

EuroDirect uses the traditional methods of recruitment including recruitment agencies, advertising in newspapers, advertising in trade magazines, the graduate gateway programme and interviews. It wants a variety of people and lists the following characteristics as ideal for new employees: client responsiveness, creative thinking, self-motivation, ability to work in a team and individually, enthusiasm, confidence, ability to work well under pressure and a capacity for hard work. In addition to their general recruitment, EuroDirect also ensure that information is circulated to local universities. Previous research and personal contacts mean that the company gains a particularly good understanding of students and their qualities through conversations with staff at the University of Leeds who understand the level of technical competence that may be required and are in a position to advertise potential project, work experience or employment opportunities to postgraduate and undergraduate cohorts. The company's recruitment programme benefits from these contacts.

From the academic standpoint, employers who are happy to contribute in a relevant way to academic courses and who are keen to pursue town-gown links are a real benefit. Students thoroughly enjoy meeting graduates a few years into employment and gain considerably from their 'stories' of the reality of employment and the relevance of that nightmare computer practical which *'makes perfect sense now'*. A company that offers direct GIS experience has clear and immediate links to the geography curriculum, but many local SME's offer comparable experiences to students. Links may be made with local voluntary organisations or environmental groups where there is always project work and not enough resources.

The student experience of the workplace by whatever means is a bonus on a CV, good interview material, and almost always a positive experience. Employer links of all types are very well worth cultivating, and using the alumni is a great first-step or 'foot in the door'.

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The LTSN Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) is developing a **register of expertise** database. This enables us to efficiently and effectively put individuals who approach the Centre with a learning and teaching **question**, in-touch with relevant experts in our disciplines. So, if you would like to know more about computer-based assessment, integrating C&IT in fieldwork, subject benchmarking, running overseas field trips etc., or if you have any other question or query, then please contact Judith Gill at the Subject Centre on: 01752 233530 or email: info@gees.ac.uk. We **guarantee** a response time of no more than **48 hours**.

A careers module for final year Geographers

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The QAA Code of Practice on Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG), asks institutions to consider embedding careers guidance and planning within the academic curriculum. This article illustrates one way by which this can be achieved. The Plymouth University Geography degree includes a compulsory third year ten credit module (for 140 students!) in Geography, Employment and Careers (GGY 3004) which was introduced in 1999 and for which we can therefore now derive the lessons of the first two years of experience.

The GGY 3004 module was designed in response to the original Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1998) recommendation on embedding careers education in the discipline-based academic curriculum. Geography at Plymouth has a long established commitment to key skills and a small component on careers was already included in a stage two skills module. Despite this platform, many departmental colleagues were initially wary about a full-blown careers module (our debates pre-dated the QAA Code). It was not considered sufficiently 'academic' and some colleagues were only won over because half the module focused on economic geography, particularly the academic study of changing patterns of employment.

Lesson one: Consider trying to win over sceptical staff (and students) by the inclusion of an 'academic' subject-based component. Avoid isolating careers education from the rest of the curriculum: build bridges not fences.

The principal rationale for the module is to act for the students as a link between academia and the world of work. It helps them to prepare for the process of job searching, applications and interviews and enables them to place their own experience within the context of some general employment patterns and trends.

On successful completion of the GGY 3004 module, students should be able to:

- demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of changing employment patterns and labour markets;
- reflect critically on the value of a geographical education (particularly in relation to careers);
- prepare a good CV and give an effective account of themselves at interview.

The module is taught jointly by Mandy Burns (Careers Advisor) and Brian Chalkley (Human Geographer). Mandy provides the specialist inputs on topics such as CVs, assessment centres and interviews. Brian provides the economic geography and is able to develop links to other parts of the students' geography curriculum.

The module learning outcomes are achieved and the curriculum is delivered through a variety of teaching and learning methods. These include lectures, talks from employers and former graduates, a video on assessment centres, role-plays, reading and web-based materials.

Of these, the students consider the guest lectures from outside speakers to be the most effective and valuable.

Lesson Two: The inclusion of talks by local employers/professionals is vital in enhancing students' awareness of how organisations work. Talks by former graduates can give present students a real sense of where they might be in a few years time.

This module is assessed by an unseen examination (focused mainly on the academic component dealing with employment change), by a piece of reflective coursework and by a mock interview, which is conducted one-to-one by a member of staff. The interview questions demand evidence of the students' skills and experience in areas such as team working and problem-solving. With 140 students taking the module, the interview workload is shared equally across the 26 departmental staff.

Lesson 3: Despite the artificiality of the occasion, students greatly appreciate the experience of going through the mock interview and value the feedback on their performance. This is a form of learning and assessment we would certainly recommend.

The first two years of GGY 3004 have confirmed our commitment to this kind of approach to embedding careers in the curriculum. However, there are limitations and problems. Academic modules, and especially those with large student numbers, do not allow the one-to-one careers guidance which most students still need. They can enhance but not replace the services traditionally provided by specialist careers advisors. Some students see this kind of module as not sufficiently subject-based (not enough geography!) and also as too 'standardised' to meet their particular careers interests or needs.

Overall, however, we feel the approach is still worthwhile. Although we have no follow-up data on our students' medium-term careers progress after the first destination survey, we feel that they are leaving University better equipped to succeed in taking forward their personal career development. They have, for example, an improved understanding of the changing world of employment, of assessment centres, interviews, and the kinds of career opportunities open to them.

Finally, we would underline that modules of this kind, require, in line with QAA expectations, close collaboration between careers staff and subject-based academics. Although working together necessitates compromises, it can also be exciting and innovative.

Lesson Four: There are many benefits to be derived by bringing together the experience, knowledge and skills of careers specialists and academics. We have a lot to learn from each other and students can certainly benefit from this collaborative approach.

References

NCIHE (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education) (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society, London, HMSO.

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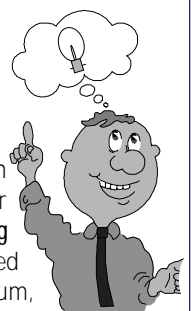
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