

Our experience at this stage has demonstrated to us the value of consultation with employers and the level of support they are willingly prepared to provide. Feedback from a recent student workshop has emphasised the value students place on such events, in making explicit to them the goals they need to achieve to be successful in obtaining employment and in motivating them to study.

Students excerpts:

"It is very important to meet people from the real world who are employed in environmental areas"

"It helped me direct my attention towards working more now to achieve a good degree"

95% of the students who attended the workshops found the information about careers either useful or very useful.

The following were considered the most important things students had learnt:

- The identification of key skills and how to highlight them for employers;
- Postgraduate research as an option;
- Work experience can be just as important as academic achievement;
- The importance of networking within the Northern Ireland environmental sector.

Involving employers has been of enormous benefit to the School and has provided us with the external perspective that we as academics can often miss. Also, through our subsequent work on embedding careers within the curriculum, we have tapped into another valuable, but often unused resource - namely our careers staff. The use of employers and careers staff has helped to convince students of the need to identify their career plans and to maximise opportunities to put them into practice.

If you would like to find out more about this careers initiative and how it operates, please contact us using the email addresses below.

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Stressful Experiences are Useful Experiences: Creating Skill-based Materials for GEES Students

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Careers and student related activities can be embedded in the curriculum through academic, subject-based, and more generic activities. The exercises described in this article could form elements that are tested at an interview or an assessment-centre. They are short, generally effective, and get students working in teams under pressure in the GEES disciplines.

The exercises outlined below give students experience in working under pressure and thinking on their feet – useful attributes at interviews and more widely in the world of work.

The key for the lecturer is to design an activity that can be reasonably well done in 'x' minutes. Then, the time allocated for each task can be reduced by about 30%, or the amount of supporting information provided can also be reduced, or you could remove a normally available element, so that people have to co-operate (work effectively as a group) to find a less obvious way to get the task done on time. Examples from related disciplines rather than from a students' direct experience can be more effective because students work on and understand the skills processes and pay less attention to the content.

Creativity and Group Work

Design a poster that explains the skills ... (geography / earth science) ... students have or, design a poster that explains the skills ... (environmental science / maths) ... graduates take to the workplace. Work in groups of six. You have twelve minutes, one sheet of flip chart paper, four pens and you are not allowed to use words on your poster.

Where this exercise is done at the start of a module it is worth keeping the posters, repeating the exercise 'x' weeks later and asking the students to comment on the differences.

This exercise develops creativity, innovation, discussion, co-operation, negotiation, presentation and art-work skills.

Context Case Studies

'Context' is a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) programme which promotes key skills in Higher Education. Some Context Case Study's (available on-line – see below) can be completed in only 2-3 hours. Using 'Design a National Flood Warning Campaign' or 'Seatons Chemicals' you might give each group of six just one or two copies of the briefing materials. This forces students to talk, and to share ideas.

Both cases develop teamwork, negotiation, discussion, planning, creativity, time-management and presentation skills. The Seatons Case is excellent in showing students that there are no 'right' answers and in practising decision making skills. The National Flood Warning study ends with a press briefing and conference, which is also useful in developing 'thinking on your feet' skills.

Tutor's and student's notes can be downloaded from:

<http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/courses/other/casestudies/>

Data Analysis

Give each group a data set and ask for an analysis presented on an OHT in an impossibly short time. Using first destination employment data for past graduates is one option. Ask students to graph the

destinations of 80-100 graduates, and be ready to present the results to the whole class in 12 minutes. The task can be done using all the data if the group agree very quickly on the categories, divide up the work and then combine the data. It can also be done by sampling, say every 5th item on the list. This is an approach that shows students have learnt something from sampling and data management classes.

The exercise develops skills in working under pressure, decision making, communication, negotiation, presentation and lateral thinking skills.

Design a Protocol / Procedure / Experiment to

You have one (two...) hours to look at the attached material and develop a plan to ... Limit the time and ideally take an example that asks for general rather than specific knowledge. Tell them that you do not want a complete answer. Some elements will be complete, while others will require a statement that more work is needed on ... It is how the student sets about the task and their ability to see and solve many aspects of a multi-dimensional problem and to negotiate that is important, rather than the details of the final answer. Examples include:

- Design a protocol to ensure safety while making a lasagne supper for 50 at a campsite (limited shopping list, limited tools).
- Design an experiment to retrieve a two-man canoe from a limestone cavern system (supply some maps and a starter equipment list such as short ropes).

This exercise develops creativity, negotiation, logic, empathy, insight, planning, decision making and presentation skills.

Getting outside the box – creative thinking

Brainstorming in action. Brainstorming is about quantity of ideas, not the quality. Try it sequentially with solo oral answers, solo written answers and group answers. Say 15 minutes maximum for all three stages, including feedback. The dynamic and volume of answers changes each time, and students piggy back on each others' ideas.

What could you use this 'flipchart, its stand and a chair' for? Ask for 10 answers in 120 secs – (medium), 20 (good), 30 plus (outstanding). Other objects might include a sledge; music stand; clothes rail; bar-be-que etc.

Student Reflection:

'I felt quite uncomfortable and a bit bewildered as to what sort of answers were wanted.'

'I needed to change my way of thinking, ... find a more creative angle rather than a sensible answer.'

'I found it hard to work creatively under pressure, and as a result realise this is something to work on...'

'It was good because of the 'no idea is worthless' ethic, which did mean that trains of thought that seemed to be going nowhere could result in some good ideas.'

'I was nervous about speaking at the start, I did not want to look stupid, discussing in the group was more relaxing... I realise I need to be more self-confident and put my ideas forward at the start.'

This exercise develops creative thinking, time management, communication, negotiation and lateral thinking skills, and realising how one responds to solve the same problem individually (verbally and on paper), and as part of a team.

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A 'Career Planning Agreement' devised for Geography programmes

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This article reports on a Career Planning Agreement (CPA) designed by The University of Brighton. The CPA aims to embed careers planning in degree programmes, in response to national guidance. This article looks at the approach adopted jointly by the Department of Geography and the Careers Centre and highlights the way in which departmental and careers staff have successfully introduced the CPA through the design and development of a Careers module. The success of the Geography initiative is borne out by the fact that other degree programmes are adopting similar modules throughout the rest of the University.

The Rationale

The Career Planning Agreement (CPA) at the University of Brighton was devised to provide a framework to meet specific career planning learning outcomes through inclusion in the students' curriculum. Dearing's recommendations (NCIHE, 1997), the QAA Code of Practice for Career Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG) (DfEE, 2001) and the Higher Education Careers Service Review (Harris, 2001) all recognise the need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to implement CEIG strategies. These will only be successful if supported by the academic departments and their courses.

Employers at the LTSN-GEES Subject Centre's 'Embedding careers in the academic curriculum conference' at the Geological Society in March 2001 stated that graduates need to successfully demonstrate competence in key skills during the careers application process, and that key skills need to be made explicit in the curriculum (GeogNet, 2001). The CPA endeavours to deliver this through its learning outcomes.

Aims of the CPA

- To ensure careers content within courses is made explicit to students, rather than being implicit;
- To ensure students are prepared for the transition to life after university;
- To focus students on the support they need to facilitate this transition;
- To ensure a common standard for all students in the support they receive within courses with lifetime career management;
- To establish a partnership approach between courses and the careers centre to deliver aspects of CEIG;
- To develop an institutional approach to CEIG with responsibility lying within departments and with the careers service;
- To use and build on good practice in delivering the learning outcomes of courses;
- To share good practice and map skills across the university.