

The CPDP pivots around four key questions, which represent the starting point for each teaching session:

- What have I got?
- What do I want to do?
- What is available to me?
- How do I get there?

These are generally recognised to be central to careers and personal development planning and each session focuses on one or a combination of these questions.

The CPDP is delivered in the form of lecture/practical sessions, of which there are around twelve, occurring with increasing frequency across the three years.

At Levels 1 and 2, the programme will use occasional teaching slots in existing B.Sc. Geography modules. In dealing with the above four questions, the CPDP draws on ideas and activities that are already used widely by careers services and personal development trainers (e.g. learning record sheets, skills and values audits, personal profiles, goal setting and 'prospects planner'). Broadly speaking, Level 1 has been designed to provide an overview of all the four key questions.

Sessions in Level 2 are intended to have more of a personal development emphasis, which will point towards and underpin an existing Work Based Learning or Experiential Learning double module, which all students are required to take in the final part of the year. Although the content of these two modules is very different (the former a six week work placement, the latter a residential field course in Spain), they both share an assessment component which requires students to reflect on their personal progress against targets which they have set themselves at the start of the module.

At Level 3, focused and practical guidance with a careers emphasis will form an important component of the programme (e.g. interview skills, letters of application).

Evaluation

Initial staff impressions and student feedback about the CPDP and our first year experience have generally been positive and encouraging. However, although a fairly clear vision has been developed for all three years of the programme, some important challenges remain. Of these, the most significant are likely to be maintaining the momentum of the initiative and, linked to this, keeping student interest and commitment. Irrespective of the value of the content, the programme is 'spread out' and there will be lengthy gaps between sessions. As a result, the student experience of the CPDP will be very different to a concentrated twelve-week module. Furthermore, at least for the moment, no part of the CPDP is formally assessed, which may act as a disincentive for some.

Working against these potential difficulties, however, is the deliberate embedding of sessions into existing modules as mentioned above. This increases the formality of the process, as does the direct input and tuition from the college careers service. The simple structure of the CPDP, based around the four key questions, is also designed to facilitate student engagement. Furthermore, a concerted attempt has been made to give the CPDP a clear identity, including the centralisation of all materials in student portfolios which are added to through the activities in each session.

Chris Ribchester

Department of Geography
Chester College of Higher Education
c.ribchester@chester.ac.uk

Judith Done

Head of Careers Service
Chester College of Higher Education
j.done@chester.ac.uk

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Why include Careers? The data

Pauline Kneale
University of Leeds

Why take time from the academic element of a degree to consider career related elements? Our students act in PR and ambassadorial roles for the department and will influence the prospects of the next generations of students, including their own children. Almost all students have a great-time while at university but what messages do they reflect down the line? What is their post-degree experience? This article considers destination data for GEES graduates as a starting point for discussion.

One driver for change in the HE careers agenda is the QAA Code of practice – 'Career education, information and guidance' available from <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/cop/COPcex/contents.htm> (and reproduced at the back of this publication).

Government and industry are driving the new skills agenda, encouraging higher education to an ever more vocationally/market oriented provision. The 'learning society' and the 'knowledge economy' are phenomena we are beginning to grapple with. These changing contexts raise many questions for the development of students' skills, prompting consideration of the role and function of skills in higher education. Skills are integral to Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Geography BUT:

Do our students and their employers value these skills?
Do our students make the most of this aspect of their degree?

One reality for students is exemplified in their comments:
'There are no jobs so why waste time looking, I must get a 2:1'
and:

'There is no time, I have a job four mornings a week and in one evening, and that's knacker. After university work you don't have the energy to fill in application forms, and if I take a day off for an interview I'll lose my job, and I can't afford that'.

At one level, GEES students do well in post-graduation first destination statistics (obtained six months after graduation) (Table 1).

While the very large majority of graduates are employed or undertaking further study, a closer analysis of the data shows that well under 50% of those entering employment in the first six months are joining companies at the graduate entry level. While a number of students are taking temporary jobs to raise money for travelling or

Degree Scheme	Geography	Earth Science	Environmental Science
Year of Graduation	1998	1998	1998
Employed	86	38	46
Still Seeking Employment/ Unknown	10	5	20
Not Available (Time Out/ Travel)	17	3	7
Further Study	21 (5 PGCE, 4 MA, 8 MSc, 3 PhD, 2- CPE and LPC: College of Law, Dip H.Ed., Nursing)	24 (16 MSc, 7 PhD, 1 MRes)	21 (1 MA, 1 MRes, 7 MSc, 5 PhD, 2 CPE and LPC: College of Law, 1 BTEC Art and Design)
Total	134	70	94

Table 1: One university's careers data

for debt repayment, further exploration through questionnaires and interviews reveals many stories typified by two people who had five jobs in two years. First a 2.1 BSc graduate who said:

'I decided to concentrate on the degree and not to apply for jobs until I graduated. Not such a good idea in retrospect. It was quite difficult applying from home although I got the vacancies bulletin. My local town careers centre was hopeless. I kind of messed about for 3 months. Then went to Europe with a friend. I got my first job as a storeman but that wasn't going anywhere. Then I worked for a PC retailer. It was interesting but... When I started to apply for graduate jobs it was difficult to explain the gap, and I sent off over 90 applications before I get sorted.'

And from a 2.1 graduate with Word, PowerPoint and Excel skills when she left university:

'I didn't know what I wanted, or really what I could do. So I temped in a local factory for 9 months, then I got on an 'into work scheme' and that helped me to get a clerical job. Then I was quite lucky and got picked for a management traineeship. Since then I have moved to as a junior manager.'

It is not all a picture of doom and gloom. Among the 30% who moved quickly into graduate level career work, we have many happy and settled graduates and some who used their first job to springboard to the next. However, those who left university without clear directions are taking a long time to get jobs with 'graduate earnings potential'. Earth Science, Environmental Science and Geography graduates are certainly no worse off than many other graduates, and generally are marginally better off because they pick up IT and finance related jobs more easily than general arts graduates. But is the current position good enough?

Significant numbers of our recent students are not in graduate careers. Talking to those caught in the post-graduation trap, there is clearly an issue about their self-confidence and about their role as the 'walking adverts' for our subjects - not perhaps the ideal image for them to pass on to friends, siblings and eventually their own children. They are

left with an image of a great degree experience, great fun, super place, great friends but not a course quickly leading to graduate work to help clear the debts; the 'was it really worth it?' factor.

'Career modules' are one useful way forward in encouraging students to value their degrees, and a useful PR activity for departments. GEES degrees give students many skills but often fail to provide the careers education and guidance which will enable students to use these skills to obtain graduate-level posts. In the current climate, this is an issue we cannot afford to neglect.

Pauline Kneale

School of Geography
University of Leeds
p.kneale@geography.leeds.ac.uk

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