has been delivered by careers services which are based in and are an integral part of academic institutions. Is that still the best model – and is it one which will serve its clients well in the foreseeable future?

There are many reasons for answering this key question in the affirmative. As institutions have grown in complexity, offering a very wide range of courses at a variety of levels to an increasingly diverse student population, the need for careers guidance practitioners who can relate to the experience which students and graduates have had has become more pressing. It is not obligatory to share the same background as one's clients, but in the context of higher education it is an enormous advantage for guidance practitioners to belong to the same academic community as their clients – not least because that lends credibility to the relationship, which is a pre-requisite when working with graduates.

Integration within the institution is the key to extensive developments in careers education within the curriculum, an area which has made substantial progress in the last decade. The Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice in Careers Education, Information and Guidance assumes that the entire institution will work towards the fulfilment of students' entitlement to assistance with career choice and job search. Although the QAA stops short of insisting on the existence of a dedicated careers service in each institution, its expectations of what an institution should provide will increase rather than diminish the likelihood of such units being the preferred means of delivering careers education, information and guidance, in partnership with academic colleagues.

A third reason which secures the future of the institution-based careers service is its role as an interpreter of the higher education system for employers. Until all higher education institutions have the same academic profile, identical student populations, carbon copy missions and operate in exactly the same way, (and pigs may fly sooner!), attempts by employers and the recruitment agencies to which they outsource graduate recruitment to deal with all institutions in the same way will be frustrated. As long as institutions set out deliberately to differentiate themselves from one another, a key role of careers services will be provision of consultancy to employers on the particular benefits of recruiting students from various courses and on the best ways of raising their profile within the institution, given its structure and operating systems. In view of the complexity within a single institution, with Faculties which differ from one another, it is virtually impossible for an employer or an external agency to grasp the finer details for even a handful of targeted universities and colleges, let alone all the higher education institutions in the U.K.

In relation to its core client groups – students and graduates, academics and employers – it therefore appears that the institution-based careers service is not only currently a model fit for purpose, but it is likely to remain the best model as institutions continue to diversify their images and offerings.

Whither higher education careers services?

Assuming that the model is correct, are higher education careers services headed in the right direction and are they focusing on the kinds of services which their clients want? At a time of rapid development in careers guidance and graduate recruitment, coupled with rising client expectations, it is not at first sight obvious which of many possible activities higher education careers services should pursue. What is clear, however, is that if they pursue every possible option without adequate resources, they will end up providing a thin veneer of services with little depth below the surface.

At such a time it makes sense to re-visit fundamental professional principles and values and to ask how these can be better served in new ways thanks to the advent of technology and alliances with new partners. Above all, it is important to avoid jumping on every passing bandwagon in order to be a weak competitor in arenas where there are others better placed to succeed. Excelling in areas where one has distinctive expertise is generally the way to success and superb customer service.

It is becoming increasingly clear that while information gathering on careers for graduates is a vital role for higher education careers services, they cannot expect to thrive either by having a monopoly of that information bank in a web-enabled world or by offering that as the sole plank in their manifesto. Gaining access to information will become increasingly easier for all of the careers service's clients – but information alone does not always provide the answer to questions which are couched in the midst of dilemmas about what steps to take next.

Likewise, placement activity beckons with the potential of income generation. This could become a significant role for some larger careers services, but it is unlikely to become the distinguishing feature of all higher education careers services. There are too many well resourced competitors in the over-crowded recruitment industry for careers services to make significant inroads into the placement of hundreds of thousands of graduates emerging from higher education.

Beyond the practical aspects, there is a conflict between the impartiality of careers services' core guidance role and the almost inevitable selectivity of a placement role, which works well for the elite, but rarely for the majority.

Whatever additional functions are assumed, in future, higher education careers services will survive and flourish only if they can promote and deliver to high quality standards their unique selling point – namely, consultancy on their intimate knowledge of the graduate labour market, from the perspectives of both supply and demand. Their detailed knowledge of the supply of graduates – not only in numbers, but also characteristics – is the foundation of their value to employers. Conversely, their knowledge of the trends sweeping through the graduate labour market underpins the advice which they pass on to students, graduates and academics.

Listening to individuals in a mass higher education system

Addressing individuals' core needs is a sure way to offer a viable service in any line of business. Though much of the information which students need when finding out about careers can be produced for a mass audience, there is a kernel of unanswered questions for many, if not most, students which can only be addressed in the context of knowledge of the individual. This is at the heart of expert guidance. It is an invaluable experience for individuals to be heard and understood by an adviser who can give feedback with insight, reveal career options with assured knowledge and provide support through the selection process (however that may change in future).

This is the labour intensive aspect of careers guidance which may be under threat, but far from being a luxury, it is highly cost effective in the long run. Assistance with informed career choice can help to prevent a 'wandering in the wilderness' experience for graduates in the early years after graduation. Effective support for job search (sometimes intensively for graduates who do not fit employers' ideal profile) can reduce a period of unemployment, to the benefit of the individual and the economy.

This one-to-one relationship does not eschew all the advances of technology. Instead, it works with them to ensure that the model of human intervention plus technology offers a better service than either could alone. For instance, a careers adviser may proceed from diagnosis of needs to refer students to trustworthy websites for reliable careers information, course options and job vacancies. It is also possible to provide on-going support, tailored to the individual, via e-mail and telephone help-lines. Thus, a careers adviser now and in the future needs to be proficient in careers counselling skills as well as familiar with the potential of information and communications technology. If ever the latter eclipses the former, however, the unique distinction between careers advisers and information providers will be lost – to the detriment of clients.

Quality assurance

Assuming the careers services are heading in the right direction and concentrating on delivery of appropriate services, they will still have to prove that they meet quality standards. Performance indicators and quality assessment are embedded in the spirit of the age, but the choice of factors to measure must be informed by advice from careers guidance practitioners. Otherwise, the wrong conclusions may be drawn and the exercise of accumulating data about scarcely relevant issues will detract from developments which should move the guidance profession forward.

The true impact of quality careers guidance is difficult to measure as its outcome may be separated from the point of delivery by a period of months or even years, during which other factors may have intervened, making it difficult, if not impossible, to gauge the true value of the guidance.

At present most higher education careers services are in the foothills of evaluation, collecting by laborious means basic data about whether various services and facilities are in place. Much of this data collection is done for compliance rather than development purposes – for example, for accreditation or in order to be eligible to bid for resources. It is to be hoped that in future careers services will progress beyond

this level of quality assurance to a situation where impact evaluation is driven by a desire to use market research to determine whether the services on offer are those which clients would prioritise and to arrive closer to assessing the value added by careers services to clients' successful career decision making.

There will also have to be more ingenuity and sophistication employed in the collection of customer feedback. The public is sinking under the weight of questionnaires and so it is necessary to be very selective in what is attempted by that means. There is scope for electronic means of quantitative data collection via electronic diaries, swipe cards and electronic counters alongside qualitative evaluation via brief question and answer sequences on websites, telephone surveys and focus groups.

Once evaluation acquires an internal rather than an external impetus, the Quality Assurance Agency would do well to adopt the 'lighter touch' which has been promised. An insistence upon an excessive amount of basic level evaluation data will only serve to stunt progress in improving customer service in higher education careers services by diverting their resources and energies away from developmental activities.

Resource allocation

Whether resources are liberal or frugal, acquired through income generation or Government largesse, at the end of the day decisions have to be taken about how they are allocated. Almost without exception, higher education careers services are run prudently within existing parameters. The question, however, is whether the parameters set by authorities outside the guidance profession are the correct ones. Is optimum use being made of the expertise residing in careers services?

At present, for instance, a disproportionate amount of resource is spent on the collection of graduate destination statistics at a single point in time after graduation. Viewed logically, is it sensible for a purely administrative task to be undertaken by staff who have the skills and expertise to provide guidance and so improve the quality of graduates' destinations? It is logical that their understanding of the labour market should be used to interpret destinations data and to use it for the purpose of guidance, but it does not follow that the data collection should be the sole responsibility of careers services to the detriment of their core activities.

There is also the wider issue of national resource allocation. There is a fundamental flaw in a system which requires all institutions to comply with a common standard of excellence in careers education, information and guidance, but sets no minimum standard for the resources to be allocated for this purpose. Not only is there no recommended staff-student ratio for careers services, but neither is there any parity in the funding available for higher education careers services in the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. Development funds which exist in one country are not available in another – yet all are reviewed via a common quality assurance model. A common goal should be supported by equal access to funding.

It is not unreasonable to expect higher education careers services to generate some income, but since the most likely source of this income is employers, the extent to which careers services can do so depends on variable factors, such as the nature of courses offered by institutions and the buoyancy or otherwise of the graduate labour market. Unless there is an equitable public funding allocation as a foundation for service delivery, the better and less well resourced careers services will drift further apart in what they can offer to students, graduates and employers and the concept of equal access for all to quality guidance will remain a pipe-dream.

Conclusion

Standing at the portal of the twenty-first century, it appears that the model of the institution-based higher education careers service remains viable for its clients. Careers services should recognise that their unique selling point is adding value to information on higher education and the graduate labour market by offering guidance to students and graduates and consultancy to employers, using both traditional and electronic means of communication.

Quality assurance should outgrow a compliance mentality and become an effective tool for careers service managers as they seek to identify trends in consumer demand and develop appropriate services to meet emerging needs. Quality audits are a reasonable expectation for recipients of public funding, but scrutiny of quality service delivery should be preceded by the introduction of more equitable funding arrangements.

Higher education careers service staff are already well motivated towards excellence in service delivery for all their customers. It is, therefore, critical that this motivation should not be stifled by a compliance culture born of mistrust, but rather supported and encouraged to develop new means of sharing valuable expertise with all of the careers services' client groups.

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Foundation Degrees
What are they? Who are they for? Where can I find out more?

Margaret Lawson

What are they?

The foundation degree is a new higher education qualification which has been created and designed with input and co-operation from employers to meet the demand for highly skilled people who know their subject and can apply it in the workplace. The National Skills Task Force reports that by 2006 there will be some 9.2 million jobs for higher technicians and associate professionals – 700,000 more than today. To meet this need a new qualification was required to allow an extension to the vocational ladder created through National Vocational Qualifications and Advanced Vocational Certificates in Education.

Foundation degrees are the equivalent of an NVQ level 4 and are one level below honours degrees. They will attract a minimum of 240 credits. Programmes will provide a clear progression route to honours degrees in a related subject and to professional qualifications or NVQ level 5.

How did they come about and why?

The foundation degree was launched in England and Wales in February 2000 by the then secretary of State for Education David Blunkett. In his words:

'The foundation degree will raise the value of vocational and technical qualifications making them an attractive first choice for many students. A two year route to a degree with a high market value because of its focus on employability will offer a new option for people, both young and mature, who do not feel that a traditional, three years honours degree is right for them'. (Foreword to the Foundation Degree Consultation Paper, February 2000).

The DfEE sent out this consultation paper in February 2000 and it provided background information on the foundation degree as well as giving some examples of existing courses or projects which contained constructive suggestions for the foundation degree such as the new associate degree offered by a network of local further education colleges and Middlesex University. Responses were requested to the document in the form of a set of questions.

This raised an initial awareness of the foundation degree and prompted discussion as to what it was to be, what it would do and who it was for. In July 2000 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) sent out a foundation degree prospectus inviting bids for the prototype foundation degrees which were to receive development funding as well as funding for the additional new students the courses would attract.

Bids had to be returned by October and the chosen consortia were informed of their success in November. Few guidelines were provided either in the original consultation document or in the foundation degree prospectus as to the actual framework of the degree instead a list of 'core features' were set out and the expectation was that each foundation degree would develop along lines most appropriate to meet the specific needs of the local area.

These core features are considered essential to any foundation degree:

- Employers must be involved in both the design and delivery of the course. Employer support is essential.
- Both practical and theoretical skills as well as key skills must be developed within the course and it is essential that these skills are subsequently applied in the workplace.
- The Quality Assurance Agency in its national Qualifications framework stated that the foundation degree would be at intermediate level but no attempt was made to impose a credit framework. However, it is generally accepted that the foundation degree will attract 120 credits at Level 1(HE) and 120 credits at Level 2 (HE), but there are variations to this model. Credits should be transferable and many foundation degrees intend to offer students partial completion awards such as a certificate of higher education.
- The foundation degree has to articulate to at least one honours degree but it is important to remember that progression won't just be to an honours degree. It may be to some other higher level professional qualification or to a promoted post in work and many students quite correctly will see the foundation degree as a qualification in its own right.

Foundation degrees:

- are designed by employers often working with National Training Organisations
- are a mix of work related specialist skills and academic learning
- include key skills
- focus on the sectors important in today's knowledge-based economy
- will take into account previous experience
- are flexible
- are delivered locally
- are validated by a university
- are designed to make employees 'work ready'
- are part of lifelong learning with many progression opportunities.

Foundation degrees are intended to:

- increase career prospects
- improve earning potential
- gain the skills that employers are looking for
- be work related so graduates are ready for a job from day one
- lead on to further professional qualifications
- enable successful students to top up to honours degree
- widen participation by encouraging students who would not normally take a higher education course to do so.

Foundation degree students should be able to study at:

- college
- workplace
- home
- university
- on Line

or a combination of these.

Who are they for?

Foundation degrees are targeted at a variety of potential students and there is quite a significant difference between a full-time and a part-time foundation degree in terms of the type of student who might be interested in the course.

Part-time courses tend to be targeted at students who are already in employment, be it full-time or part-time, and who want to upgrade their skills to enhance their career prospects within the same job role or to allow them to transfer to some new job role perhaps in a different vocational area.

These students will be attracted to the foundation degree because of the flexibility of delivery and the fact they can study locally either at an further education college or in some cases even in their place of work. They will also be attracted because the entry qualification for foundation degrees clearly take in to account their relevant work experience and in many case do not insist on formal educational qualifications. Much of the assessment is through portfolio building or work-related assignments so this again cuts down on the time input required from the student as well as ensuring a core feature of the foundation degree - work-based learning and application of skills in the workplace - is ensured.

Full-time courses will tend to attract younger students from schools or further education colleges who require a degree level vocational qualification but whose results were perhaps not good enough for them to access an honours degree course immediately. Some of these may be students who would previously have enrolled on Higher National courses both Higher National Diplomas and Higher National Certificates but this is not to say that in some vocational areas and for personal reasons the Higher National qualification might still be the student's first choice.

In the case of full-time students, arrangements will be made to provide relevant work experience during the course.

Students may be able to obtain financial support. For further information on this please check:
www.dfee.gov.uk/hestudents/index/shtml

Where can I find out more?

There is a wealth of information freely available on the web and also in paper format.

The DfES has a web site for the foundation degree with much useful information as well as hyperlinks to other relevant web sites. This can be accessed at www.foundationdegree.org.uk

The DfES has also produced three publicity leaflets: FD01 for Career Guidance Professionals, FD02 for employers and FD03 for potential students. These are available from DfES Publications who can be contacted on 0845 60 222 60.

Several of the new foundation degrees have developed their own web sites and a particularly good one is the Foundation 4Success Consortium at Leeds Metropolitan University. This can be accessed at: www.lmu.ac.uk/foundation4success

A support team has been appointed to help with foundation degree development and they have useful information on their web site. You have to register to use it but this is usually a very simple process. This can be accessed at: www.foundationdegree.pwcglobal.com

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CRAC's new Insight Plus programme for undergraduates

Adam Nichols

Introduction

Insight Plus is a structured learning programme to match student casual work experience to employer requirements for key skills competencies. It will provide a framework for the accreditation of different types of work experience, including involvement in clubs and societies and volunteering in the community, as well as part-time paid work.

Why has Insight Plus been developed?

Employers are looking for potential graduate recruits with a strong academic track record, and a good degree; but they also want more. Leadership, the ability to work in teams, effective communication and an understanding of how organisations work are just a few of the competencies required to succeed in today's graduate labour market.

Whilst many universities are moving towards making these key skills an integral part of their degree programmes, many students develop important attributes and experience away from the lecture theatre.

Over 40% of students are now working between 12° and 40 hours per week in term time; and extra-curricular activities, such as sport, clubs and societies and volunteer work in the community are no longer seen as simply enjoyable recreational pursuits, but a valuable opportunity for students to develop their skills.

Yet, despite the fact that many students are spending more time on these activities than their studies, most receive neither structured support to enable them to maximise the learning potential of their casual work experience, nor formal recognition for the skills they develop.

Objectives

- To give employers greater insight into the experience and competencies of potential recruits
- To provide a standard or 'kitemark' for the skills developed through extra-curricular activities
- To give students the opportunity to optimise the value of their extra-curricular learning and provide a framework for career management by giving them the chance to demonstrate what they have learnt and to have that learning accredited

Outcomes of the programme

For each student, the programme seeks to identify:

- career management and development skills
- interests and aptitudes
- aspirations
- personal value system and motivational drives
- identification of transferable skills from previous work experience
- opportunities for further skill development

It also:

- makes the link between work experience, transferable skills and employability
- helps students to develop action plans and present themselves electronically, on paper and verbally
- better equips undergraduates to find an appropriate and challenging graduate job
- gives the opportunity for full and thorough reflection
- gives a broad overview of how organisations work
- offers the chance to demonstrate learning
- provides the opportunity for feedback

How long will the programme take?

Accreditation is based on around 200 hours of work experience which could be the sum of a variety of activities - for example voluntary and paid work. This figure equates to ten hours per week over the twenty weeks of the programme, an amount we know is already exceeded by the vast majority of students.

Participants will also need to show evidence of at least 10 hours of related private study – around half an hour per week – which will be facilitated through the Insight Plus learning resource (see below).

Structure

The programme is delivered via students' unions, jobshops and careers services. It has three key elements:

1. Workshops

Two separate workshops will mark the beginning and end of the Insight Plus programme. Each is managed by CRAC, utilising its successful *Insight* methodology, being delivered with the help of a team of facilitators drawn from participating universities and employers.

2. Website

The Insight Plus website comprises:

- a reflective learning log
- a virtual support manual
- chat areas, in which students can discuss their personal development with their peers
- online events, such as presentations from graduate employers
- a search facility enabling students to source paid and unpaid work experience opportunities at their local university

3. Mentoring

Each student on the programme has a personal mentor, to provide a support service for students during the main period of the programme. Mentors receive training at a full day workshop delivered by the National Mentoring Consortium. This mechanism provides the added benefit of a development opportunity for the mentors themselves.

The mentoring itself consists of:

- regular email communication between mentor and mentee
- online tutorials, in which mentors facilitate discussion with their mentees

Mentors are drawn from two distinct groups:

- Staff working for commercial, public and private sector organisations
- Mature students with some workplace experience

Target audience

There are two distinct target audiences: UK undergraduates and graduate employers. In phase one of the project (September 2001 – May 2002) we will be concentrating on 14 HE institutions and approximately 700 students, with up to 60 HE institutions and 12,000 students participating in year two (from September 2002). We also aim to involve at least ten graduate employers during the initial two phases.

Evaluating success

The following criteria will be used:

- greater numbers of students participating in personal development planning
- establishment of IP as nationally recognised standard
- involvement of employers of students on casual work experience in the project
- reduction in the pressure of the need for work placements
- employer recognition of IP as part of the graduate recruitment sifting process

Various methods will be used to test these criteria:

- participant numbers
- retention rates
- recruitment focus group
- written survey or participants and employers
- workshop evaluation forms

Benefits

For students

- The opportunity to optimise the value of their extra-curricular learning and provide a career management framework
- The chance to demonstrate what they have learnt and to have that learning accredited
- Delivers what they need by exploiting the potential of activities in which they are already engaged

For universities

- The opportunity to be part of a groundbreaking new national initiative
- Provides an excellent product to add genuine value to students' experience of Higher Education
- Draws together all the student development initiatives across an institution towards one cohesive goal
- Develop links with industry
- Develop links with a variety of national networks

For employers

- Gives a greater insight into the experience and competencies of potential recruits
- Provides a standard or 'kitemark' for the skills developed through casual work experience

For employer partners

- National exposure to the key undergraduate audience
- The opportunity to get to know the cream of today's undergraduates in an informal setting
- Staff development through mentoring
- The opportunity to contribute to a key government priority

For mentors

- An excellent staff development opportunity, especially for staff without direct line management responsibilities
- Improvements to self image and self esteem
- Learn more about their own organisation in order to answer questions from mentees
- The mentoring scheme links well to other staff development programmes
- The high quality training provided by the National Mentoring Consortium has widespread application outside this programme

About the project partners

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) is providing overall project management and co-ordination for the Insight Plus programme. Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Mars and Consignia are founder employer partners. The project is also being supported by Independent News & Media, activate.co.uk, NEBS Management, National Union of Students (NUS) and the National Association of Student Employment Staff.

Getting involved

CRAC are now recruiting universities for phase two of the programme from September 2002 as well as mentors from across the country. Please contact Adam Nichols, Programme Manager if you are interested in either of these opportunities at adam.nichols@crac.org.uk or on 01223 448514.