

accreditation give recognition to the importance placed on ongoing recording, reflecting and planning processes. It is crucial for students' motivation to make relevant links to future career plans and the aim is to increase their awareness and confidence in the value and marketability of the degree they are working towards. The work experience element is obviously a key part of this, but regular opportunities to make connections between current activities and possible future work demands are essential in practising the skill of transfer. That is, thinking through how to apply knowledge and skills in different contexts.

## Assessment

The draft portfolio we are currently working on carries a 40% weighting and includes a personal skills audit matched to specific career aspirations, an interview role play and a presentation to an employers' panel. The skills audit moves students on from simply listing examples of activities that demonstrate skills, to analysing and describing specific academic tasks at level three, and work-related experiences for the purpose of developing 'self-marketing' strategies. Students are encouraged to complete in-depth research into possible job roles and are expected to explore the demands of each. This research enables them to practise justifying their own suitability and motivation for the positions. The portfolio also requires a detailed action plan linked to accurate understanding of graduate labour market trends.

## Conclusions

This document will be used by the first cohort of students taking the module next year, and will no doubt be subsequently refined and modified. It is intended to increase students' awareness of the value of their undergraduate education and the potentially high level of employability it provides. In addition, the processes involved will give a firm grounding for self-reflective professional development, which is an integral part of long-term career management.

For an interactive paper on PDPs, which will encourage you to contribute to the thinking on what PDP means, please visit:  
<http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/for-us/communications/UKbriefings/ref-0111.asp>

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## What Career Skills do our Graduates take to the Marketplace?

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*GEES students are multi-talented and multi-skilled. The problem is that they have trouble in acknowledging this. They generally disregard or undervalue the skills they acquire inter alia with GEES knowledge. In this paper, we look at some mini-exercises as a basis for discussing how this position can be reversed.*

GEES graduates are well summarised by this employers' comments: 'Graduates come in with a level of education and intellect, and the level of work and commitment that is involved in passing a degree. So, in a sense, there are certain hoops that must have been jumped through in quite a short space of time. They have been trained to an extent in broad skills rather than just in a specific academic qualification. They are usually people who are willing to train further and to take further courses. They are not frightened by that and are usually quite alert in terms of what is happening in employment terms in their specific field' (Harvey *et al.*, 1997).

The skills employers want are generally summarised in lists which almost always include variations on: effective communication, teamwork, problem solving ability, analytical skills, flexibility / adaptability, self management / motivation, decision making, independent judgement, logical argument, research skills, creativity, IT skills, ability to relate to wider context and specialist subject knowledge.

Most careers and academic staff will agree that:

**By studying their GEES courses students acquire:** IT skills, organisational skills, presentation skills and specialist subject knowledge.

**By doing part-time jobs whilst studying students acquire:** communication skills, team working skills, people skills (ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds), time management skills, self management and motivation skills.

**By being at university they acquire:** Financial planning skills, decision making skills, communication skills, stress management skills, self management and motivation skills.

But careers staff observe that without considerable coaching and encouragement almost all GEES students DO NOT present the evidence for having these skills in their CV's, on their application forms and in their interviews. This is a real issue for getting through the early rounds in applications and causes unnecessary disillusionment. GEES students have the skills, we need to find ways to encourage them to recognise these skills and both talk and write about them.

So what can be done? This section outlines four very brief examples of activities that might be part of a 'careers' module or part of a traditional lecture course or which could be done on fieldwork or in tutorials.

- 1) The 'What is a graduate?' poster exercise asks students in groups of 5-7 to create a poster that defines graduateness. The only rule is 'no words allowed'. It takes about 10-15 minutes and requires the use of communication and creativity skills. 'No words' posters

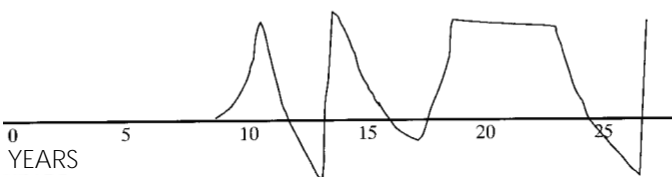
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can be used elsewhere in the curriculum to generate 'out-of-box' thinking. In all these sessions it is vital to take time in reviewing and commenting on the work to make sure students realise that in addition to achieving a product they are variably proud of, they have also used team work, communication, creative, and perhaps negotiation and presentation skills to complete the task.

- 2) *Legomania* is an exercise that many careers staff are familiar with as an ice breaking and group work task. The team has to construct a Lego person from a set number of Lego pieces in a given time. One person at a time is allowed to go and look at an example of the finished product so there has to be communication for the team to complete the task. Building a Kit-e-Kat tower is a similar exercise with easily available resources. Each group of 6 is given the same number of straws, pins and length of string. The winning team is the one that constructs the tallest tower from the materials to support the tin of Kit-e-Kat in the given time. This exercise drives home ideas about teamwork, communication, group leadership and how suggestions were pooled and chosen. In addition, time and stress management skills emerge.
- 3) Decision making is an issue that arises in interviews. People make decisions all the time but when asked how you make decisions it is not unusual for an interviewee to fail to recognise the processes involved, or to explain how s/he arrives at personal best processes. *The Life Line* exercise asks you to plot a decision making line in relation to your age. Good decisions go up, bad decisions go down. The materials required are minimal: (e.g.)



The dimensions could be something like participation in sport/music or academic achievement or perhaps decisions affecting ones overall life.

Student's comments after this life-line exercise are very revealing:

*'I hadn't realised how much I rely on other people: I let other people take control and go with their ideas'*

*'I tend to put off decisions until the reality overtakes me and I realise that I have no choices left'*

This is an exercise that really makes students think about how they operate as individuals. It is very quick to complete but they also need time to make some notes about how they operate and what that means, and whether they need to take more control – some do and some remain happily as they are.

- 4) Encouraging students to recognise and become familiar with talking about their skills can be usefully undertaken using the *competency-based questions* that come up on application forms in one guise or another. From the Procter and Gamble Management Application Form 2001 - *'Give an example of when you set yourself a demanding goal and overcame obstacles to achieve it'*. Or *'Give an example of when you led a group of people, set directions for them, gained their commitment and led them to achieve outstanding results'*. Such questions ask people to articulate their self-motivation and management skills. First attempts at these are invariably weak.

Evidence which students can use can come from within academic, part-time jobs, leisure and other activities. Talking around experiences in pairs helps people articulate the activity, and move from just describing it to explaining and evaluating their role.

GEES graduates have extensive transferable and very marketable skills. However, students need the encouragement, time and opportunity to identify and articulate the skills they possess. We need to devise learning experiences to help them to do this.

## Reference

Harvey L., Moon S., Geall V. and Bower R. (1997) *Graduates Work: Organisational Change and students attributes*, Centre for Research into Quality and Association of Graduate Recruiters, UK.

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## A Graduate's Perspective – from Geography to recruiting Geographers

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*EuroDirect is a company based in Skipton which has chosen to recruit locally through university contacts as well as through the traditional routes. Martin Bradbury is a GEES graduate who actively retains contacts between the business and Leeds university, to the benefit of both. Many students wish to continue to live in the area where they went to university, and search for local jobs. Building and retaining active contacts with local businesses enables a university department to offer workplace opportunities for project students, work experience opportunities, a window into industry and potential employment opportunities for graduates. This paper argues that cultivating such relationships is a win-win situation, one that can help to give students an insight into the local small to medium enterprises (SME's) as well as the wider employment market.*

Martin Bradbury is a geography graduate who currently works for EuroDirect (<http://www.eurodirect.co.uk/>). He was in the right place at the right time gaining a job ideally suited to a GIS 'er'. EuroDirect is a rapidly expanding database marketing company, with award-winning Geographical Information Systems, creating bespoke analysis systems, working with the Electoral Roll and Census Agency. The company employs 80 members of staff, has a £7 million turnover and offices in Bradford and Leeds. Essentially, the business involves building and providing solutions for transforming raw data into valuable marketing intelligence, to enable corporate clients to build competitive edge through innovative use of publicly available data and information.