



First year student experience Wales

A practice guide

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and First Year Experience Wales project group members

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Introduction

The Higher Education Academy in Wales regularly meets with several consultative groups from the Welsh higher education institutions. One such group¹ share current initiatives and practice designed to support the first-year experience. The University of Glamorgan volunteered to co-ordinate a special interest group, and each institution nominated a member of staff to join the project team. The project became known as the First-Year Experience Action Set and was established in October 2008. In the academic year 2008-09 the group produced approximately 40 case studies, which were published under the title of First-Year Experience Wales – A Practice Guide. The success of that publication led the HEA in Wales to ask the FYE Action Set to continue and over the 2009-10 academic year participants have worked together to bring a collection of initiatives forward for wider dissemination on two different themes – innovation in first-year assessment and enabling employability through the first-year curriculum.

The group has also established a wiki, which will be linked with the wiki supporting last year's publication – details will be announced in due course. The members of the FYE Action Set hope you find this publication and the resources on the wiki useful for enhancing practice concerning the first-year student experience.

Overview and aim of the project

Feedback from the first FYE Wales Practice Guide suggested that the value in hearing from practitioners about things that have worked, and things that could have gone better, set the guide apart – the voices of the practitioners were clearly heard throughout. The group's overall aim was to share initiatives designed to support and enhance the first-year student experience in Wales, and we have benefited immensely from the very positive approach that all group members took in willingly sharing the good, the bad, and the sometimes ugly, experiences along the way. We see this publication as contributing to the evidence on how to enhance the first-year experience in UK higher education.

As with the first Practice Guide, this publication does not aim to cover every first-year experience initiative currently underway in higher education institutions in Wales, but to provide a taste of a wide range of initiatives within the institutions – from something working at module level right through to institution-wide initiatives. Of course each of the initiatives could be up- (or down-) scaled depending on how you want to apply them. Most of the initiatives include a contact name, but if a contact name is not shown, then the representative member of the institution will be happy to answer queries. In this way, the group hope to establish a network of shared views about the first-year experience throughout Wales and beyond, and we hope that you find this publication a useful starting point for that network.

The group received upwards of 80 initiatives and has had to be selective about those offered in this publication. It should not be assumed, therefore, that because we have highlighted an initiative in one institution that similar work is not underway in others – we just had to stop somewhere! It is also true that the initiatives in place to support the first-year experience are always growing, and it is perhaps inevitable that higher education institutions are developing their work in this area at different rates. The aim of this publication is to offer something for everyone to consider in enhancing the first-year experience in higher education.

1. The Welsh Institutional Group (WIG), comprising a senior contact responsible for learning and teaching from each Welsh HEI and chaired by the HEA Head of Policy and Partnerships for Wales.

Why the focus on innovative first-year assessment and enabling employability through the first-year curriculum as the two themes?

The first FYE Practice Guide chose two themes upon which to base the published case studies, an approach that enabled the capture of a wide breadth of initiatives from a focused viewpoint. This year, the group decided to maintain the themed approach, and we returned to Tinto's (1993) model of student retention and chose two themes that would fit with the transition (assessment) and assimilation (employment) phases of the model. (The themes of communities of practice and academic engagement in the first Practice Guide fitted with the first and second of the three phases – separation and transition.) These themes also represent 'hot topics' for higher education in Wales and are reflected in the Welsh Assembly Government's For Our Future strategy for higher education. The case studies also build upon earlier work produced by the Welsh Assessment Project: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resource_database/casestudies/welsh_case_studies_index.

We hope that the case studies contained in the two First-Year Experience Wales Practice Guides provide a wealth of practitioner experiences that, when viewed as a set, will enable institutions to address many aspects of student retention, achievement and performance. While this publication is determinedly associated with practice, those wishing to visit the literature on the first-year experience may like to start with the following (Yorke, 1999; Wallace, 2003; Hillman, 2005; Harvey, Drew et al., 2006; Yorke and Longden, 2007; Nutt and Calderon, 2009).

First-Year Experience Group members

Aberystwyth University — John Powell
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Acknowledgements

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The initiatives contained in this publication are shown in the tables below.

TABLE 1: INNOVATION IN FIRST-YEAR ASSESSMENT

Name of initiative	Implementation level	Institution	Page	Contributor
Ensuring quality assurance: workplace experience and HE	Module/subject	Bangor		Sheila Hughes
Assessment of the journal in Fine Art studio practice	Scheme/programme	Bangor		Andrew Smith
Student panel: assessment experiences	Institution	Glamorgan		Alice Lau & Karen Fitzgibbon
Making feedback work for you	Scheme/programme	Glamorgan		Rob East & Clare Lewis
Telling tales: investigating students' learning experiences	Module/subject	Glamorgan		Dr Jacqueline Harrett
Individual goal setting	Institution (selected programmes)	Glyndwr		Celia Butters
Written feed forward	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Peggy Murphy
Using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI)	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Denise Oram
Using peer assessment and feedback to facilitate learning	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Christine O'Grady
Using blogs and wikis to share developmental learning	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Stephen C Kenyon
Group presentation of critical assignment	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Desdemona McCannon
Developing peer and self-reflection	Module/subject	Glyndwr		Elizabeth Edwards
Initial assessment and feedback surgeries	Module/subject	Glyndwr		Gemma Rochester
Preparing for university study	School/faculty	Newport		Wendy Roberts
Variation in in-class assessment	Module/subject	Swansea		Melanie Jones and Steve Cook
Marketing experiences	Module/subject	Swansea Met		Will Fleming
Examining student feedback preferences	Module/subject	Swansea Met		Paul Hutchings
Feedback schedules	Institution	UWIC		Learning, Teaching and Development Unit Team
Fast and Broad: first-year multiple-choice assessment	Module/subject	UWIC		Jane Croad
One-minute feedback	Module/subject	UWIC		David Lloyd
Feedback on feedback: student responses to feedback	Module/subject	UWIC		Jason Williams
Diagnostic and formative assessment using a personal response system	Module/subject	UWIC		Dr Charlie Whitham
Early assessment	Module/subject	UWIC		Francesca Cooper

TABLE 2: ENABLING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH THE FIRST-YEAR CURRICULUM

Name of initiative	Implementation level	Institution	Page	Contributor
Working with employers	Institution	Bangor		Delyth Murphy
'Experience Works' week	Institution	Glamorgan		Euros Evans & Careers Service Team
Work-based learning: framework and resources toolkits	Institution	Glamorgan		Dr Heather Skinner, Peter Green
Network75 professional academy	Institution	Glamorgan		Louise Hawker
Employability and professional development	Scheme/programme	Glamorgan		Dr Sam Bairstow
'So, what did you learn on placement?'	Scheme/programme	Glamorgan		Richard Owen
Engineering induction: Elastic Olympics	School/faculty	Glyndwr		Mary Bradley & Matthew Draycott
'This will be my life'	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Sally Harrison
Design Communications community blog	Scheme/programme	Glyndwr		Adam Cooke & Elizabeth Edwards
History students experiencing the workplace	Module/subject	Glyndwr		Dr Kathryn Ellis & Peter Bolton
Professional Skills module	Scheme/programme	Newport		Mary Evans
Working and learning in sports and fitness (course E113)	Module/subject	OU in Wales		Ceri Wilcock
Working and learning: developing effective performance at work (course BUI30)	Module/subject	OU in Wales		Ceri Wilcock
Career development and employability (course T122)	Module/subject	OU in Wales		Ceri Wilcock
Make your experience count (course UI22)	Module/subject	OU in Wales		Ceri Wilcock
Entrepreneurship/enterprise simulation	Module/subject	Swansea		Corina Edwards
Establishing meaningful PDP experiences with large student groups	School/faculty	UWIC		Graham Haines
Pathology field trip: threshold concepts and the transfer of learning	School/faculty	UWIC		Delia Ripley
Induction and employability: the outdoor activity residential contribution	Scheme/programme	UWIC		Dr Gwilym Davies
Mindfulness meditation	Scheme/programme	UWIC		Francesca Cooper
Support from students	Module/subject	UWIC		Francesca Cooper

Initiatives that demonstrate innovation in first-year assessment

Institution-wide

STUDENT PANEL: ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCES UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

assessment; students' voice; students' experience

Aim

To provide an opportunity for dialogue between academic staff and students, and to challenge academic staff's current understanding of students' assessment experience.

Description/approach

A staff development event jointly organised by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) and the University of Glamorgan Students' Union. Students from different courses volunteered to take part in a student panel answering questions from the staff audience about the assessment experiences on their courses. The student panel was made up of a diverse group of students, including international, mature, and first- and final-year students.

Staff were invited to submit questions or themes on assessment and feedback that they would like to explore when registering onto the event. The Students' Union also came up with some themes that they would like to explore. Our student panel therefore had some ideas on what sort of questions they could expect. Questions were grouped into a number of themes including assessment criteria, anonymous marking, feedback, assessment bunching, and assessment experience and submission process.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes were to:

- generate lively discussions and initiate some much-needed dialogue between staff and students;
- challenge existing staff perceptions on students' experiences of assessment and feedback;
- take a step towards closing the gap between staff and students' expectations and perceptions.

Evidence of actual outcomes

There were plenty of lively discussions between students and staff around the various themes. Students were keen to share their experience and views. Staff were able to gain insights into students' assessment experiences that they do not normally see; for example, the way students tackle the issue of assessment bunching and the number of hours students normally spent on their assessment.

By listening to students' assessment experiences, staff were able to pick up some good practice examples that were happening across the University. Staff were also keen to share their experiences and good practice with colleagues at the event. For example, when students talked about the importance of marking criteria, one member of staff at the event shared their practice of providing feedback specifically with grid criteria. Another member of staff shared their use of self-assessment on their course, where they asked students to self-assess against the marking criteria before they submitted their work.

As dialogue at the event happened in real time, staff were also able to immediately respond to students' concerns. For example, students identified the need for support especially for first-year students on what different type of assessments were and how to tackle essays. Staff at the event were able to direct students to resources that were already available to them on Blackboard and, at the same time, saw the need to review and perhaps re-emphasise the availability of these resources to students. In addition, staff were able to learn from their colleagues; for example, one member of staff learnt about functions of the plagiarism detection software that they did not know before from another member of staff at the event.

Having a diverse group of students at the panel enabled different views to be captured at the event. For example, students had opposite views on anonymous marking where one student said "absolutely not" and another said "excellent idea". Such immediate and polarised views that staff would not normally get from module questionnaires provided a compelling example to staff about the diverse views from students and the value of such an event.

Overall, the event was very well received by both students and staff.

Examples of student comments:

I would like to say thanks for giving us the opportunity to ask some questions, it is a start, it is integration, and that's what we need, students and lecturers to integrate and the fact that we are taking these steps forward, that's what we need for better student experience.

I have had issues but at the same time I have had some really good experience, it is only by working together, and by giving you feedback and feed forward to one and other, that the University can move forward and improve our experience.

Staff comments:

... it was really interesting and enlightening to hear both sides of the arguments in a safe environment. Well done to the students. I would like ALL [emphasis original] academic staff to attend.

This type of event has to be developed and used to address other issues. Interaction and dialogue is essential if we are to understand our students.

Reflection/impact

To summarise, the event enabled dialogue between students and staff; provided staff with a better understanding of the ways students approach their assessments; and unpicked some of the contentious areas like bunching of deadlines and anonymous marking.

The discussions also brought up other areas for consideration, including the power relationship between staff and students; the need to empower our students; student autonomy; and innovative assessments practice happening within the University.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL SETTING GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

feedback; study skills; assignment; tutorials; assessment; goal setting

Aim

Many first-year students fail to use marker's feedback on assignments to develop their academic writing, with the result that students may progress into Years 2 and 3 still exhibiting poor written abilities. The aim of the initiative was to encourage students to read feedback on assignments and use the guidance effectively by planning short-, medium- and long-term goals for developing their academic skills.

Description/approach

Following return of a marked assignment, first-year students were invited to sign up for an initial 15-minute tutorial with a study skills lecturer. The initial session was designed to use the marker's feedback on completed assignments to plan short-, medium- and long-term goals for student self-development using an action planning tool used adapted from Race (2007). Further tutorial sessions were offered to follow up the students' progress.

Anticipated outcomes

It is anticipated that focused goal setting will encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and thereby develop their academic writing skills.

Evidence of actual outcomes

While the individual tutorials were offered to all students on selected programmes, take-up was mixed. One programme leader booked a specific study skills tutorial session for the whole cohort. Other programme areas left it to individual students to accept tutorial support. Students who did attend used the action plan to set their own goals: identifying what was, for them, the most significant feedback on the assignment. Many students preferred to complete the action plan on their own and then book an individual tutorial to discuss their goal-setting.

Actual outcomes will be determined at the end of the academic year using attendance figures and student engagement with the initiative. Developmental feedback will be sought from attendees to inform a possible roll-out programme throughout the University next academic year.

Reflection/impact

It is apparent that many students simply look at the mark given to their assignment without reading any comments. Indeed, one student commented that she had never thought about reading the feedback before, but had simply filed away her completed assignments after noting the mark and grade awarded.

Another student found that completing the action plan forced her to focus on the detail of the marker's comments, which make her consider specifically how she planned to improve her writing skills. Interestingly, for her, the three most significant comments were critical of her work, even though the marker had made the several positive comments on her writing style. For self-development, the student planned to use the feedback action plan on subsequent assignments.

Students' failure to utilise feedback on assignments can directly impact on grades in the second year with implications for the classification of their degree at the end of the third year. It is hoped that utilising study skills tutorials to plan short-, medium- and long-term goals will encourage students to take responsibility for their own scholarship and become autonomous learners.

Institutional context

The University has the highest number of students from non-traditional backgrounds and those claiming Disabled Student Allowance in Wales (HESA performance indicators, June 2008). To ensure that support is in place for everyone who has the potential to succeed in higher education, the University has employed study skills lecturers to provide additional academic skills workshops for first-year students. Study skills workshops are available via small group or one-to-one tutorials.

Action Plan adapted from: Race, P. (2007) *How to Get a Good Degree. Making the Most of Your Time at University*. 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 102–3.

FEEDBACK SCHEDULES

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

feedback; assessment; expectations

Aim

Following student comments in the National Student Survey about the promptness of feedback, it was decided that all schools would provide students at the beginning of each term with a guidebook detailing when assignments would be set, deadlines for submission and an approximate date for receipt of feedback as well as basic information about the meaning of 'feedback' to better manage students' expectations.

Description/approach

Feedback schedules were designed in each school to create a more appropriate balance between assessment tasks, including their timing and volume. The guidebooks also meant that students were aware from the very beginning of term when their assessment deadlines would be and when they should expect to receive feedback on their work. By outlining these dates, schools were able to ensure that all feedback was timely in order to assist students in responding to feedback and integrating it into their learning.

A number of programme leaders also included feedback sessions into the timetable to afford students the opportunity to ask for further clarification and the option to discuss their feedback in more depth with the lecturer/ marker. This was of particular value to students in their first year at university as it helped them to build their understanding of the assessment criteria and how to apply feedback to subsequent assessments.

The schedules also intended to raise students' awareness of the importance and role of assessment and feedback. The documents emphasised that feedback can come in a variety of forms – for example, formative feedback that is delivered verbally during lectures. Information about marking criteria was also provided, where appropriate, to allow students to form accurate expectations about the standards required of them and to offer greater transparency about the assessment process.

Anticipated outcomes

The main purpose of the schedules was to improve students' expectations about when they could expect to receive assessment feedback and also to enhance their understanding of the meaning of the term 'feedback', including the various forms that it can take.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Discussions with student representatives revealed that first-year students were highly satisfied regarding assessment feedback and that the schedules had provided an appropriate quantity and quality of assessment/feedback information in a timely and accessible manner. Results of the NSS 2009 showed that student satisfaction in relation to assessment and feedback, including promptness, had improved following the introduction of the schedules.

Comments showed that irrespective of how long they had to wait for it, students were happy as long as they were made aware of when they could expect to receive comments about their work.

Students also began to place greater value on the feedback made by lecturers, rather than simply focus on the overall mark they had been given.

School- or faculty-wide

PREPARING FOR UNIVERSITY STUDY UNIVERSITY OF WALES, NEWPORT

Keywords

retention; formative assessment; deep and surface learning

Aim

Accrediting formative assessment as a retention tool

Description/approach

Delivery of 'bite-size' part-time community-based higher education learning opportunities through the Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning (CCLL) at the University of Wales, Newport, led to a recognition that for some new learners the demands of both engaging with academic rigour and managing subject-specific theoretical content proves overwhelming. A lack of confidence in their ability to construct formal academic submissions coupled with the looming of assessment deadlines serve as disincentives that resulted in non-attendance, non-submission and ultimately 'failure' of the modules on which they were enrolled. Despite an obvious interest in the subject area and the evident commitment to attending classes, research also

suggested that some students were engaging with surface learning in both their subject area and study skills in order to meet the assessment requirements, rather than the deep learning that would provide them with both a better quality learning experience and building blocks for further successful engagement with higher education.

In order to combat perceptions of failure, two five-credit, Level 4 (first-year degree level) modules grounded in formative assessment named 'Engaging with HE' and 'Assignment Research and Planning' were created and validated by the institution.

CCLL has a proven track record in meeting the needs of non-traditional learners and reaching out to engage individuals from hard-to-reach groups in areas of social and economic disadvantage. Experienced staff deliver a broad range of modules in the social sciences, humanities and information communication technologies. Ongoing formative assessments are integral to module delivery and embedded within all module teaching and learning strategies are the development of study and employability skills and reference to education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Separate accredited and non-accredited study skills support is also provided. Despite this high level of support, some learners still do not feel equipped to tackle a module's summative assessment requirements, and where staff perceive that the individual is likely to discontinue, they are offered the opportunity to gain five credits through the attainment of one of the two modules 'Engaging with HE' or 'Assignment Research and Planning'.

Administratively, learners are withdrawn from the module on which they originally enrolled (and hence are no longer at risk of 'failing') and enrolled on either of the two five-credit modules. Learners continue to attend and engage with the module on which they were originally enrolled. An attendance rate of 80% is a prerequisite for engagement with these five-credit modules, and they are only offered as an option following attendance and engagement with a learner's original module(s). After which time if s/he still does not feel equipped to take on the assessment requirements of their third module, they will be counselled accordingly as to whether s/he is pursuing an appropriate course of study.

'Engaging with HE'

Assessment is tutor-directed and constitutes consideration of formative in-class assessments through individual and group exercises. This is coupled with a final individual tutorial where the tutor will further discuss and assess the learner's engagement with the module content. The tutor is then

required to write a short report on whether the learner has achieved the five credits through a combination of attendance, class participation, formative assessment exercises and tutorial discussion.

'Assignment Research and Planning'

This module has a summative element in that learners are required to submit a plan for the original module's assessment. If the module assessment consists of more than one submission then the tutor should decide which one should be used. Typically, this should be the assessment with the greatest weighting. This plan needs to include references to relevant theory and sources. The nature of the plan is contingent upon the module assessment requirements, but could, for example, constitute an essay plan with reference to structure, theoretical content and argument. Learners would need to show evidence of having sought relevant referenced sources.

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that engagement with these modules would both enhance progression rates and enhance module grades.

Evidence of actual outcomes

To date, a total of 62 learners have enrolled on these modules, of which 37% have not yet been considered at exam board. Of the learners who have already been considered at exam boards and accredited, evidence shows that 74% have enrolled on subsequent modules. This may certainly have contributed to an increased attainment rate for CCLL of 73% at the March 2010 exam board, which is the highest rate of attainment since March 2007.

Reflection/impact

Are the modules a success? After some initial problems with engagement, centred around tutors' unfamiliarity with them, take-up is really improving. The fact that students can engage fully within a classroom situation creates parity with other learners, and it is this that increases their confidence, giving them a sense of value and worth. When students feel that they are valued, that they are listened to, and that their needs are being met, this allows a stimulating learning environment to blossom that can only add value to the students' experience. That said, it is important to note that enrolment on these modules is approached with caution both in ensuring that learners are eligible (that is to say, they are at the beginning of their learning journey) and in ensuring that these modules are indeed the best option for the individual, inasmuch as they are not ready to achieve ten-credit modules. Also, caution is exercised in ensuring that quality procedures are in place in these modules, as

in all modules, and that they are consistent with the Level 4 curriculum even though the 'Engaging with HE' module (but not the 'Assignment Planning and Research' module) is based on formative assessment achieved through oral engagement, rather than being assessed summatively. In this way, a balance is being struck between innovative curriculum and quality assurance.

Programme, scheme or award level

ASSESSMENT OF THE JOURNAL IN FINE ART STUDIO PRACTICE BANGOR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

critical understanding; reflection

Aim

The main aim is to assess the creative journal while developing critical awareness and greater understanding of the subject area. The new journal assessment pro forma has facilitated this process.

The assessment of the reflective journal in Fine Art is developed with close observation of the student's progress during studio-based activity. Studio-based activities in the creative fields are those involving considerable practical workshops or studio sessions.

The students in the Fine Art programme at Lifelong Learning are mature adult learners often initially unfamiliar with academic writing. The flexible approach to the format of the journal means that the activity is personal to the individual and the journal is not distinct or separate from the studio activity.

Description/approach

The journal begins as a reflective diary of the process involved leading to a broader response and interpretation of the student's work through discussion and interpretation.

The journal is the main evidence of the student's critical

thinking in relation to the practical studio work, and assessment is designed to encourage independent informed critical analysis of the practical work through research.

Formative assessment of the journal emphasises the need for an ongoing reflective writing process, mapping the making of practical work rather than post-production evaluation. The new journal assessment pro forma used at every module assessment point at Level 5 and 6 is designed to encourage independent research, critical thinking and reflective writing.

Anticipated outcomes

Through reflection and interpretation in the journal, the information and knowledge acquired through studio-based activity leads to a greater understanding of the methodologies employed, their application to the tasks and projects and the meaning of the art work. The effective assessment of this is central to the student's development and understanding.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The assessment pro forma is the main channel for providing constructive critical feedback for the student designed to nurture the reflective critical thinking process. The categorisation of the pro forma includes sections designed to identify strengths and weaknesses within each individual journal.

The assessment is based upon criteria including developing critical awareness; a study of the relationship between art practice and theory; a study of the contexts of art practice; and originality of thought.

The pro forma has been well received by students and staff. The categorisation of each criteria into outstanding, very high level, high level, satisfactory, adequate and unsatisfactory mean that students can identify strengths and weaknesses in different areas of their journal rather than receiving overall or general feedback. The pro forma has facilitated the marking of the studio journal for staff by making the process more transparent and time efficient. Staff can also review parity of their marking and feedback, and this can also be reviewed by the moderator.

Reflection/impact

The process involved in teaching and learning centred around the journal is such that the student's initial subjective position moves, with the accumulation of knowledge, to a position of distance from the studio work and reflection. The student acquires a more objective

view of their work through research and develops a positioning within a contemporary art (and cultural) context. This understanding in turn feeds back into the studio practice, and effective assessment is a vital part of the learning process.

MAKING FEEDBACK WORK FOR YOU UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

Leaflet; feedback; feed forward; formative assessment

Aim

The target audience consisted of approximately 140 first-year Law students enrolled on the Legal Process module (a compulsory 20-credit module on LLB Year 1).

Description/approach

The 'Legal Process' module offers students the opportunity to take part in a drafting exercise in respect of their first formally assessed assignment of their undergraduate studies, whereby they can resubmit an improved piece of coursework based on the feedback that they receive on an earlier draft submitted halfway through the first term. With this in mind, a leaflet was produced to highlight the importance of feedback in enhancing the wider learning experience. This leaflet was designed both to encourage students to make the most of the particular drafting exercise by using the feedback on the draft submission in an effective way, and also to understand how they can continue to benefit from the different forms of feedback throughout their entire degree studies.

A key feature of the leaflet was to indicate the many forms that feedback to students can take, highlighting that it is not only formal feedback on assignments, and to encourage them to make use of all feedback to feed forward to improve future performance.

Anticipated outcomes

Specific

The opportunity to obtain feedback (including a provisional grade) following a first 'draft' version of an assignment, prior to the final submission, would mean that students would engage more constructively with the feedback, as it would be given at a stage when they could obtain clear benefit (in the form of a possibly improved final grade) from considering what it contained. With the coursework consisting of two

parts – an essay-style question and a question that involved providing an answer to a legal problem – this would lead to a clearer appreciation of the skills necessary to successfully address each of these two forms of assessment that are key features of undergraduate legal study.

The leaflet was designed to highlight the role that feedback can play in enhancing the undergraduate learning experience.

Another aim of the leaflet was to encourage students to seek guidance and elaboration on feedback from staff/peers.

General

Once students have realised the importance of feedback and the many forms that it can take, they will continue to benefit from it. The leaflet was designed to facilitate this by expressly identifying the forms that feedback can take; how students can use feedback to improve competence in the skills for successful study; and what proactive steps they can take when feedback may not be clear or readily forthcoming. By using feedback in such a tangible way, writing skills, appropriate referencing styles, research skills and presentation skills can be developed along with intellectual skills such as understanding and application of the law (the latter being a key element in answering problem-style questions in legal studies), thereby improving students grades across other modules in Year 1 and, subsequently, in Years 2 and 3.

A further feature of the leaflet was that it aimed to promote good practice in the provision of feedback, and thereby contribute to teaching staff being more considered in the feedback that they give and to use it not only to comment on the work undertaken for a particular assessment, but to advise the student on how to improve future submissions.

Evidence of actual outcomes

In respect of the resubmission exercise, there was clear evidence of an improvement in the marks achieved by those students who resubmitted. While this varied from student to student, the average improvement was approximately 5%.

Student feedback questionnaires given out after the final marks were made available revealed that students were overwhelmingly in favour of the exercise, and this was endorsed by a small student focus group that met at the end of the academic year. For students that resubmitted, constituting 78% of the total number of students, the questionnaires revealed that most of them felt that the

feedback provided was clear and specific and enabled them to improve the second submission and achieve a higher mark. Support for the process also came from those students who chose not to resubmit, their main argument being that the exercise provided a safety net for their first undergraduate assignment and removed the fear of what, to many, was an unknown process. It is acknowledged, though, that there are resource implications, both for staff and students. However, its overall benefit indicates that the process was a worthwhile exercise that warranted the substantial resource input. Further evidence on the benefit of providing feedback at the draft stage of an assignment is available at: www.ukcle.ac.uk/interact/lili/2006/papers/east.html.

The focus group indicated that the feedback leaflet had less impact on their learning experience. All students had received the leaflet early in the academic year, but it would seem that its value was not emphasised sufficiently. This is disappointing and more effort will need to be made in future years to ensure that the leaflet is firmly embedded as part of the first-year experience.

Reflection/impact

The leaflet and drafting exercise were designed to give students an insight into the learning process as they set out on their studies. This insight involved giving them feedback on an assignment at an early stage in its development when it is particularly valuable and, therefore, when students are likely to engage with it. This aimed to increase ownership of the learning process by the students and to act as an example of formative assessment, facilitating the acquisition of competence in the range of skills necessary to write essays and answer problem questions, thereby leading to increased learner autonomy. While it would seem that the drafting exercise has been successful, the use of the feedback leaflet to support this is still a work-in-progress and can be improved. There is a clear need to link the two together more effectively.

WRITTEN FEED FORWARD GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

feedback; feed forward; formative assessment; summative assessment

Aim

The initiative was introduced in September 2009 to a cohort of 62 students on the BN (Hons) pre-registration nursing programme at Glyndwr University.

The objective of this project was to reduce student anxiety about handing in their first piece of work at university. It was designed to improve retention and student success. When they were asked what projects they felt would impact upon them staying, many students expressed concerns about where to pitch their work and stated they did not know what was really expected of them at undergraduate level. This project was aimed at pre-registration student nurses studying their first module who were working on their first assessment at Level 4. Prior to this intervention, the students only received written feedback on their work after their formal assessment. The September 2009 cohort was offered 'feed forward', which gave them the opportunity to improve the outcome of their first assignment at degree level before the final deadline.

Description/approach

'Feed forward' is clear guidance given to students about how they can develop their own work. In order for the tutor's comments to be effective, 'feed forward' comments need to be offered in sufficient time for students to be able to work on improving their assignments before their deadline. This project presented students an opportunity to submit one discrete element (approximately 400 words) out of the four that were required for their first 2,000 word assignment before it was summatively assessed. This work was scrutinised and written feedback as 'feed forward' was offered with the specific purpose of giving students the opportunity to develop their own work using the comments provided. It was then the responsibility of the students to apply the comments from one element of the assessment to develop all four elements of the assignment. The 'feed forward' was offered to the students one week prior to their final submission date to allow sufficient time for them to either improve their work to meet the required standard, or improve their grade.

Anticipated outcomes

This project is in line with Glyndwr University's 2007–08 – 2009–10 Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which states the University's achievements in:

... widening participation and social inclusion of students traditionally under-represented in higher education in Wales and in the UK ... Glyndwr University aims to provide relevant, inclusive and intellectually stimulating programmes ... and appropriate academic and pastoral support to ensure that all students reach their full potential as independent and lifelong learners.

It also follows the guidance from David Blaney, Director of Strategic Development at HEFCW, who spoke at the 'Improving retention and success: retaining students to and through higher education' conference in May 2010 highlighting HEFCW's support for widening access and stressed that Wales was behind the rest of the UK on retaining students from low participation neighbourhoods (9.6% non-continuation in the UK compared to 11% in to Wales). He requested universities to galvanise into informed action that would also include the role of the student voice. Helen May and Liz Thomas who also presented their work at this conference, stressed that one of the key areas on which to focus resources for student retention and success was during the induction and transition period.

Student engagement within a programme increases student retention. This project gave students the opportunity to establish a benchmark during the transition from being assessed at Level 3 to being assessed at Level 4. Students often only receive written feedback on their work after formal submission; students often only gain this information about how they have done on previous modules when they are studying new topics. This does not always make the feedback relevant to the student's progression. 'Feed forward' aimed to raise students' awareness of their writing ability before they formally submitted work. It also intended to give more meaning to the assessment process in that the students and tutors interacted with the intention of achieving a positive outcome for the student during the module they were studying.

Evidence of actual outcomes

All but three of the 40 students who chose to participate improved their work and their final grade was an improvement on their projected mark.

Reflection/impact

One of the benefits of the project was it identified students who were struggling with the required standard prior to submission. This gave the student and the tutor the opportunity to be proactive rather than retrospective about implementing strategies to encourage success. Any student who was just above the pass mark or below was referred to both student services and the study skills tutor for assessment and advice. Alongside the 'how to edit your draft' checklist, the work enabled students to edit, improve and recover their own work. Giving students the knowledge of what is expected of them at Level 4 is one way to empower them to develop skills that promote independent learning, such as reflection and awareness. The underlying

aim was to encourage students' autonomy and belief in their own ability to improve their work. The innovative nature of this work is both simple and proactive. Any gaps between their actual work and the standard of work required were identified before giving them a summative mark. There was an informal submission date for a section of their work that was informally assessed, but this was completed in a formal context. This gave new students the chance to see what really happens in higher education and let them know how they can influence the outcome of their own work to improve their chances of success in higher education.

Evaluation of the project

The project was evaluated by 26 self-selecting students who participated in a simple questionnaire.

In particular, Question 2 asked: 'For those students who did submit a draft; what did you learn from it/what will you take forward to your next academic piece of work?' The student responses were as follows:

How to set my references out and how to write in the correct manner, and it also put me at ease that I wasn't doing it wrong.

Yes I learned from it. The feedback I had I took into account and improved my assignment.

To reference properly and effectively.

It was very useful to get an appreciation of how our work would be marked, especially as it was our first assignment.

By submitting a draft the feedback helped me to go into more depth with my assignment.

That I hadn't read around the subject enough and needed to work on referencing.

How to structure paragraphs.

Enabled me to improve the standard of the rest of my work.

I learned to take more time in planning.

I thought it was a good idea as it was our first assignment we didn't really have an idea of how it was to be completed-form-content etc. So a draft gave me a little more indication of what you were asking of me.

The structure needed to be better and to ask someone to proof read it before handing it in.

I learned from an early stage I was on the right track. By handing in the draft I planned the rest of my assignment so I wasn't rushing around at the end.

This provided me with the opportunity to rectify the flow of my writing, also to look at referencing.

Worry that I'm doing it wrong like I did on my draft.

Yes it allowed me to structure where necessary and gave me the opportunity to review referencing.

I learned not to rush my work and to reference correctly – I was really glad of being able to do the draft.

I learned what the tutor expected and how referencing should be done.

I learned how to reference and it built up my confidence for the rest of the assignment.

How to format, reference and do paragraphing.

Learned how to paragraph correctly.

I learned what I was doing wrong in my academic writing, learned how to make paragraphs and to put dates in references.

It helped me to get a better understanding of the assignment and what topic I was reading about.

Restructure, delete and expand upon relevant areas. To get final draft improved.

I learned how to go about my assignment better.

I learned how to structure my work more effectively.

I learned how to layout my assignment, improve my referencing technique and use different sources.

The project was also discussed at the following conference:

Improving retention and success: retaining students to and through higher education, Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells, 12 May 2010.

USING THE EFFECTIVE LIFELONG LEARNING INVENTORY (ELLI) IN AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEARNING PROCESS AND LEARNING STYLES AND HOW THESE CAN AFFECT STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI); independent learning; motivation; employability

Aim

The initiative was introduced across the School of Computing and Communications Technology (Denise Oram) and the Business School (Sandra King).

Widening participation and recruitment of students from countries inside and outside Europe means that lecturers are faced with classes made up of students who may have widely different perceptions of the learning and teaching process. This presents new challenges to teaching and learning in higher education. Glyndwr University is committed to providing students with a range of learning opportunities to increase employability and enhance their learning experience and career prospects for the future.

This study presents and reflects the findings of current research on the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) to identify new approaches to students' learning. This is a unique research project aimed at increasing the dimensions of a student's learning power.

Each student generates their own personal profile and is supported in recognising how to bring about a change in their learning culture and practice. The project provides an awareness of 'how to learn' to increase student motivation and consequently improve retention and future employability.

Description/approach

ELLI is an online software development tool, which has been designed by the University of Bristol to provide a narrative of student's 'learning power'. The assessment tool is a self-reporting questionnaire that attempts to describe how learners perceive themselves in relation to seven key dimensions of learning. The feedback takes the form of a visual profile that communicates a pattern of strengths and development areas. Assessing learning power in this way helps students to reflect on the profile and decide what action they should take in order to improve their learning potential.

The ELLI project is accessible to students of all disciplines and cultures.

Anticipated outcomes

It is anticipated that the ELLI tool allows students to reflect on and take ownership of their own learning and adopt a new attitude to their learning experience.

It is also anticipated that ELLI provides students with a language to discuss and convey their self-awareness, skills and achievements that can contribute to bridge the gap between employers and employability.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Evidence shows the ELLI tool to be an excellent communication tool between the tutor and learner and the findings have given a useful insight into student learning. It also shows that there is a change in students' perspectives after using it as it generates valuable data about the relationships between the learning power of different populations and a variety of learning interventions and learning contexts.

Student's comments on ELLI:

ELLI created an awareness that I did not have before about how to learn.

... it enabled me to focus on an entirely new way of learning.

... it shows weaknesses in learning in a positive light and this is more motivating.

Reflection/impact

The ELLI tool provides a generic approach that can be applied across all disciplines and can be used as a vehicle to enhance learning. ELLI has the facility to equip students with the necessary tools to be empowered to develop a range of skills that are highly sought after by employers.

ELLI provides a student-centred approach to learning, which has encouraged engagement in reflection and a change in attitude. Raising awareness of the learning dimensions has promoted dialogue and reduced the barriers between different cultures.

The ELLI tool has stimulated conversations, the exchange of good ideas and promoted a fresh outlook among colleagues facilitating the development of ideas for the future for student learning, motivation and retention.

USING PEER ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TO FACILITATE LEARNING GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

peer assessment; peer feedback

Aim

The peer assessment initiative was introduced to the first year of the pre-registration nursing, Bachelor of Nursing (Hons) programme in Glyndwr University. By introducing a formative peer assessment component into the learning environment it will encourage a more participatory culture of learning, and provide recognition of the important contribution and enhancement that each student can make to their peer's learning.

Description/approach

The second module in the first year of the pre-registration nursing programme is assessed by a summative brief case presentation. The aim of the assessment is to illustrate key elements of a selected clinical problem and the associated nursing care based on the student's observation in practice. This is the students' first oral presentation and they are required to present their work in groups of four. Each student is expected to deliver a five-minute presentation.

In preparation for the summative assessment the students carry out formative peer assessment. They each observe their peers' presentation, and with the guide of a peer assessment form provide feedback to each other on the presentation skills and the theoretical content of the work. The students are fully prepared in a briefing session as to the purpose of the peer assessment/feedback. The students are informed of the importance of providing supportive constructive advice, as well as emphasising the long-lasting effect of negative experience of formative assessment.

The students coach one another and the formative peer assessment/feedback in this instance involves comments rather than grades. The group discussions include areas that the student has done well in and suggestions for improvement. Having the opportunity to reply to their peers' feedback allows clarity, and the feedback is often more effective because they have a vocabulary that can be easily understood.

Anticipated outcomes

The interactive exchange that takes place during peer assessment/feedback may be beneficial because it has the potential of evoking a deeper elaboration of the material and knowledge base, thus leading to better learning. Working

together as a small group may encourage peers to exert maximum effort and reinforce one another's academic efforts. When the student then goes on to perform the summative assessment, it may result in enhanced student achievement.

Another potential outcome of peer assessment is that participating will develop the student's skills in giving feedback, as they think through how to formulate feedback that will be meaningful to their peers. Being involved as a reviewer has the potential of improving the student's skills in the art of constructive criticism as well as improved inter-group relations.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Students have commented in module evaluation about the comfort that peer assessment/feedback provides as they see the peer group as being supportive and helpful. Working together builds bonds between the group members and provides opportunities to make friends. The students reported that being involved in the peer assessment initiative has given them good ideas and ways to improve their work. The positive suggestions that their peers provide also help to boost their self-esteem and motivation.

Reflection/impact

The students comment that they enjoy working in a group and they value learning from each other. Although the group assessment and feedback is formative, they do not see the work as unnecessary. The same amount of effort is put in for the formative presentations in relation to preparation, as the assessment is considered to be relevant to the real-life situation.

Institutional context

The peer assessment/feedback initiative has been introduced as a module initiative, within the subject area of Nursing. The culture of the institute is one that welcomes and encourages initiatives that value the contribution students make to their peers' development.

USING BLOGS AND WIKIS TO SHARE DEVELOPMENTAL LEARNING GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

moderate; peer-to-peer; online; learning; key skills; group formation; referencing; communication; learning technology; engagement

Aim

The increasing power of user groups with regard to technology and its effect upon peer-to-peer and

information exchange is a key facet of the module, and the online shared space seeks to mimic that approach within an assessment/practical environment.

The approach of online peer review aligns with theoretical components of the course including Jenkins' concept of 'knowledge communities' (2006), together with pedagogical application of Siemens' 'connectivism' (2004) and Wiley's case study in Brown and Adler (2007). Using his own experiences, Wiley notes:

Because my goal as a teacher is to bring my students into full legitimate participation in the community of instructional technologists as quickly as possible, all student writing was done on public blogs. The writing students did in the first few weeks was interesting but average. In the fourth week, however, I posted a list of links to all the student blogs and mentioned the list on my own blog. I also encouraged the students to start reading one another's writing. The difference in the writing that next week was startling. Each student wrote significantly more than they had previously. Each piece was more thoughtful. Students commented on each other's writing and interlinked their pieces to show related or contradicting thoughts ... The power of peer review had been brought to bear on the assignments.

It is this notion of the empowered user group that defines the intended aim.

Description/approach

Glyndwr University's Screen Studies 'HUM 414 Virtual Worlds' module, which began in September 2009, examines nascent trends within modern screen culture, such as: the prevalence of the 'screen', the use of technology, game analysis and the increasing power of the user. Multiple formats of blended delivery are utilised within the module including face-to-face sessions, lectures, seminars, VLE environments for course material/delivery and the establishment of an online student discussion group (Facebook is being used as an initial discussion space, with evaluation on effectiveness pending).

A trial is proposed during the academic year 2010-11 to incorporate student assessment, currently wholly portfolio-based, within a blog/shared wiki/online upload 'space', (environment to be decided) so that in effect each reflective/analytical piece would be accessible by the rest of the group, who could comment, offer suggestion or assistance, and importantly, pre-moderate.

Anticipated outcomes

As an extension of core components within the module itself (user power, peer-to-peer discussion, shared knowledge bases), it is hoped that the practical application of such ideas, in conjunction with shared academic/student best practice (for example, from offering advice on content, to how to reference, to assignment structuring concepts, to use of theoretical terms and understanding) would allow for:

- subject insight;
- the increase of assignment quality through shared knowledge.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Not yet known.

Reflection/impact

While the benefits of such an approach have been extolled above, the application would need careful monitoring; the students would need guidelines and suggestions on behaviour/forum moderation, and the group would need to be fully comfortable within a specific online scenario, in addition to face-to-face activity. Further, the notion of 'putting work out there for all to see' may prove daunting, and would need more engagement from the tutor than simply a 'look at the theory' approach. A process of interactivity and group formation would be absolutely necessary. However, the potential benefits for subject application and resource sharing are necessary factors within a module based ostensibly around the rising power of the user, user groups and emergent technology.

Implementation

It is planned to introduce similar strategies across other taught modules, in some cases replacing written task-based analysis with video presentations available for student groups to comment on, and therefore mapping to the above criteria and aims. Such a proposal will likely be introduced within the Computing module 'COM504 Game Narratives and Characterisation' to enable greater facilitation of group work and student-based learning.

As of September 2010, Moodle will replace Blackboard as the primary VLE for Glyndwr University, with hosting facilities off-site. The migration to Moodle is designed to integrate course content and delivery, online communication, student forum activity and assessment process. This integration will assist initiatives such as the proposal outlined above in benefitting and personalising the student experience, embedding initiatives "...in the culture of the learner, rather than the curriculum" (Watamaniuk, 2005).

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GROUP PRESENTATION OF CRITICAL ASSIGNMENT GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

collaboration; research methods; visual presentation; supportive community; critical thinking; group work

Aim

To encourage students to share research, negotiate subject matter and learn from each other. Groups are designated and are interdisciplinary to break down traditional attitudes and assumptions about the boundaries of each named award within the art school.

Description/Approach

The Critical Studies (CS) module is often approached by art students with trepidation bordering on reluctance. Partly the problem is the high level of dyslexic students, partly the isolated nature of the tasks, traditionally written assignments. This brief set early on in the year asked students to work with others in designated groups, to take the theme of 'innovation' and agree a particular decade to research, each individual contributing findings from their own subject discipline. They were then asked to pool their findings and draw out common themes from what they had discovered. We encouraged the use of visual aids to group thinking such as mind maps, timelines, and picture-based research.

The task called for a high degree of responsibility from the students who had to arrange meetings, agree a chairperson

and assign tasks, as well as produce a ten-minute structured visual presentation given to the entire cohort.

Anticipated outcomes

We felt that the group work would help foster friendships outside subject-specific year groups, and potentially facilitate collaborative work further into the degree programmes. We also felt it was important to underscore the interdependence and interrelatedness of art, design, technology, culture and society early on in the module to counter any sense that it was 'just art history' or 'too fine art orientated' – a common complaint of the module in the past.

We also wanted to test alternative modes of assessment to the traditional written assignment, the academic essay format. We asked for a written evaluation of the group project including an outline of the individual research undertaken, but this was weighted equally with their contribution to the group project to encourage active participation.

We wanted to see if collaborative learning, group discussion, the use of diagrams and visual research methods familiar from studio-based assignments could be translated into the critical and theoretical modules, offering students familiar practical methodologies rather than prescriptive and isolated tasks.

We also wanted to see how autonomously the groups would function, and to see whether attendance was affected.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The written evaluations of group work contained both positive and negative responses to the brief. The group sizes were felt to be too large and unwieldy, and the difficulty of finding mutually convenient times to meet and discuss was a widespread issue. Students felt that although it had not always been an enjoyable experience, it had been valuable, and had fostered a sense of a co-operative rather than competitive learning experience.

Attendance at the presentations was very good, with all groups producing well organised, visually interesting and relevant presentations. The professionalism and commitment was on the whole very impressive, with some exceptions. Only one student did not work within a group, and requested to present alone.

Reflection/impact

The project was difficult to manage because of the size of the first year, and the shorter timescale imposed through the module being delivered in one semester instead of

two. A trip week and reading week also fell within the period assigned for this brief, which was disruptive. We would have liked to have offered more structured support sessions where we could oversee the groups and offer strategies to facilitate discussion and negotiation, the main obstacle to this was time.

The impact has been to create a cohesive first-year cohort who know each other well and are more relaxed about offering opinions in lectures and discussing ideas and theories. In the first year, the CS module is the only one in which all students, including FdA are given the same task, and so it is an ideal opportunity to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and broad-minded evaluation of themes and ideas pertinent to all subject areas.

The research methods that the students evidenced were variable, with some students using a variety of sources including textual and electronic, and others relying too heavily on internet search engines. Overall the groups evidenced discussion into ideas and themes as well as historical examples.

Module or subject level

ENSURING QUALITY ASSURANCE: WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION BANGOR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

quality, induction, collaborative, reflective practice

Aim

The work placement module is a compulsory element of a degree in Substance Misuse Studies and students normally undertake this module at the end of their first year. The module is carried out at the employer's residential detoxification unit. The main aims are to enable students to observe, learn and reflect on their experience while also providing the opportunity to link practice and skills with underpinning knowledge and theory gained on earlier modules undertaken in their first year. The work placement module has also been devised to meet the relevant drug

and alcohol national occupational standards (DANOS). In line with University and QAA policy, arrangements for assuring quality need to be rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny. Before commencing their work placement, all students must have obtained a Criminal Record Bureau check and satisfied the University of their eligibility of being able to work with vulnerable adults. The practicalities and quality assurance involved with all these procedures require a collaborative and supportive three-way relationship between the employer, the student and the University.

Description/approach

The assessment for the module involves both formative and summative elements. Formative includes the satisfactory completion of attending the work placement and carrying out the observational or assigned tasks. Summative assessment involves completion of a reflective learning diary and a report demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the policies, frameworks and legislation that operate in a substance misuse setting with reference to relevant national occupational standards.

Due to the nature of this work placement, it is very important that expectations and requirements relating to this module are clearly understood and complied with, in order that all parties can ensure quality and meet the overall learning outcomes. To this end, students are required to attend a work placement induction session prior to their actual work placement visit. This provides an opportunity for the University and the employer to clearly set out the terms and conditions of the module, its aims and expected learning outcomes.

At the induction session, students are issued with an induction pack containing general guidance and advice and a number of important forms required by the University and the employer to monitor and evaluate the student's work placement. These forms include a letter of authority from the University to allow them to commence their work placement at a specified time. The pack also contains a work placement learning contract, which clearly sets out contact and work placement details including support arrangements, learning outcomes and learning opportunities. This contract is signed by the placement supervisor, the mentor and the student. Students must also complete a health and safety checklist at the workplace to ensure that they are fully aware of these procedures.

Students are advised they will be assigned a supervisor who will oversee their work placement and also a workplace mentor who will work alongside the student and guide and

monitor their daily activities. A number of activities that students may be involved in are outlined and students are made aware that due to the nature of the work placement, patients/clients are advised about the student's attendance at relevant sessions and permission will have been given to allow the student to take part.

Time is spent during the induction to discuss in detail the formative and summative elements of the assessment requirements in order that students are well informed and prepared. Students are introduced to reflective practice models and reflective writing to enable them to develop the skills of applying theory to practice in their academic writing.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes are that the student is able to identify and reflect upon specific issues relating to the bio-psycho-social factors arising from practice in a substance misuse setting and to identify and analyse policies and practices. The anticipated outcomes also include the students being able to reflect on their own personal and professional development and show insight of their strengths and areas for improvement in working with substance misuse clients.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The reflective diary forms part of the summative assessment and as such is awarded marks for content, reflection and insight. Time is allocated to the student towards the end of each work placement day for them to reflect on the activities of the day and record their thoughts and ideas in the learning diary.

At the end of the work placement, student mentors will complete a report, which provides evidence that the student has achieved satisfactory attendance and has observed and/or carried out designated tasks appropriately. An exit interview is arranged for the student to discuss their work placement and gain constructive and critical feedback from their mentor and supervisor.

The assessed report is completed within four weeks from the end of the work placement and marks are awarded for the student's ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding gained during their work placement. The report should illustrate that students have researched relevant theories, legislation, national occupational standards and policies that operate in the detoxification unit and that they have attempted in their report, to draw together theory and practice.

Reflection/impact

The organisational elements/procedures involved with the work placement need to provide a seamless and supportive framework for the learning experience to take place. It demands that the administrative and pedagogical methods and procedures are securely in place and regularly reviewed. Students are invited to attend a tutorial with their personal tutor within the University to discuss their experiences and raise any issues or suggestion for improvement.

Students have commented that the work placement at the end of Year 1 consolidates their prior learning and practical skills gained on other modules from the programme in the Year 1 syllabus, such as the drug and alcohol counselling and motivational interviewing. For many students entering this workplace environment has a marked impact on them, and their experience has enabled them to reflect on the realities of the issues faced by professionals dealing with patient/clients who are seeking help for problems related to their substance misuse, while drawing together theoretical and policy issues and requirements.

The induction process, administrative arrangements, checks and monitoring and the ongoing three-way communication throughout the process, ensures that the quality systems in place are robust so that students can benefit from an experience that will empower them to take responsibility for their own personal and professional development and widen their future vision. Including a work placement at the end of the first year has proved that students are enthused about their future studies and understand more clearly the relevance of the need for both theory and practice.

The innovation of this module is that it involves a three-way partnership between the employer, the University and the student. By providing the work placement induction and the correct administrative framework, this ensures: that each partner is aware of their responsibilities and their expectations; that students will benefit from a positive work placement experience; and that the quality assurance needs of the module will be met.

TELLING TALES: INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

narrative; learning experiences; sharing; reflection

Aim

To enable first-year students to share learning experiences in a safe environment.

Description/approach

During a teaching session on learning, students were introduced to the idea of memory/learning boxes. This was through photographs of young children's memory boxes and discussion on what constituted a learning experience. Students were encouraged to think about their own learning and how these learning experiences reflected on their own attitudes to education. Claxton's (2002) theory of the 4 Rs was introduced in connection with attitudes to learning. Tutors shared their learning experiences – both positive and negative – and how these experiences could be represented by items in a 'learning box'. In this virtual learning box students could place items relating to any learning experience, not just academic, and how this had affected them. They were invited to share their experiences in pairs. Students were asked to identify if these experiences had been positive, negative or mixed and how, on reflection, this had impacted on their attitudes to learning. This was recorded on individual grids and then shared in small groups or with the whole class. Students were also given information from Spendlove (2008) on how stress could be reduced by examining one's approach to learning.

Anticipated outcomes

We expected students to be reticent in sharing experiences. This was early in the term and with large cohorts, such as in this particular award, anonymity is often preferred by quieter students.

We anticipated that some students would be open and willing to participate, but were unsure how this should be received by the majority.

Evidence of actual outcomes

All the students in the cohort who were present participated fully with the activity. There was a real 'buzz' in the room as they talked and laughed in sharing their narratives. Many were willing to publicly tell their stories, both positive and negative. Some of these stories were

quite moving and reflective in nature, while others were common to many of the students, such as learning to drive. From this session we learnt more about our students' lives outside the academic environment and they learnt more about each other.

Reflection/impact

From their sharing of experiences students seemed to have a greater empathy with each other. It enabled them to see how many of their experiences were similar.

One unexpected outcome was that the students developed a more open attitude towards tutors, seeing them as more approachable and quickly developing a rapport after listening to their personal learning stories. Often first-year students see lecturers as distant and hesitate to ask for help until a relationship has been formed. With large cohorts this may take time. After the sharing session the group relaxed and were more likely to ask questions and give their opinions when asked. Sharing of their learning journeys had given them a common ground and provided a supportive environment in which it was possible to voice opinions and ideas. Feedback indicated that they found this an interesting and valuable way of thinking about their learning experiences and the impact those experiences had on their attitudes to future learning and assessment.

DEVELOPING PEER AND SELF-REFLECTION GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

reflection; learning outcomes; feedback

Aim

The aim was to encourage students to adopt an active role in the continual assessment of their work so that they did not view the process as something that was 'done to them'.

There were two strands to this overall aim. The first was to establish the relevance of learning outcomes to student assessment. The second was to use learning outcomes as a framework to improve reflection and analysis in relation to peer and self-assessment.

Description/approach

This activity initially took place in a drawing project, early in the academic year and was repeated (in slightly varying forms) through the semester.

Students were introduced to the learning outcomes of a brief and encouraged to interpret them orally. Then students were divided into small groups in order to peer assess the work of individuals in another group.

Each student presented their work and answered questions about the work. After the presentations, the groups separated to discuss and review the work using the learning outcomes as the focus for feedback. The activity encouraged debate and negotiation in relation to the assessment criteria and consolidated understanding of expectations, at a stage in the brief where individuals could revise their strategies if necessary.

Groups collaborated to agree on short, structured feedback that was delivered on three Post-it notes stuck onto specific pieces of work. Groups identified:

- most successful work in relation to learning outcomes;
- least successful work in relation to learning outcomes;
- an aim for the week based on an overview of the work.

Students were encouraged to use focused keywords in their feedback.

The process was reinforced later in the project as the lecturer gave feedback using a similar method and structure. Students also made their own individual assessment of progress in relation to learning outcomes at the end of the project.

The approach was used at a modular level. The studio setting facilitated the process. The construction of studio environments is valuable in supporting team collaboration and ongoing informal peer feedback. It is an approach that is endorsed by representatives of the design industry.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes include:

- increased attention to aims and learning outcomes of briefs;
- more focused analysis of work and use of appropriate and specific language;
- fluent integration of reflective practice into studio experience leading to more precise/authentic awareness of strengths and weaknesses;
- associated improvement in quality of PDP and reflective blog.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The outcomes cannot be quantified at this stage and this process will need to be embedded within other modules in order to judge its impact on students' ability to peer and

self-assess. However, formative assessment suggests an improvement in the quality and degree of reflection and adherence to the aims of the brief in ensuing work.

Reflection/impact

Using a focused activity to address the learning outcomes of a specific brief drew attention to the clarity of briefs and raised awareness of difficulties students may have in understanding assessment and specific learning outcomes. The group work approach enabled students to talk about problems and clarify issues safely, without exposing individual insecurities. It also increased the transparency of the assessment process. It is hoped that this will encourage students to take ownership of their progress and become more cognisant of the measure of their work.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK SURGERIES GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

initial assessment; feedback; induction; student retention; study skills; critical studies; academic skills

Aim

The aim of this initiative was to give students a positive induction into the 'Critical Studies' module. During the first year of the undergraduate programme, many students have difficulties with the written components contained in this module. We used this strategy to review prior learning of students. We hoped that this scheme would allay fears associated with the transition to higher education, along with strengthening the staff/student rapport.

Description/approach

Many students entering into art and design courses in higher education come from non-traditional backgrounds. One of the reasons behind this is the selection process, which is based on portfolio and interview rather than grades. Students often have very low confidence relating to their academic skills. During the week following induction week, we set a brief to students that asked them to complete three tasks. They were first to write a postcard to the lecturer in study skills introducing themselves and outlining any issues they felt could be barriers to learning. They then wrote a 500-word essay based on a piece of art they liked. Finally, in week two, the students had to attend a one-to-one appointment with the study skills lecturer where the two pieces were reviewed. This brief set in the first week of term encouraged students

to assess their abilities and enabled staff to spot any potential support issues early on. The one-to-one feedback surgeries that followed meant that all students came face to face with a member of academic staff very early in their academic career.

Anticipated outcomes

The main aim that we had was using this kind of assessment and feedback would create a positive effect on student retention. We were aware that often students drop out or go 'off radar' in the first few weeks. This strategy made sure that every Level 4 student had face-to-face contact with a member of staff, which helped to settle them in. It was hoped that more students would identify and disclose study support needs earlier in the term as they were given the opportunity to speak one-to-one with an academic. Along with fostering written and research skills, the follow-on surgeries asked students to display punctuality and professionalism, which are especially important in the art and design industry.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Study skills lectures have been better attended this academic year. Students registered with Student Services and sought advice on learning differences earlier in the term, which had a positive effect on the grades awarded for written assignments. The incidence of students self-referring for study skills one-to-one appointments continues to increase. Students commented that they felt more confident having completed the first piece of writing so early in the term. The face-to-face feedback helped students from non-traditional backgrounds to understand what was required/expected of them.

Reflection/impact

The assessment was very labour intensive for staff as it required a quick turnaround for markers, and the provision of feedback on a face-to-face basis for 140 students proved difficult to execute.

The strategy had a positive effect on the rapport between the study skills lecturer and the new cohort. Students were able to exercise a wide range of skills in a short time period, which allowed any potential problems to be flagged up quickly. We anticipate that figures at the end of the academic year will show a positive impact on student retention.

The nature of learning and teaching in art and design made this a valuable exercise. The students in this cohort were generally more confident with writing and research. As we are a relatively small school it meant that it was possible to undertake this research. The strategy was introduced at school level and we hope to continue it next academic year.

VARIATION IN IN-CLASS ASSESSMENT SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

Keywords

assessment;; in-class; unfair practice

Aim

To improve performance, attendance and student learning in tutorials in a first-year Economics module.

Description/approach

The fortnightly tutorials for EC-100 have always been based upon discussion of worksheets distributed ahead of the sessions. These sheets provide a mixture of exercises and general questions to test student understanding of material covered in lectures and to prompt tutorial discussion. This year we have continued with the distribution of exercise sheets ahead of tutorials, but have added an assessment component to six of the eight tutorials. In short, students are provided with worksheets approximately two weeks ahead of their tutorial. Thirty to thirty-five minutes of the tutorial is then spent going through the worksheet before an unseen short question sheet is circulated. This question sheet contains a small number of questions based upon the topic(s) covered in the worksheet. Students are given ten minutes to attempt the question sheet. To overcome potential issues of unfair practice, several versions of the question sheet are prepared – all of an equivalent level of difficulty – and distributed so that students sitting together attempt different questions. Through the year we try to vary the manner in which questions test students – simple numerical exercises, consideration of tables and graphs, short response answers, etc. Of the six tutorial-based assessments, the marks for the best five are taken at 4% each to give 20% of the mark for the module.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The anecdotal evidence of impact is promising: the multiple-choice January exam is up on last year, even accounting for the removal of negative marking in the current session. Many more questions are asked by students concerning tutorial material both within and ahead of tutorials and the marks for the tutorial assessments are relatively high (approximately low 60%).

MARKETING EXPERIENCES SWANSEA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Keywords

PebblePad; reflection; practical application

Aim

The initiative was directed towards a first-year group of Performing Arts students who had been involved in the preparations for a final-year showcase. The initiative was designed as part of the assessment of these students on a 'Marketing' module. The purpose of the initiative was to use an assessment method to develop students' awareness of the importance of reflective self-analysis as a key factor in developing employability by taking them through the process as part of their assessment. Incidentally, they are schooled in the use of PebblePad, which is one form of e-portfolio they might find a useful vehicle in the future. The initiative establishes at an early stage in the student's mind the value of reflection and offers a tool by means of which to pursue effective reflection.

Description/approach

Students were taken through the main elements of the 'Marketing' module and asked to apply them to the final-year showcase with the students running the marketing elements. The assessed element was their structured reflection on the outcome. PebblePad was used to offer them a structured approach and also to familiarise them with a tool and with the procedure at the same time.

Anticipated outcomes

Students will find that reflection is most effectively accomplished when structured.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Student response was varied: many found the procedure helpful but some complained that they found it artificial.

Reflection/impact

The first point to make is that when attempting the exercise again it shall be ensured that all the technology is in working order and is actually working. PebblePad was a very useful template to keep them on track, but does depend upon the availability of working PCs on which to run it.

Secondly, not all students find the structured approach congenial and for those students unstructured and semi-structured approaches will be devised as an alternative. Having said this, most students responded positively

and it remains to track their use of PebblePad or its equivalent through their three years and to follow up their employment success to get a measure of the effectiveness of the project.

EXAMINING STUDENT FEEDBACK PREFERENCES SWANSEA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Keywords

VLE resources; quiz assessment; formative feedback; written feedback; web-linked feedback

Aim

In order to ensure that the VLE resources available are used to their full potential, this project set out to show that students should become more involved in the design and implementation of resource tools. As the end users of these resources, students should be aware of the tools available and the way in which they can be used. By incorporating student knowledge and opinions into the creation process of VLE resources, it is hoped that information will be garnered to ensure that these resources are created in a way that is most conducive to the students' learning.

One of the easiest functions available to the instructor on the Blackboard system for student learning is the 'quiz' option. With minimal practice an instructor can quickly create a quiz for their students, with student responses available in multiple formats. Possibly the easiest and most intuitive of these is the multiple-choice format, where a question is asked and four possible answers are presented to the student. However, a further available option of 'feedback for correct and incorrect answers', if utilised, may provide greater formative learning for the student than merely informing them if they are right or wrong.

There are a number of ways in which the VLE can provide formative feedback to the students. A written explanation of why the answer given is correct or incorrect may be provided. Alternatively, a direct link to an external source on the web may be provided, which can provide the student with further information.

At present there appears to be little evidence to suggest which of these feedback types are most suitable for students. The project used students' direct input into both the creation and evaluation of a VLE quiz to examine their attitudes towards type of feedback preferred by students.

Sixty-one Psychology students from Swansea Metropolitan University provided input into the first part of the study during their 'Research Methods' module. All of the participants were first-year students who had been at the University for approximately five months. Data from 39 of the students from part one of the study was collected. However, three responses were incomplete, leaving 36 responses usable for analysis.

Description/approach

Participants were randomly assigned to two groups for the design of the study, with Group One designing quiz questions with written feedback and Group Two designing quiz questions with web-linked feedback. All participants took part in part two of the study, completing a quiz assessment form that examined participants' rating of question difficulty, perceived usefulness for an incoming student, and preference for type of feedback provided.

Anticipated outcomes

It was not assumed that either form would be preferred.

Evidence of actual outcomes

A chi-square analysis of expected versus observed preference for feedback type was utilised in the primary analysis to examine feedback preference. As a secondary analysis, a between-subjects design was carried out to examine whether preference for own-group design influenced preference for type of feedback. The students were tasked with selecting a question and four answers of similar difficulty level. Group One provided written information for answers, while Group Two provided a hyperlink to information about the correct answer.

One week later the students aided in the creation of a VLE quiz using the Blackboard multiple-choice quiz function, with each student entering their question independently. This provided two online quizzes, one with written feedback attached to the answers and one providing links to web information about the correct answer.

In part two of the study, all students were asked to complete both of the quizzes through the Blackboard system. Quiz presentation order (written feedback/web-based feedback) was counterbalanced across participants. Participants then completed the assessment form, which asked about difficulty level and usefulness of questions, and preference for web-based or written feedback.

Statistical analysis of counterbalance data showed no significant differences between groups for presentation

order of quizzes, nor a significant preference for own-group questions (all up's $>.05$). Analysing across all participants, there was no significant difference between reported difficulty levels of the written or web-based feedback questions ($p > .05$). Therefore, neither the questions used for each type of feedback nor the group which each participant had originally been assigned to were considered to be influential on subsequent results.

Chi-square analysis of the students' preference for feedback showed a significant difference between preference for written feedback ($n = 29$) and web-based feedback ($n = 7$), $\chi^2(1) = 13.44, p < .001$.

The overall findings of the study show that, while students reported finding both sets of questions useful and of equal levels of difficulty, there was an overall preference for written feedback over web-linked feedback. One possible reason for this is that the web-based content still involved searching for information, while the written content was far more direct in giving the specific answer to the question.

Reflection/impact

Before turning to the statistical analysis, it is worth noting the comments made by some of the students regarding their experiences creating the VLE quizzes. Overall, the students found this quite positive and it gave them an understanding of the requirements, particularly in relation to time, to create both the questions and the quiz itself. However, they were also pleased to see questions that they had created utilised in a format that could be useful for other students and not just themselves; this appeared to keep many motivated on a project that was extra-curricular to their assessed work. It was therefore also good to see that they approached the preference for feedback with a critical eye, choosing the feedback they felt worked best for them rather than merely choosing the feedback on which they had worked when creating the quiz.

The above point, however, gives rise to a major limitation of this study: while the procedure set out to both provide a quiz format designed by students for students, and also gain insight into student preferences for quiz usage through the Blackboard system, it does not provide clear indications of whether this preference is actually the most useful to the student. For example, just because students appear to prefer written feedback, does this mean that it is the best way for them to subsequently learn? An extension of this research is planned that will also involve a form of testing to examine whether retention of knowledge is aided by viewing written or web-based feedback.

One of the major issues highlighted during the study was the participant attrition rate between part one and part two of the study. While this was not an assessed exercise, it was incorporated into tutorial time to act as a learning experience for the students. The loss of one-third of students who chose not to involve themselves in part two of the study is an area of concern; as it involved the use of Blackboard directly, is it the case that these students either do not, or do not know how, to engage with the Blackboard system fully in order to utilise its functions? If this is the case then many of the ideas proposed for implementation through VLE systems may not reach the very users who require them the most. As many of the current young undergraduates are considered to be the 'computer generation', it is almost taken for granted that they will be conversant with use of VLE technology. However, it may be necessary to ensure that this is the case, and that support is put in place to aid those who are not as conversant with computer technology as others. A future study examining student ability and knowledge to access VLE and other computer technology is currently being undertaken and should help in some way to answer this question.

In conclusion, it appears that students do prefer the more direct means of answers provided through written feedback as opposed to the wider knowledge base of web-based feedback. Whether this is preferable for learning outcomes remains to be seen, but for the moment should be considered as the best way to provide information to students when using VLE quizzes. Also, by including students in the creation of the quizzes, it appeared that students adopted a sense of ownership for their learning. However, a major task highlighted is to attempt to reach those students who do not see extra-curricular work as being beneficial to them, even though it may aid them in their studies.

FAST AND BROAD: FIRST-YEAR MULTIPLE-CHOICE ASSESSMENT

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

first year; learning technology; learning outcomes; student-centred learning; engagement; immediate feedback

Aim

The aim was to assess the learning outcomes of the 'Understanding Markets' module of first-year undergraduate students studying BA and HND Business Studies and BA Marketing within the UWIC Cardiff School of Management.

A secondary aim was to provide instantaneous feedback for the students, including their assessment marks and also to give them some control of achieving their learning outcomes.

Description/approach

A multiple-choice assessment comprising 25 questions was developed using Blackboard, UWIC's virtual learning environment. The questions covered all the learning outcomes of the module and required that the students researched the answers for each question using multiple sources of references.

Students are commonly very eager for more opportunities that allow them to take control of their own learning. This assessment afforded them such an opportunity as they were required to prepare for the assessment by reading the material provided throughout the course, as well as self-directed reading. Students were encouraged to refer to reading matter while undertaking the assessment.

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that students would carry out more independent study as a result of this assessment and that they would appreciate the immediate feedback that online assessment can offer.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Student feedback has been very positive. They enjoyed the immediate response and liked the fact that they received their assessment marks as soon as they had completed the test. The objectivity of the test and the potential of achieving 100% were also very motivating for the students.

The autonomy afforded to the students in undertaking revision learning and further reading prior and during taking the assessment was also positively received.

There was a wide spread of marks from 0-100% with 70% of the students achieving 40% and over. Having received their marks immediately, students were able to progress and apply the feedback straight away to other learning tasks without waiting for further feedback – this was found to have a positive impact on their progress in other parts of the module.

The feedback in module evaluations was very positive, particularly regarding the assessment method. A review of the Blackboard data showed that after their assessment, the students returned to Blackboard more frequently, which suggests that students were carrying out independent study more often.

Reflection/impact

The assessments covered all the learning outcomes, but because of the format of the assessments the students were able to complete the assessment in a relatively short timescale of about four hours, hence the title 'Fast and Broad'.

The students were able to undertake the assessment from home or in UWIC. They did not need to print anything out or travel to submit the work or return to receive feedback, thereby saving financial, environmental and time costs.

The students did achieve a high level of autonomy through this assessment as they were encouraged to undertake a broad range of revision of learning material provided as well as further reading and learning before and during the assessment. This empowered the students in many instances, and the instant results led to increases in motivation.

Due to the success of the assessment, similar assessments will be introduced in Years 2 and 3 of the degree programme next year.

ONE-MINUTE FEEDBACK: 'THE MUDDIEST POINT' UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

deep learning; listening; feedback; supporting; non-threatening; helping; reflecting

Aim

The application of a one-minute feedback methodology was based around the non-complicated approach developed by Mosteller (1989) – “the muddiest point in the lecture” – as a feedback device to improve teaching and learning standards. The aim was to provide a simple and non-threatening means by which to encourage the student to provide feedback at the end of a lecture on any points or issues not fully understood. This information from students could then quickly be analysed by the lecturer, who, on reflection of the issues raised, could either respond to the individual or to a group and seek to re-engage in the subject area identified, as not being fully understood. The overall aim was to avoid the assumption that all students fully comprehended and understood the knowledge/subject matter covered in the lecture just delivered.

Description/approach

A trial 'one-minute feedback' was implemented with one control group of students over an eight-week period. Before

commencing, the process was carefully explained to the student cohort as it was important to gain ownership and trust as to why the feedback was being requested and how this might benefit individuals or the whole student group. It was important to make the process as non-threatening as possible with the aim of collecting 'student thoughts' before they left the lecture. It was also important to demonstrate a genuine desire to 'listen' and to be seen to respond in a positive and constructive way. Students were given the option of identifying themselves or remaining anonymous; the idea being not to put in place any reason or barrier why a student should not provide feedback.

A simple feedback paper form was issued at the end of the lecture and students were asked to spend no more than 60 seconds writing down their personal answer to the question: “what idea was least clear to you at the end of the session?”

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcome was difficult to determine in that students were not only being invited to provide detail of any issues they had struggled to understand, but implicit in this was the possible fear for the student in being seen to criticise their lecturer or to feel inadequate in some way by declaring an inability to understand the subject matter being taught.

Evidence of actual outcomes

During the eight-week trial, 176 one-minute feedback reports were returned. Of these 75% indicated there were no issues that needed further clarification, but there were 46 occasions (25%) that indicated that an 'idea' was not clear. There was also considerable variance in the number of 'unclear responses' from one lecture to another with a range spread from a high of 44% to a low of 4%.

The positive outcome was that students did feel able to raise issues where their level of understanding was not clear thus enabling the lecturer to reflect on the feedback and more importantly recover the situation at the following week's lecture or on a one-to-one basis if there was an isolated issue that the student had identified themselves.

There was certainly no evidence that students were not prepared to participate in providing the requested feedback and no evidence of a student feeling threatened by the process.

Reflection/impact

On reflection the use of a one-minute feedback process provided a win-win scenario. The students were able to freely and openly communicate areas of concern

regarding their level of understanding from each lecture, and the lecturer was able to gain valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the delivery, and more importantly, the understanding of the subject matter being taught. As the aim of the lecturer was to instil a level of deep rather than surface learning with the student group, the approach taken was very supportive of achieving this aim.

FEEDBACK ON FEEDBACK: STUDENT RESPONSES TO TUTORS AFTER RECEIVING FEEDBACK UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

feedback; online feedback; interactive feedback

Aim

This study developed and evaluated the use of an online interactive feedback system by students and lectures within higher education, with specific focus on first-year students on computing programmes.

Description/approach

The system

An online electronic interactive feedback system (OEIFS) was developed within BlackBoard, the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), which runs over the internet. BlackBoard was chosen after an evaluation of possible tools for development in conjunction with a critical appraisal of current thinking in this field. Blackboard had the necessary tools to develop a prototype system in order to investigate the questions and procedures that could be used by any future research. The development of the OEIFS within Blackboard meant that there were no issues regarding security or deployment as the infrastructure was already in place. The online implementation also meant that there was no restriction to the machine type in relation to hardware and, in addition, the only software required to run the OEIFS would be an internet browser.

How the system works

Students submitted their assessments via the system, then the lecturer downloaded the work, graded it and added the feedback that was read by the student. The OEIFS took the interaction between the lecturer and student a step further as the student now was given the opportunity to respond to the feedback that they received via an online questionnaire. The questionnaires consisted of nine

statements and were presented as a Likert scale with five possible responses, ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The lecturer could then reply to the student response to the feedback, which would then start another possible response from the student. After the second reply to their response, the students were either happy with the answers that they received or they talked to the lecturer directly.

Evidence of actual outcomes

This research recognised that the introduction of an online interactive feedback system within higher education improved student feedback for both lecturers and students. The results of these findings recognised that students had a better understanding of their feedback, which appeared to arise from the interactive element of the system. There was also an improvement in their perception of what feedback was as the system appeared to clarify their understanding of feedback. The students also thought that the quality of feedback improved as they could clarify any confusion that arose through the interactive element of the system. Students who used the online interactive feedback system appreciated being able to communicate with the lecturer and recognised that the questionnaire they used helped in reflecting on their feedback. In addition, the separation that the system introduced between the student and lecturer simplified the process of responding to any criticism of their work. It is recognised that there are areas for improvement with the interface that was used for the system, but overall this research has found that the online interactive feedback system improved the dialogue between lecturer and student and also enhanced the learning process for the student.

DIAGNOSTIC AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT USING A PERSONAL RESPONSE SYSTEM UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

personal response system; diagnostic/formative assessment

Aim

The personal response system (PRS) is an electronic voting system, which enables teaching staff to ask their students questions and receive instant feedback on their responses.

Firstly, the PRS was used as a diagnostic assessment tool. This is particularly important in higher education as

students come from a variety of educational backgrounds and therefore have differing levels of knowledge and skills on entry. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many first-year students lack basic knowledge within their chosen subjects and that poor comprehension is usually only identified after an initial assessment, which is often too late.

Secondly, the system was employed to formatively assess students' understanding of topics that had been covered during their first few weeks of term.

Description/approach

A series of multiple-choice questions were created in Microsoft PowerPoint, using the PRS software. The questions were designed to assess the existing knowledge of first-year BA Modern History and Politics undergraduates, such as key historical dates and facts. It allowed the lecturer to measure students' preparedness for their chosen programme of study and to identify gaps in the knowledge and understanding that students would be expected to possess on entry.

Students' knowledge retention and concept understanding of topics that had been covered early on were also measured through multiple-choice tests. This allowed the lecturer to identify areas that required further teaching and/or revision.

During the learning session, questions were posed and students were required to use their handsets to answer. Once every student had responded, the lecturer closed the vote and the class responses were displayed in the form of a bar or pie chart for everyone to see. After the responses to each question had been revealed, the lecturer confirmed the correct answer and discussed the topic in further detail.

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that assessing students in the few weeks of their first term at UWIC would allow teaching staff to identify gaps in students' understanding of their discipline. By addressing areas of weakness, the risk of students falling behind would be minimised and therefore retention and progression would be maximised.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Rather than feeling daunted by the early assessment, students commented that the learning session had been enjoyable, fun and engaging. Students were enthusiastic about the technology and the results of an evaluation form showed that almost 60% rated the system as 'Excellent' or 'Very Good'.

The PRS enabled the lecturer to provide immediate feedback to students on how they are progressing and also indicate to them where they need to focus their studies/revision. Using the system allowed students to compare their knowledge and understanding with their fellow students as well as offering an immediate insight into areas where they had good comprehension, thereby boosting their confidence. Students were also able to identify subject areas that required further reading.

Voting anonymously minimised the embarrassment students often feel when answering questions incorrectly, and they also felt reassured to know that they were not the only ones who did not understand particular topics.

The students showed very good levels of background knowledge within their subject, thereby refuting the common belief that new entrants often have a poor understanding of basic principles. However, several areas of concern were identified, which were addressed as a result.

Reflection/impact

The innovative method of assessment was met with a high level of enthusiasm by students. The PRS contributed to increased interaction between students, which led to discussions between students and improved peer learning and academic motivation. Students remained actively engaged during the lecture, which was reflected later in their knowledge retention and subsequent attainment.

In conclusion, the PRS is an excellent pedagogic tool that can be used to measure students' existing knowledge and knowledge retention, making it ideal for diagnostic and formative assessment and a useful tool during revision sessions.

EARLY ASSESSMENT

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

early assessment; expectations; motivation; retention

Aim

To introduce an assignment on academic writing skills before the half-term reading week to enable early feedback to be given, and reduce anxiety regarding the build up of 'the' first assignment (hitherto handed in at the end of term 1). The early hand-in date will also result in a better spread of Year 1 assignments over the academic year.

Description/approach

The assignment will require students to apply the theory from a workshop on writing skills and references in a broad-based pre-clinical module.

Anticipated outcomes

To:

- reduce anxiety for students making the transition into higher education by providing early feedback on academic performance;
- enable students to adjust to university-level standards, as frequently, grades achieved at university may not be as high as they had experienced previously at school or college;
- highlight early on the importance of appropriate academic writing and referencing;
- reduce the likelihood that students will repeatedly get the same comments from different tutors, both within and between years, by ensuring the first assignment and its feedback focus more on process than content, thereby providing the opportunity to achieve higher grades in subsequent assignments;
- identify early on, those students who might benefit from additional help with study skills, including essay writing skills and refer them for support;
- identify any first language Welsh-speaking students who have chosen to write their assignments in English yet who are unfamiliar in doing so, and who may require some support with English grammar;
- improve retention as a result of reducing anxiety and implementing support as identified early on.

Evidence of actual outcomes

This initiative is to be introduced in the next academic year (2010-11) so the outcome is yet to be determined. It is in response to end of Year 1 feedback in which students requested an earlier assignment and feedback, as well as following informal discussions between staff and students at the start of term 2 (see 'Support from Students' entry below).

Reflection

The initiative has required a minor change in the hand-in date of the first assignment. Due to intensive staff teaching loads, this first assignment will be reduced in length to ensure there can be a quick marking turnaround time. Any changes to assessments need to be logistically manageable for both students and staff in order that the desired outcomes are achieved.

Initiatives that enable employability through the first-year curriculum

Institution-wide

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS BANGOR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

engagement; partnership

Aim

This initiative is part of the institution's widening participation work, in collaboration with the Reaching Wider North Wales Partnership. The main aim is to raise young people's aspirations in STEM subjects and to develop an employer engagement model that stimulates collaboration across the sectors to address the skills shortages in North Wales.

Description/approach

Employers in North Wales are critically aware of skills shortages within the workforce and of the need to increase the skills base of potential employees. Demographic issues are leading companies to accept that significant effort will be required to remedy some severe and persistent skills shortages in the area. In North Wales, Bangor University's School of Lifelong Learning is endeavouring to meet this challenge by working in partnership with industry, Business in the Community and the Reaching Wider North Wales Partnership. This is being done through a recently established North Wales HR STEM Forum, which represents the key industries in the region.

Anticipated outcomes

To:

- establish a networking programme for Human Resource professionals;
- create a platform for collaboration across the sectors to

- ensure coherent and meaningful provision;
- focus business community involvement in deprived communities across North Wales on employability and raising educational aspiration;
- ensure the support of the Wales TUC for skills development in the workforce;
- establish a programme to integrate schools and businesses to tackle long-term skills shortages and to raise the aspirations of young people, particularly in deprived communities;
- in partnership with the Welsh Language Board, promote the use of Welsh in either education support or career development for those from the most deprived communities.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- Establishment of the North Wales HR STEM forum whose membership includes: BT, Magnox North, Kingspan Insulated Panels, Cadburys, Scottish Power together with Lifelong Learning, Business in the Community and Reaching Wider North Wales Partnership.
- Discussions are currently taking place between the HR STEM Forum and the WJEC to determine the shape of the new science GCSEs.
- Discussions are planned with University departments to ensure the curriculum addresses the needs of industry.
- Plans are in place to:
 - explore the possibility of including industry placements in ITT;
 - provide business mentoring to teachers and head teachers;
 - provide role models and mentors to young people;
 - allow industry to work more collaboratively with the education sector to develop a more responsive continuum.

Reflection/impact

There is no other model like this in Wales and it is already catching the attention of educationalists, industrialists and policy makers. It could have a lasting impact on the relationship between supply and demand and between the private and public sectors.

‘EXPERIENCE WORKS’ WEEK UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

collaboration; partnership working; institutional; employer engagement; raising the profile of work experience; enhancing the student experience; engagement with the employability agenda

Aim

The aim of this high profile initiative was to raise the awareness among students and to encourage their engagement in a wide range of work-related opportunities. This is against a background of economic recession, which has resulted in fewer one-year placements being available.

Description/approach

- This initiative was delivered by the Work Experience Task Group, which has representatives from all faculties; the Careers Service; the Students' Union; the Commercial Services office; the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching (CELT); and the Marketing department.
- The task group reported directly to the Employer Engagement Group, which is chaired by one of the pro-vice-chancellors and therefore endorsed at a senior level within the University.
- Funding for this initiative was provided by a successful bid by the Careers Service for an Innovation Grant, which was awarded by CELT.
- This was the first time for such a wide programme of events to have been organised by the University and hosted by all faculties across all three campuses. In total 32 events were organised throughout the week, which were supported by 91 individual employers.
- A website was created to publicise the programme of events and to manage the booking process for some sessions: www.glam.ac.uk/experienceworks. This was supported by an extensive marketing plan, which was delivered in partnership with the Marketing department.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes were:

- engagement by students through attending a wide range of events throughout the week, some of which were freestanding bookable and integrated into the curriculum;
- support from academic staff in organising and hosting events;
- raising the value and range of work-related experience opportunities including voluntary work, international opportunities and a variety of structured placements including short placements and work tasters etc.;
- that employers would support this event and be critically involved in delivering advice and information.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- Over 1,100 students attended 32 events during the week.
- Feedback from students indicated that 60% of students who attended said the event was excellent. Only 5% said they did not find it useful while the remainder found it very useful.
- There was considerable support from academic faculties with nine events integrated within the curriculum, five others organised by faculty staff, and 18 events organised by the Careers Service.
- The SU hosted a Volunteer Fair, which was hosted by over 100 students.
- The launch event included a high profile external celebrity speaker who also hosted a speed networking event.
- Two further exhibitions were held, one at our Cardiff campus and one at the main campus in Pontypridd.
- 54 employer organisations supported the event and the feedback was excellent:

The event was very well organised and Ruth Badger was a fantastic speaker. It was a great event.
(National Council for Work Experience)

- 80% of employers rated the event as 8 out of 10:

It is one of the best events we have attended aimed at promoting work experience to students in higher education. (Welsh Assembly Government)

From an employer's perspective it was a very well run and useful day. (BBC)

The speed networking was a good concept and worked really well. (Global Exchange)

This was an excellent event. Students are fortunate to have a Careers Service who are able to organise such a high profile networking event to promote a wide range of work-related experiences. (Ruth Badger, guest speaker)

Reflection/impact

- The 'Experience Works' weeks certainly gave the vehicle to raise the profile of employability and the value of work experience for both students and staff.
- Support for the initiative at a senior level within the University was critical.
- The right guest speaker can provide a catalyst for support from employers and other stakeholders.
- Gaining 'buy-in' from a cross-section of colleagues fostering a team approach is critical.

- Having fewer and sharper-focused events is likely to gain a better cross-section of engagement from students.
- Embedding all events will be a critical success factor as we move forward with future planning. This is also being reflected at a more strategic level in relation to moving forward with the wider employability agenda.
- The event was also an excellent case study in working in partnership both with internal and external stakeholders.
- It also had a positive PR value and several articles were published in the press.

WORK-BASED LEARNING: FRAMEWORK AND RESOURCES TOOLKITS UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

shell framework; outline module descriptors; resources toolkits

Aim

The target audience for this initiative is:

- anyone who would like to gain a university qualification for their work (including those who may not necessarily have formal qualifications but who have 'the ability to work at the relevant level');
- anyone who already holds relevant qualifications but would like a framework for continuing or extending their development;
- anyone who would find difficulty in attending a conventional full-time or part-time university course.

Description/approach

In order to facilitate higher levels of adoption of work-based learning, in 2009 the University of Glamorgan's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), in partnership with the University of Glamorgan Commercial Services, developed a work-based learning framework and an online toolkit of support materials that articulates progression pathways from HE entry levels through to postgraduate study. The framework and toolkit fits with the UK's Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and was developed in full consultation with faculty Heads of Learning and Teaching.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcome was a framework for work-based learning and toolkit of support resources for learners, employers and lecturers that could be adopted across the Glamorgan Group in order to help address

the employability and skills agenda for University of Glamorgan students of all ages, on all modes of study, and at all HE levels, wherever they are studying, on or off campus, in the UK or overseas, with student support materials available on Blackboard, the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

In England a limited number of HEIs have adopted a framework approach to the accreditation of work-based learning. This will be the first shell framework to be articulated for the Welsh skills agenda by a Welsh HEI.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The Learning Through Employment framework

Full details on the framework and its implementation can be found on the CELT website (<http://celt.glam.ac.uk/Learning-Through-Employment>).

Outline module descriptors: Outline modules, including sample learning outcomes, are offered in order that programme designers who may be less familiar with a competency-based approach to assessment or indeed less familiar with the accrediting of informal learning, may take these 'off the shelf' and incorporate them into their programmes. Learning Through Employment modules may also be used to accredit placement learning thereby embedding employability into more traditional campus-based programmes that adopt learning for employment.

The Learning Through Employment toolkit

A toolkit of support materials has also been developed by CELT to provide practical advice, support and guidance on the Learning Through Employment framework, with separate toolkits targeted towards learners, employers and lecturers.

Learners' Toolkit: The learners' toolkit is promoted on the University's web pages (<http://celt.glam.ac.uk/Learning-Through-Employment/Learners-Toolkit>), with support material available via Blackboard. The learners' toolkit support materials interface with the VLE via the University's own content management system (CMS) 'GlamLearn'. The online learners' toolkit offers a wealth of information and guidance on:

- learning to learn with the toolkit and engaging with the CMS, the framework and credits;
- the accreditation of prior learning;
- preparing a learning contract;
- accessing the University's facilities (many of which are available online).

There are also full support materials on how work-based learning can be assessed, including:

- outlines of various methods of assessment;
- guidance on preparing a portfolio for assessment (with the integration of an e-portfolio tool within Blackboard to facilitate assessment and personal development planning);
- guidance on reflection and review, making presentations, and preparing work-based and research projects.

This toolkit is also accessible by University staff involved in the support of these learners.

Employers' Toolkit: The employers' toolkit is available electronically (<http://celt.glam.ac.uk/Learning-Through-Employment/Employers-Toolkit>) and is also available in hard-copy format. This toolkit outlines some of the issues facing employers considering supporting work-based learners, including the limit and also extent to which employers can be involved, if they so choose, in: the University's discussions about skills, qualification and training requirements in the industry; curriculum working groups; designing units of the course; delivering units of the programme; offering students work-based learning opportunities, projects, placements and work experience; assessing students' work; and offering representation on employer panels. The toolkit also outlines the additional support employers can offer the University outside of any work-based learning role, such as acting as: a visiting speaker/lecturer; a contact for graduate employment; a host for day visits by students; and an employer of students on a part-time basis during holidays and at weekends.

Lecturers' Toolkit: The lecturers' toolkit, available at <http://celt.glam.ac.uk/Learning-Through-Employment/Lecturers-Toolkit>, contains information on managing work-based learning programmes; supporting work-based learners; and assessing work-based learning in order to facilitate an equitable level of support for work-based learners at all levels independent of the individual tutor support that may be variable across programmes.

Reflection/impact

The employability and skills agenda is being driven by employers, Sector Skills Councils, professional bodies, and also by Government. In Wales, specific challenges have also been translated into policies and strategies articulated by Welsh Assembly Government, and higher education institutions (HEIs) have tended to articulate their own policies in response to these drivers. However, the question still remains of how a HEI can better ensure that it delivers in practice what it has articulated in policy.

Despite some examples of good practice in both learning for employment, and learning through employment across the institution, real opportunities for learners to gain accreditation for informal learning are not always available in practice for all students at the University, although University policy does articulate the regulations and processes for the accreditation of experiential learning.

The Learning Through Employment framework embeds the notion of programmes that are designed in partnership with employers, so that specific skills needs may be met that are relevant to the Welsh context, including opportunities brought about by the creation of the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHoVI).

The Learning Through Employment framework enables programmes at all HE levels to be designed in partnership with employers, in order that specific skills needs may be met that are relevant to the Welsh context. Validating the shell Learning Through Employment framework and outline module descriptors facilitates the wider adoption of work-based learning across the Glamorgan Group.

This approach could help other HEIs better enable the wider accreditation and embedding of work-based learning within HE, which is deemed so important in facilitating the achievement of UK Government targets for 40% of UK adults to gain a qualification at Level 4 or above in the next ten years.

NETWORK75 PROFESSIONAL ACADEMY UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

employability; key skills; widening access; Network75; work-based learning

Aim

Network75, introduced at the University of Glamorgan in 2000, is a unique, innovative work placement scheme that created a network of 75 companies aiming to support and attract young people into engineering/technology. In order to acquire academic and practical training in Mechanical, Civil or Electrical Engineering, students study for degrees part-time over five years while working in a host company. Students receive a bursary and study free of charge, helping to widen higher education participation by minimising the financial constraints involved. Network75 has further developed its course

offering in response to demand from companies and potential students for courses right across the Faculty of Advanced Technology and University of Glamorgan. We currently have Network75 students in engineering, built environment, business and accounting disciplines.

Description/approach

Network75 is a combined work and study route to a degree. Undergraduates apply their academic knowledge to real-life work within a host company. During term-time students work in a local business for three days per week and attend University for two days per week. Students work full-time at their host company throughout holiday periods. Students on Network75 receive a minimum tax-free bursary of £5,000 per annum, which increases by £500 each academic year. In addition to the bursary payments, all Network75 students have their course tuition fees paid in full. Students on Network75 can therefore choose to graduate without any student debt at all.

We have a network of over 400 companies across South and West Wales. Opportunities are available in a wide variety of industries within companies of all sizes, from large multi-nationals to small enterprises. All companies participating in Network75 must prove that they are innovative and able to offer a high quality placement to students. As a result students can be sure of a top-quality position that will give the best training and experience. Host companies and Network75 management work closely to develop individual student training plans.

Combining work with study helps to improve students' future employability. Network75 trainees graduate with both academic and practical training, making them industry-ready and well prepared for the workplace. All students who have graduated from Network75 to date have been offered jobs by their companies and often accept senior positions upon graduation.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Evidence over the past ten years has shown a number of Network75 successes including:

- 100% employment rate: all students graduating from Network75 to date have been offered positions within their host companies;
- being shortlisted for the Times Higher Award 2009 'Outstanding Employer Engagement Initiative' category;
- developing both generic and technical work-based skills through specific training and supporting transferable skills;
- establishing a network of educators, specialists, students, companies, schools and colleges;

- disseminating best practice and promoting technology/knowledge transfer;
- encouraging employment/retention of graduates in South Wales;
- securing ISO9001: 2008 accreditation;
- becoming a sustainable project. It is a testament to companies' satisfaction with Network75 that in 2006 companies increased funding contributions in order to allow the scheme to continue;
- increasing Network75's offering across the Faculty of Advanced Technology and the University of Glamorgan;
- generating vast media interest.

Reflection/impact

The Network75 scheme has proved to be successful for students, host companies and the University. Network75 has been successful in attracting both students and companies to the University of Glamorgan. As the reputation of the scheme grows it is anticipated that the demand will grow further.

School- or faculty-wide

ENGINEERING INDUCTION: ELASTIC OLYMPICS – GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

enterprise; engineering; challenge; creativity; problem solving

Aim

We were tasked with putting together a set of workshops to introduce engineering students to concepts of creativity and problem-solving while helping to cement teams on new courses at the start of the academic year. The classes consisted of both local students and students from several European countries.

Description/approach

The Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (CfEL) initiatives work best when carried out in collaboration with enterprising academics. In this instance we found the Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering subject discipline to be open and supportive of new ideas. CfEL developed an 'Elastic Olympics' to challenge over 200 students to find innovative

and entrepreneurial ways of solving problems linked to their studies, thereby introducing a competitive element. In doing so they were learning enterprise and entrepreneurial skills, which will help improve their future employability.

This involved them in the planning, design and build of kinetic machines from scrap materials. This had the dual function of discussing engineering principles in a fun environment where everyone was slightly out of their comfort zone.

Anticipated outcomes

- increased knowledge/interest in enterprise skills (creativity, problem-solving, etc.) and entrepreneurship linked to their degrees and increased motivation to pursue engineering;
- increased interaction with Zone/Z□n, the student enterprise centre, throughout their studies.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Student feedback questionnaires showed that over 80% felt that the 'Elastic Olympics' had helped them to learn more about enterprise and entrepreneurship as linked to their degrees. They commented that they had learnt a great deal about themselves and achieved varying levels of results – this in a fun environment while developing skills that will add value to their subject knowledge and increase their chances for graduate-level employment.

The overwhelming majority of students enjoyed the workshops and felt that it had helped them to come together as a group. One student in particular was moved to stand up at the end of the session to highlight the fact that cultural barriers had been broken down and everyone was now one group of students, noting:

Getting to meet my fellow students and getting to know them all made this event far better than any icebreaker.

Reflection/impact

The students found the autonomous nature of this free creativity exercise to be very rewarding. It was not what they had expected their first engineering experience to be like, and it increased their enthusiasm for the rest of the course.

The students, who were from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds, found that this exercise moved them all slightly out of their comfort zone, creating a shared experience that enabled everyone to work together instead of keeping to their own cultural groups. This bodes well for future team working in the faculty.

ESTABLISHING MEANINGFUL PDP EXPERIENCES WITH LARGE STUDENT GROUPS

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

managing personal change; personal development planning; employability awareness

Aim

The aim of this project was to develop a sustainable process to enable first-year Sport undergraduate cohorts (>450 per year group) to articulate their skills, qualities and abilities within an employability context as well as improving what and how they learn, how to evaluate their development, and what targets they need to set themselves.

Description/approach

This blended learning approach has been driven, designed and evaluated by a collaborative cross-functional development team to deliver effective PDP learning support, enhance the quality of learning resources, and revalue learners' individual contribution.

Year 1 students are introduced to key concepts in PDP (within an employability framework) to engage them in a process of personal planning as a scaffold for learners during their transition into HE. The PDP process is supported through a series of self-managed activities learners need to complete over the year. Each term commences with a lead 'briefing' to introduce key concepts and explain the self-managed activities students need to complete over the term. The activities combine stimulus with thoughtful reflection.

E-lessons cover:

- academic and information skills (with accredited e-test);
- learning styles;
- role of personal tutor;
- reflective skills and self-assessment;
- Year 2 options choices – making informed choices for intended career pathways.

Tasks include:

- three-day outdoor residential activity and associated reflective tasks;
- building an evidence base of employability skills development;
- reviewing progress with evidence-based personal reflection.

The methodologies address learners' demonstrated preference for a Facebook style of access. Responsible maintenance of individual e-portfolios of uploaded work, reflective logs and employability logs – all accessible by personal tutors – encourages learners' quality investment in their own work.

Anticipated outcomes

The aims of the module are to:

- develop students' awareness of employability and understanding of the personal, social, academic, reflective and professional skills required at Level 1;
- devise an accurate evidence base of developing employability skills.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this module students should be able to:

- evaluate their role within a team;
- identify their own learning styles and preferences and apply self-management and independent learning strategies to address their study at HE Level 1;
- devise and monitor an action plan for their personal development based on their awareness of the key aspects of employability;
- develop appropriate and accurate evidence to support their progress;
- demonstrate independent learning by addressing appropriate academic support and information systems.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Achievement of these outcomes has been evidenced in the range of outputs built into the self-managed activities, which are then up-loaded into students' e-portfolios. To ensure learners' responses reflect full engagement with the various e-lessons, tasks require reflection on the impact of information on personal development.

Reflection/impact

Evaluation indicates the vast majority engaging well with the new PDP processes; for example, 'snacking' on e-lessons out of hours, late at night and on weekends, with return visits. Learners have positively critiqued the e-lessons, and the self-managed nature of the modules enabling them to engage at times suiting their learning and lifestyles.

Much learner reflection on personal development is pleasingly mature, demonstrating the reward from the 'dignity factor' created by the safe environment these modules have produced.

PATHOLOGY FIELD TRIP: THRESHOLD CONCEPTS AND THE TRANSFER OF LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

work experience; employability; transferable skills; pathology; biomedical science

Aim

The aim of the pathology field trip was to enable first-year Biomedical Science students to experience the subject first hand and be exposed to the working environment that they would be likely to go into after graduating.

Description/approach

Forty-two first-year Biomedical Sciences students were offered the opportunity to attend a field trip to an NHS pathology laboratory (Royal Gwent) to gain insight into the working life of a registered biomedical scientist and an introduction to pathology.

Students witnessed real-life case studies and observed how academic knowledge is applied within the world of work. They took part in the daily routine of a biomedical scientist and gained experience in all sections of the department, such as cytology, where they were able to compare healthy and diseased tissue under microscopes under the supervision of a professional who helped students look for appropriate features.

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that the trip would provide students with a 'real-world' view of biomedical science and contextualise classroom-based exercises, which would in turn enhance their employability skills and understanding of the subject.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Results of a questionnaire showed that the pathology field trip had encouraged students to exercise interpersonal and networking skills, which had improved their ability to communicate and develop working relationships.

The work experience students received gave them a better insight into the role of a registered biomedical scientist. This allowed students to make more informed decisions about whether they wished to pursue a career in a similar profession upon graduation. Students were also able to better understand threshold concepts ('alien concepts') as a result of the trip as they were able to transfer their classroom learning to practical, real-life tasks.

Scheme- or programme-wide

EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

employability; skills; personal/professional development

Aim

The aim of the module is to give students a framework within which to develop key skills underpinning their academic study and future employability through further personal and professional development. The module is offered as part of the first year of the Higher National Diploma (HND) and Higher National Certificate (HNC) programmes in the general areas of management and business.

Description/approach

As the module title suggests, 'Employability and Professional Development' enables students to develop an early understanding of the skills they will need for work and study, within a framework of continuing professional development. To support students' development of key employment/study skills, the module assesses entry-level key skills early through both self-diagnostic activities and an individual interview, and asks students to identify their own areas for improvement over the year ahead. The module handbook contains exercises and activities that support and reinforce each week's skills-based workshop session incrementally as well as providing elements for their developing professional portfolio, itself assessed as part of assignments two and three. At the end of the module, having completed activities from basic numeracy, communications and presentation skills through to more advanced problem solving, research and creative thinking sessions, students submit a reflective essay considering their development over the year and attend an exit-interview to discuss their future employment (and study) skills objectives.

The guiding framework for the module is Kolb's learning cycle, which is directly referred to at the beginning of the workshop programme and underpins the assessment strategy and much of the workshop activity. Learning outcomes are thus about students evidencing their employability and study skill developments by engaging

in individual and group-based activities and experiences, reflecting on those experiences and, crucially, planning ahead for new skill developments as their careers continue.

Anticipated outcomes

The module is designed to improve the way in which students engage with their own professional skills development in their classes, part-time jobs, and their lives more generally, and take ownership of this developmental process. We anticipate that by the end of the year-long programme students will have developed a 'learning mindset' appropriate to their own context, skills and needs. Planning further skill development for the second year of the programme and their future careers is the major focus of the final assignment.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The nature of this module and its assessment means that collecting evidence of anticipated outcomes is always challenging. The skills being developed throughout the module are both personal and contextual so only the students themselves are fully able to evaluate how effective it has been in achieving its goals for them as individuals. The indirect impact is likely to be felt in other contexts – their part-time jobs and other modules, for example – as the students begin to apply the skills they have started to hone during workshop sessions to the tasks before them. Quantifying this correlation remains almost impossible, but we do know that those who engage fully with the skills programme often progress fairly smoothly to their second year of studies. Many also express interests in the University's BA (Hons) top-up programme during their HND/HNC studies, suggesting they have understood the importance of continuous professional development for their future career aspirations.

While it would clearly be inappropriate to suggest that the students' ability to progress was solely the impact of this module, the teaching team take great pride in the contribution this module clearly makes to students' engagement with the academic and professional challenges they face and to their ability to rearrange their own skills priorities accordingly.

Reflection/impact

Each yearly review brings new ideas, from students and tutors across the University's network of partner FE colleges where this programme is also taught, for better ways to support students' developing confidence to move their own careers forward. In the 2009-10 academic year we have spent more time on presentations about students'

skills, rather than on skills of making presentations more generally, and are reviewing ways to make the final exit interview more formal next year, to closer mimic a work interview situation and emphasise the importance of both personal and professional presentation in every aspect of their developing professional lives.

Final note: the module leader would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Mary Broomfield and colleagues, both past and present, in delivering and developing this module within the Partner College network. Thanks also go to those involved in earlier incarnations of this module. The success of this initiative would not have been possible without everyone's enthusiastic support.

'SO, WHAT DID YOU LEARN ON PLACEMENT?' UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

Keywords

reflections on learning; voluntary sector; work-based learning

Aim

The aim was to give first-year LLB degree students insight into a 40-credit module, 'Reflections on Legal Advice Work', which can be studied over the second and third year of their course with a 20-credit exit point at the end of their second year.

Description/approach

The module is like no other the students study in many important respects. Firstly, they agree to work as volunteers at the Citizens Advice Bureau and make commitments to Citizens Advice to volunteer for up to ten hours per week. This is not suitable for some students depending on their paid employment and domestic commitments. Secondly, students need to be aware that while the work can be highly rewarding, some aspects of the work can be challenging on a number of different levels. Thirdly not all first-year students exhibit a high level of awareness of the importance of acquiring work experience and the need to enhance their employability.

It was thought that the best way to communicate these issues to the students was to get current second- and third-year students to share their experiences with the students. As some of these students had made impressive progress with their advisory work including representational work

at first tier Social Security and Child Support Tribunals, this would motivate and inspire the first-years. The module has also seen some unexpected developments in the affective domain with students re-evaluating their values as a result of their advisory work. It was also thought to be an effective way of explaining the ethos behind Citizens Advice and the need to subscribe to this ethos if the students were to choose this module.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes were:

- a greater number of students opting to do this module;
- higher completion rates of those students who do choose the module.

Evidence of actual outcomes

While at the time of writing, it is too soon to see the effect on completion rates, it has raised awareness of the module among students, with more students finding placements and opting to do the module in the 2010-11 academic year.

Reflection/impact

Allowing the student voice to come through to the first-year students has given them a much greater awareness of issues associated with this optional module than they would have obtained through traditional module fairs. It gave them the chance to hear authentic inspirational stories and a chance to consider aspects of the module that may not have been immediately apparent to them such as the opportunity to examine their values. The more challenging aspects of advice work could be dealt with in a manner that was realistic but not off-putting to students.

‘THIS WILL BE MY LIFE’ GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

career focus; work experience; employability; aspiration

Aim

To enable students to reflect and focus early on a career choice thus raising aspirations and achievement.

Target audience for those using this type is type of assessment is media tutors specifically, but anyone teaching at first-year level who is looking to help students gain career focus and an integrated approach to practical study and employability. First-year students are also part of the target audience.

Glyndwr University is the youngest university in Wales, a new educational institution that champions the spirit of enterprise and an outward-facing philosophy. This heralds an exciting new era for Wrexham, Wales, the borderlands and the academic world. The University sets out to inspire enterprise in all who engage with us. Courses are designed to provide employers with exactly what they are looking for and to encourage students in developing their entrepreneurial spirit. Support in helping students plan both their careers and their lives outside of the world of work is key to our University ethos and mission.

Description/approach

This exercise involved the integration of a creative media-based exercise that developed personal reflective research based on careers coaching and attendance at an industry-specific careers fair that included workshops and media employer exhibitors.

Specifically, the assessment exercise asked the students to use reflective processes and exercises in class to produce a reflective ten-minute video that considered the factors that resulted in them coming to university to study Broadcasting and Journalism and to consider their future aspirations and possible career directions (in either a broad or a specific sense).

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that students would begin to start considering the significance of their university study and the period over the next three years of study in relation to future careers, and that students would receive a strong message that a degree alone is unlikely to help them into the creative industries or media industries.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Several of the students have booked further careers appointments since handing in their assessment. At least two of the students have gained and completed media work placements in their own time.

Reflection/impact

The quality of the videos received is both exciting and impressive. Students have relished the chance to reflect on their route to university and to consider existing skills and future aspirations. Without exception, each student has applied a creative treatment to an emerging notion of an ‘employable self’.

Perhaps the biggest and most unexpected marker is that this group have begun the creation of a Student Magazine

for Glyndwr University. This is a group-driven initiative that they have told me was conceived as part of the realisation that they need to gain some media experience during their time at university and that this is a way for them to network within the University and with local businesses.

DESIGN COMMUNICATIONS COMMUNITY BLOG GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

blog; community; development; employment

Aims

The community blog aims to improve the student experience by developing a more relevant VLE and experience that builds networks with a design industry focus. It also investigates how we learn from social media.

Description/approach

Located away from major cities and immediate, direct access to the design community, the community blog brings the design industry closer. The current VLE system has not been embraced by the student cohort because of its inflexibility and top-down structure. Consequently, an open-source, flexible VLE was devised that would continue to evolve and maintain relevance through university and into employment.

All students currently keep a blog to reflect on their practice and document research. A community blog was established to aid employability by building skills, raising industry awareness and encouraging cross-school collaborative projects.

The blog (<http://nwsadcollective.wordpress.com>) was established to build a community of design students, from all year groups, across the art school. Students are invited to become members of the blog and can link from the group site to their own blog.

Staff and students make posts and share information about design practice and contemporary work and topical issues. Job adverts are posted and group and community projects initiated. Students can air difficulties they are having with projects or can post work for group feedback. Threads form in response to posts. It acts as a catalyst for work, discussion and debate that corresponds to professional interaction in a studio environment and it breaks down some of the false divisions of level-based learning.

Students participate at a range of levels; for example, reading, responding to posts and posting new content. This kind of participation often becomes more active as students progress and gain confidence. First-years become part of the community and are able to gain insight into potential career paths from those who have gone before them. Former students continue to post and this establishes direct connections within industry.

Anticipated outcomes

Students maintain persistent awareness of contemporary practice and movements in industry. Interdisciplinary and inter-level links encourage professional collaborations and relationships. Students look outside traditional professional practice models and become proactive at generating work and building career options. This includes greater awareness of grants and funding processes. Self-initiated groups tackle live briefs. Students build communication skills, and an improved engagement with individual portfolio blogs is anticipated as a spin-off of the community blog.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The community has created an extendable, fluid VLE for networking that can adapt as a student's relationship to industry changes. What begins as a source of information about current practice and work in creative industries becomes a tool for finding work, showing work and networking. The project has raised student awareness of intellectual property rights and privacy issues, as well as the role and impact of social networks.

Interdisciplinarity is strongly encouraged within art and design, and it is this culture that has supported and enabled the community blog to become embedded and to flourish.

Reflection/impact

The group blog has become a hub for communication in the subject area and has taken on a life of its own. Posts on the blog often provoke discussions that continue in the studio. Students are increasingly aware of how designers communicate portfolio work and adopt these methods for building their own professional presence online and offline.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS MODULE UNIVERSITY OF WALES, NEWPORT

Keywords

personal and professional development; hard and soft skills; reflective practice; student expectations and engagement

Aim

The module aims to develop and enhance the employability of students by providing them with the opportunity and support for:

- managing their academic, personal development and career planning;
- developing the range of transferable skills so valued by employers and essential for academic and professional success.

How was the initiative introduced?

The initiative was introduced in 2004 as an accredited core module to all the undergraduate BSc Computing programmes with the exception of Games and AI, where the programme leader considered there was no appropriate slot for such a module in a full first-year curriculum of that programme. In 2008 the module became compulsory with successful completion required to progress to the next level. As a result of feedback from Games and AI students, who felt they were disadvantaged by exclusion from the module, 'Professional Skills' will be introduced as part of their programme in the next academic year.

Description/approach

The teaching team considered the first year was critical not only to provide a crucial underpinning of the key skills essential for the rest of the programme of study and career, but also to cover an important aspect of the requirements of professional bodies associated with the computing discipline, such as the British Computing Society (BCS).

Learning outcomes are linked to identifying and adopting appropriate professional, ethical and legal practices, as well as planning and developing personal, academic and professional goals. Equally important are primary and secondary research methods, referencing techniques and effective written and oral presentation. Demonstrating the ability to work as a member of a team is a key factor in the module.

The first assignment requires students, by the end of Semester 1, to plan and prioritise their personal development in relation to career prospects and related learning. They are expected to reflect upon how they can build and enhance a portfolio of career skills that they can offer a prospective graduate employer. A group-based assignment in Semester 2 requires them to research, analyse and compare the graduate opportunities for computing professionals and the requirements of computing graduate employers.

A significant factor in the success of the module has been the ongoing support of the Computing Academic Leader and his teaching team as well as that of the University Careers' team. The latter has an input into the delivery of the module, while all are involved in the assessment of the team presentation.

Anticipated outcomes

To engage first-year students directly in a process that provides them with an academic and professional skill set upon which they can build their personal development planning (PDP) and develop their employability in the subsequent years of degree study. It was anticipated that a positive impact on learning would be demonstrated in other modules and that enhanced performance would benefit progression.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The module has made a positive contribution to the engagement of the majority of first-year students with their studies. Tutor feedback has reinforced the value of the module in providing the fundamental underpinnings essential for academic and professional development at the higher levels of study.

Student feedback has been very positive with some examples given below:

I was not looking forward to Professional Skills at first, because it's not computer related. I did not realise that a degree is the whole package, and how essential the module is.

I joined the University with far less understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for an undergraduate student than I have now. The Professional Skills module (part of the Information Security BSc Hons course) has been instrumental in the identification, understanding and improvement in this area.

This module teaches you how to think creatively and in an academic way, which the author had not done since school days, 25 years ago.

I have hugely increased my skills from attending your lessons and my knowledge of the graduate programmes companies offer has increased. I believe I have developed not only my skills but also myself as a person and collaborating with a team that has the same goals and professionalism as I do has produced a result I am very proud of. I only wish I could do it all over again.

I was made redundant before enrolling on this course, so my confidence was at an all time low. The Professional Skills lectures gave me a number of strategies that I could understand and follow to pull myself up and regain my confidence and self-esteem. My skills have developed in a number of areas, such as understanding the importance of PDP and knowing the areas I needed to develop using a SWOT analysis, motivational strategies and working within a team. The sessions have also enabled me to plan and focus on my future career and how this could be realistically realised. I am really pleased to say that I was offered a full-time job in an area that I would not have applied for before enrolling on this course. Therefore I would like to thank you as this has been instrumental in my development.

Unfortunately some students refuse to engage in the module due to its non-IT nature and, in some cases, fear of teamwork and presentations. The quote below is taken from an email of a student who later transferred to another university:

I have been meaning to talk to someone about Professional Skills. My problem I have with it is that, I signed up to this course to study computing not to study something that has no relevance to what I want to do. I have checked the syllabus [sic] at other universities and they don't seem to have to do this module.

Reflection/impact

The module has enabled and motivated students to plan further personal and professional development in subsequent years of study. The process also emphasises a lifelong learning approach to facilitate continuous professional development (CPD).

Each year a number of students have been offered vocational placements at the employing organisation where they conducted their research for the second assignment.

Teamwork is a key element of the module enabling new students to form a supportive group. Successfully cohesive teams continue to develop as an informal self-help learning tool, not only for other Year 1 modules, but for subsequent levels of the programme.

Another positive impact is on the learning experience of our part-time students. They often feel isolated, but team formation early on in the first year helps them to quickly bond with other students to benefit in the above way from teamwork.

INDUCTION AND EMPLOYABILITY: THE OUTDOOR ACTIVITY RESIDENTIAL CONTRIBUTION

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

peer interaction; self-awareness; personal development; transferable skills

Aim

Research indicates that induction and transition to university is an important process in the retention and progression of students and successful study at university.

In addition, the important role of universities in enhancing employability and the part that personal development planning (PDP) plays in this is well evidenced in policy and practice literature (e.g. Department of Education and Skills, 2003; Confederation of British Industry, 2009).

The outdoor activity-based residential is an element of the Year 1 PDP module for all students entering the undergraduate Sports Study scheme at University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC).

Every year, each new entrant to the school experiences a two-day/three-nights residential held in the first month of their first year. It is based at an outdoor activity centre in the Brecon Beacons. During the residential, students work in small and large problem-solving groups in an outdoor activity context and evaluate their contribution to processes and outcomes of these activities.

Description/approach

Each residential comprises 40 students, split initially into five working groups each facilitated by a member of staff. The programme is an intensive and varied one. The activities of a typical residential include an introductory briefing, ice breakers with group tutors, collaborative problem-solving tasks, a competitive team challenge, building and using an overnight shelter; preparation and presentation by students of a plan for whole group activity, execution of this activity and a final course debrief with group tutors. It also offers a chance for participants to review their experience of the residential in small working groups, led by the group tutor. This review focuses on self-assessment, feedback from peers and staff, collection of material for later reflection by individuals leading to subsequent development of a personal action plan for inclusion in each student's electronic personal development profile. There is built-in opportunity for formative self- and peer evaluation through staff- and student-led review discussions.

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that the residential would promote students' self-awareness and development through personal audit. It was also expected that the residential would improve students' transferable skills, such as communication and personal assessment (of self and others).

Evidence of actual outcomes

It is consistently apparent from formal and informal evaluations that the residential did achieve its stated objectives and provides both support for the transition into university and a clear stimulus for the development of employability skills.

From an informal perspective this residential experience offers a unique opportunity for the students to engage in reflective personal development, begin the engagement with their personal development planning and also to get to know others on the programme at an early stage. This latter aspect is particularly important in the development of social support networks at an early and transitional stage, particularly as the School of Sport undergraduate intake is over 450 students across eight programmes.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the experience has had a significant positive and preventative impact on individual withdrawal decisions.

Evaluations are consistently positive and feedback from students suggests that the residential is a challenging and useful part of the module. Students are asked to indicate which, if any, skills they feel they have gained or developed that will help them both in the rest of their study and in future employment. The sorts of attributes gained that are consistently identified by students include:

- an appreciation of the need for planning and time management;
- improved confidence in communication and listening skills;
- problem solving as teams;
- recognising and working with strengths and weaknesses of others.

Reflection/impact

The outdoor activity residential not only is an enjoyable social event for first-year students, but also provides opportunities for new entrants to develop transferable, employability skills through a range of practical and co-operative activities.

Students are empowered as they develop new skills and become increasingly confident about starting university life. By developing their self-awareness and self-auditing

skills, the residential encourages students to become autonomous learners who are able to identify their own strengths, but also recognise and address their weaknesses.

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

stress management; reducing burn-out; coping skills

Aim

This initiative aimed to provide Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) students with the opportunity to learn 'Mindfulness meditation' in an eight-week course as part of a toolkit for managing the stresses of university life. Given the high rates of stress and burn-out in healthcare professions, it was appropriate to offer healthcare and other students the opportunity to have a range of skills to manage their future professional well-being. The initiative was part of a strategy to increase student retention and enhance student well-being.

Background to Mindfulness

Mindfulness is an integrative, mind-body-based approach that helps people change the way they think and feel about negative experiences. Students sometimes get caught up in negative thoughts and feelings about past events or worries about the future. It can train the mind and give people the skills to deal with stress differently.

Mindfulness aims to: reduce stress and anxiety; increase quality of life; develop and maintain a stable yet flexible sense of self; increase self-confidence; enhance non-judgemental awareness; improve concentration; and develop openness and flexibility. It can be helpful for many mental and physical health problems. It is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) as an effective treatment for people with recurrent depression. There is an increasing body of evidence to support its effectiveness: www.bemindful.co.uk/about_mindfulness/mindfulness_evidence#.

Mindfulness is increasingly being taught in a wide range of private and public sectors, including the NHS, businesses and higher education. It is non-denominational although originated from Buddhist meditation practices. Learning Mindfulness does not require any religious or spiritual beliefs and none are taught on a Mindfulness course. Mindfulness is simple to learn. For stressed students it can help manage the challenges of university life and beyond, providing a proven tool for improving and maintaining general health and well-being.

Description/approach

A one-hour lecture from an experienced Mindfulness tutor was given to Year 1 and Year 4 students together as part of a term 1 lecture on well-being and stress management. The session was extremely well received and several students requested the opportunity to learn the skills taught in an eight-week Mindfulness training course.

The tutor was asked to deliver an eight-week pilot Mindfulness course, which was open to all four years of Speech and Language Therapy students. Sessions were just over one hour long, once weekly. Students were asked to contribute £2 per session as there was no funding available from the University. The University Chaplain was fully supportive of this pilot initiative.

Two weeks before the first session, the SLT tutor who co-ordinated the initiative, gave students in all years a ten-minute talk about Mindfulness, and also put it into a professional context (Mindfulness training is offered for qualified SLTs and has proven benefits with some client groups that SLTs work with).

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that students would have better skills to cope with university pressures (see aims above).

Evidence of actual outcomes

The greatest interest in Mindfulness was from fourth- then second-year students. No third-years and only six first-years started the eight-week course; all six first-years had dropped out by week three. Twelve fourth-year students and five second-years completed the course and all said they would recommend it.

Student feedback comments included:

It was useful when I felt pressure/stress increasing, to employ the techniques we learned. I found being more aware of my thoughts made it easier to deal with them and prevented negative thoughts from building up. I have been able to put things into perspective, which helped me organise myself much more easily and focus on things when they need to be focused on – i.e. not worrying unnecessarily.

The techniques are very calming [sic] and relieve a 'racing' mind when overloaded with work and deadlines.

Mindfulness helped me alleviate stressful and unhelpful thoughts so I can work more effectively and function better.

Reflection and action points

Timing of the Mindfulness course

It is interesting to speculate why none of the first-years completed the Mindfulness course. Perhaps it was not seen as sufficiently 'mainstream' as they had come to university to gain a professional qualification. Or maybe they didn't want to appear different from the rest of their cohort, which was still in the process of gelling. Alternatively maybe they hadn't yet experienced the stresses of university life. Whatever the reasons, some of the Year 4 evaluations suggested introducing Mindfulness earlier in the academic year and that also earlier in the four-year programme would indeed have been beneficial:

As the SLT programme is very stressful, the [Mindfulness] course does help put in place coping strategies, however it would be beneficial to have the course in Year 1 or 2.

Action: Run the Mindfulness in term 1 (start mid-October).

Funding

The £2 'contribution' per session was not enough to cover the tutor's costs. It had been anticipated that more students would enrol and complete the course. The Mindfulness tutor was willing and committed to complete the eight-week pilot training despite doing so at a financial loss.

Action: Ask students to contribute £3 per session. Possibly ask them to pay £24 for the full course 'up front' at the start of course to increase commitment.

Action: Some start-up funding has now been obtained via the Chaplain for a Mindfulness Student Society.

Action: As the Chaplain will co-ordinate Mindfulness training in future (see below) there will be no cost for booking rooms (ideally a quiet prayer/meditation room).

Increase participant numbers

To enable more students to benefit from Mindfulness training and ensure the course is viable, more students need to be recruited onto it. For the course to be viable, approximately 28 students would be recruited (anticipating 25% will drop out).

Action: Open the Mindfulness course to all students across the University (see marketing below).

Action: Deliver the course from 13:00-14:00 on Wednesday lunchtime to maximise those who might be available to attend (no lectures on Wednesday afternoons).

Action: A 'taster' Mindfulness session will be offered to all students the week before the eight-week course

commences, so students can explore whether it is something they would like to do or not.

Co-ordinator with a University-wide remit

The programme tutor who initiated the pilot considered that to take Mindfulness training forward strategically would require someone with a University-wide profile, and the time and remit to commit to it.

Action: The University Chaplain will in future take over the co-ordination in his remit for Student Well-being.

Broaden awareness – involvement of interested parties

To ensure that a wider range of students know about the initiative, collaboration with relevant parties is needed.

Action: The Chaplain will endorse Mindfulness when he meets with the Students' Union (as they may be unaware it is non-denominational and a proven stress management tool).
Action: Continue liaison with Student Services (Counselling).

Marketing

The programme tutor who introduced the initiative has already written an article on Mindfulness in the interfaith student magazine as word of the pilot began to spread. More widespread marketing is required.

Action: Announcement of the course dates and brief outline in the student magazine.

Action: In his Freshers' week address, the Chaplain will briefly mention that a stress management course will be starting up in mid-October.

Action: The Mindfulness tutor will have a stall at the Freshers' Fair.

Action: Existing UWIC students will be advised of the Mindfulness course via Blackboard, the student magazine, posters and flyers, and email.

Module or subject level

HISTORY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING THE WORKPLACE GLYNDWR UNIVERSITY

Keywords

employability; practical and professional skills; work placement; group dynamic; bonding; collaboration

Aim

The aim of this initiative is to introduce first-year History students to the workplace at an early stage of their studies in order to embed employability skills more effectively through practical and professional experience. The new History curriculum focuses on ensuring that students are prepared for the practice demands of the profession particularly in heritage/museums archives and libraries.

This is specifically targeted at first-year History students. It complements Glyndwr University's strategic commitment to the socio-economic needs of its students and seeks to further enhance the standing of the History department within the wider community.

Description/Approach

The new first-year curriculum in History has been created to place practical learning at its core. Specific modules have been designed with an emphasis on student placement. This practical engagement with the resources and professionals in the workplace is intended to complement classroom theory.

The practical experience in the first year includes:

- group induction and workshops at local record offices led by archivists. In particular, collaboration with the Palmer Centre at Wrexham and Denbighshire and Flintshire Record Offices;
- museum visits aimed at general orientation with a focus on heritage/educational resources;
- group tours of National Trust properties;
- guided walks to local sites of historical importance.

All group visits and practical work are linked to learning outcomes and assessment for the modules. These visits ensure diversity in learning but perhaps more importantly provide each student with the opportunity to build up

a network of contacts with historical employers and practitioners. The practical focus ensures a stronger and more diverse skill set that allows students to familiarise themselves with the demands and experiences of a range of history-related professions.

These skills acquired in the first year of the student experience are consolidated with a work placement module in Year 2 at one of the sites/repositories visited.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes were:

- improved student awareness of History in the workplace;
- enhanced development of academic and practical skills;
- greater focus on employability through the engagement with professionals in the workplace;
- a solid foundation for a work-based learning module in Year 2;
- improved employer engagement with the University.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- There is a much improved group dynamic: students have been more engaged and enthusiastic about the degree.
- The visits and group work have certainly encouraged bonding and student involvement in the degree programme.
- Students have become more proactive in undertaking additional, non-timetabled visits to archive repositories and heritage sites away from campus than was previously the case.
- A History Society has been set up for social networking, but also as a means of organising historical visits and events to supplement the timetabled sessions.
- Formal and informal student feedback has been extremely positive.

Reflection/Impact

The study of History can quite easily become an isolated and introspective activity. The increased practical and professional emphasis of the curriculum in Year 1 has encouraged a more proactive approach to learning within the current cohort. Even the physical demands of learning and experiencing different professional workplaces have broadened the students' experience and encouraged the concept of 'learning outside the classroom'. Establishing an emphasis on employability at the start of the degree becomes a way of letting students feel that their first year can be the beginning of the journey to a successful career.

WORKING AND LEARNING: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE AT WORK (COURSE BUI30)

OU IN WALES

Keywords

innovation; work-based learning; reflective learning

Aim

BUI30 is a 30-credit module at HE Level 1 studied over 24 weeks using the Open University's virtual learning environment (VLE). The aims of the course are:

- to enable students to reflect upon what they learn for work and how they learn in their work;
- to support students in improving their learning, and exploring how this impacts on particular aspects of their work practice;
- to enable students to critically evaluate work-based learning in relation to their own, and other, work contexts, and to review their own personal and professional knowledge and skills.

Description/approach

BUI30 provides an introduction to the skills of work-based learning (WBL). It provides a stimulating link between degree study and day-to-day working life, with the chance for learners to study issues that are particularly relevant to their work or home life. WBL changes the way learners can study and focuses their attention on the question 'Will this work?' At a practical level, studying through WBL enables learners to lighten their study workload as they can locate some, perhaps much, of their learning within their day-to-day job.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes were to:

- understand own learning, its role and impact in the workplace so as to plan and manage learning towards the achievement of aims and objectives that fit with chosen career;
- engage in reflective learning by reflecting on, evaluating and applying experiential learning in professional, occupational and workplace contexts;
- focus learning on important issues in day-day work;
- communicate arguments, ideas and issues effectively using appropriate styles and language;
- read and interpret information presented in a variety of forms and perform relevant tasks for analysis and evaluation;
- develop the skills needed for making the most of university.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Feedback was received from students and tutors on the positive benefits derived from studying BUI30.

Reflection/impact

Included reference to environmental factors such as empowerment, autonomy, approach to innovation, which proved influential.

BUI30 is different from conventional ways of learning in that it requires students to be innovative and to negotiate their own learning experience, to develop in their ability to learn by continual recording and reflecting upon their learning, and ultimately to improve their practice at work. Students are required to engage with online study via the VLE.

WORKING AND LEARNING IN SPORT AND FITNESS (COURSE E113)

OU IN WALES

Keywords

communication; motivation; leadership; reflective learning

Aim

The aim of the course is to enable students to learn in the workplace through reflecting on their current practice and then reflecting on how they can try out and integrate new ideas from the course theory into their practice.

The target audience is sports coaches, exercise instructors and sports managers who have started their careers but want to improve on their skills and develop their careers.

Description/approach

Embedded in the content of every unit of each study topic are reflective checkpoints where students are asked to think about what they currently know and practice about a topic (e.g. motivation, communication) and what they would like to know. Once they have done some learning they reach another reflective checkpoint where they stop and think about how they could go about using these ideas in their practice and who could help them.

This approach is taken in the assessment strategy as well where they continually look at how they embedded new ideas into their practice and how successful they have been.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcome is that we produce reflective practitioners who see their workplace as a constant source of learning and find opportunities to reflect on their current practice.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Unclear as yet – the first cohort are about to graduate, but based on their assignment work they seem to have grasped the concept of reflection and are looking to use it in the workplace.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY (COURSE T122)

OU IN WALES

Keywords

employability; career development; PDP; CPD; research at work; skills mapping; critical thinking; reflective practice

Aim

The vehicle for this initiative is a new module entitled 'Career development and employability' (T122), which will be presented for the first time in November 2010 across the institution.

This module will benefit anyone who wants to enhance their employability, improve their ability to perform at work and make realistic plans for their future personal, academic and professional development.

Description/approach

This module gives students the opportunity to achieve 30 credit points at HE Level 1 towards their higher education qualification goal using work-related activities as a basis for their studies. They will achieve this by working through resources, activities and assignments with support from a personal tutor, work colleagues and fellow students. There are four study blocks in the module covering: learning at work; critical thinking and reflective practice; carrying out research in the workplace; personal, academic and career development planning; and understanding the workplace context and their role within it.

This module will enable students to use their workplace as a context for learning, and develop their ability to apply learning to improve practice at work. They will also develop critical thinking skills and increase their understanding of how to research workplace issues. The preparation of

personal, professional and academic development plans will support their development as an independent learner and help them to align personal and career development aspirations. Students must have access to a realistic work environment and be performing a role – whether paid or voluntary – that they can use as a basis for their studies.

Anticipated outcomes

This module will help students to develop a range of development plans, including a higher education learning plan that will allow them to identify an appropriate qualification goal taking account of their present circumstances and future aspirations. They will also develop a range of employability skills that will help them to directly improve their performance at work.

Evidence of actual outcomes

'Career development and employability' (T122) is a new module based on the withdrawn module 'ICTs at Work' (T121). T122 builds on the proven success of T121 in helping students to enhance their employability by taking the same approach but widening access to students outside of the ICT sector.

Reflection/impact

Teaching and learning approach

— Constructivist philosophy

We start from the position that students aren't 'empty vessels' waiting to be filled from the font of all knowledge. Students come with different levels and kinds of knowledge and understanding, skills, experience and values. Students with different mindsets are going to acquire and process knowledge differently.

Presenting students with ready-made meanings is counter-productive to the learning process – it means they don't have to think things through for themselves or engage seriously with the learning opportunity, hence they are not making new neural connections, i.e. they are not actively engaged in thinking about how new knowledge and understanding fits in with what they already know and understand. This leads to a surface rather than deep learning approach – memorising 'facts' for repetition rather than manipulating information to create owned knowledge and understanding.

T122 students will learn by trying to make sense of the module resources based on what they already know from their past experiences. We aim to enable students to construct their own meanings from the learning experience by encouraging:

- an active learning approach: This keeps students working and thinking throughout the module. It is a way of getting them to engage with the learning opportunity to help them get the most from the learning process. Making activities interesting and relevant to the student is the key thing to achieve, so getting them to think about what they already know or can do is a good initial step. During this process they obviously think about the gaps in their knowledge and skills as well. This provides a prompt to help them think about what they need to know and how they can go about acquiring new skills and knowledge. Trying to contextualise knowledge and skills is an important aspect. How is this knowledge useful to me? In what context(s) will I be able to use it?;
- a metacognitive strand;
- reflective practice: students are encouraged to think about how they acquire knowledge and what kind of knowledge they possess and we ask them to think critically about their practice with the aim of identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.

MAKE YOUR EXPERIENCE COUNT (COURSE UI22) OU IN WALES

Keywords

experiential learning; theories of adult learning; reflection; personal and career development

Aim

UI22 is a 30-credit module at HE Level 1 studied over 16 weeks using the Open University's virtual learning environment (VLE). This module is suitable for anyone who is willing and able to analyse and reflect on their past learning experiences in order to identify and recognise the learning that has taken place. These experiences can be informal as well as formal and certificated or non-certificated. 'Make your experience count' is suitable for those in paid or voluntary work, employees planning a career change or those wishing to enter or re-enter the labour market. It is also suitable for those wishing to undertake some personal or academic development and who do not have a clear career goal in mind.

Description/approach

'Make your experience count' gives students the opportunity to gain 30 credit points towards higher education qualifications by drawing on past learning experiences. During the 16 weeks of study they will learn

how to identify, analyse, reflect on and present learning from experience, take stock of their skills and begin to plan for their personal, academic and career development.

They will be supported through this process by an OU personal tutor and a range of online materials, activities and assessments. They will be able to gain support from their peers through moderated electronic forums, including their own tutor group forum.

Anticipated outcomes

By the end of the module students have a clearer understanding of personal development acquired through past learning and are able to plan future personal, academic and career development. They will also have developed a range of skills that prepare them for further academic study, including writing, research and ICT skills.

Evidence of actual outcomes

There is feedback from students, tutors and employers on the positive benefits they have derived from studying/sponsoring study of the module.

Reflection/impact

'Make your experience count' was designed to enable students to gain academic credit for identifying, analysing and presenting learning derived from past experiences. The module seeks to show students that all experiences potentially contain learning processes and outcomes if thought about in a reflective and systematic way. The module encourages students to value all their experiences and treat them as learning opportunities and also facilitates planning for further personal, academic and career development. The evidence so far is that the module succeeds in helping students to become engaged in higher level learning and that they find the process of recognising the value of their past learning experiences empowering.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP/ENTERPRISE SIMULATION SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

Keywords

entrepreneurship; employability; simulation; skills

Aim

To introduce first-year Business and Economics students to a range of business and entrepreneurial skills.

Description/approach

The EBG102 module is a generic skills module aimed at addressing a variety of study and key skills for Level 1 students in Business and Economics. One section of the module, initially developed collaboratively by the institution's Enterprise Champion and academic staff, is devoted to 'entrepreneurship', with an innovative approach in relation to both delivery and assessment woven around a group assignment accounting for 45% of the marks for the module.

Students undertake a business simulation using the BETTS award winning SimVenture software, running a (virtual) computer manufacturing company from business start-up stage (36 months of role play spread over around six weeks). The assignment comprises a business report consisting of three annual reports and a summary of decisions made with a reflection on the consequences for their business, and an appendix, which contains final accounts and supporting evidence of individual contributions including timesheets (log in times on SimVenture), meeting minutes and attendees signing in and a peer review form.

Students also provide a summary of their group, their approach to making business decisions, team dynamics, etc. This is in two parts, one at the start when roles are allocated or agreed upon, one at the end. Supporting lectures are provided by guest entrepreneurs from the Dynamo Role Model programme funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. Each introduces their business and discusses a related topic (e.g. 'employing others', 'financial management', 'improving sales figures'), so students get to hear from an SME about how each element works in practice. There is also a group activity planned in place of one lecture to help the groups bond and work together as it has been recognised that group work presents students with a number of challenges particularly in a large module cohort (400+) with students from different backgrounds, different first languages and often not knowing each other.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes were:

- enhanced employability of students;
- improved teamworking skills;
- knowledge and application of a range of transferable skills.

SUPPORT FROM STUDENTS

UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF (UWIC)

Keywords

expectations; engagement; networking; motivation; attrition

Aim

To:

- make Speech and Language Therapy students' first-year experiences even more positive;
- enable them to have a realistic understanding and expectation of the four-year course progression;
- maintain motivation prior to their initial placement experiences in the second year;
- enable them to appreciate that the theoretical basis of the first year provides the essential underpinnings of later clinical practice placements;
- allay some anxieties about assessments, and what happens if a module is failed;
- improve retention as a result of having realistic expectations early on and maintaining motivation.

Hearing the experiences of students in higher years could provide the opportunity for first-years to ask final-year students about the realities of the programme and how it prepared them for the job.

Description/approach

During the previous year, the SLT programme team had disseminated a questionnaire to students in Years 1 and 2 asking them to identify what factors would make Year 1 on the course even better. Responses indicated that although most first-year students found the programme very stimulating and enjoyable, they wanted to:

- know how theory linked to practice in order to reach their ultimate goal (qualifying four years later);
- know what were the 'highs and lows' of university life and tips to manage these;
- have an earlier assessment and feedback to judge how they were doing academically (see other FYE entry).

Fourth-year students were considered the most appropriate ambassadors to share their experiences. They had a 'bird's-eye perspective' of how the various components of the programme linked together, progressed and had provided them with the basis to link theory to practice on their clinical placements – which most students find the most enjoyable part of the programme.

Towards the end of term 1, fourth-year student volunteers were invited to share their experiences with first-year students in a one-hour timetabled lecture slot in a pre-clinical module. It was anticipated the first-years would be more comfortable to raise issues without staff being present, so the session was student-directed. Students discussed issues in small groups, approximately one fourth-year to a group of five or six first-years. (It was suggested that the fourth-year 'volunteers' might like to move on to another group after about 20 minutes to offer a range of Year 4 perspectives, but it was reported later that they were happy to stay for the hour with their original group).

The fourth-years were given a very broad remit, which was to share their experiences of the course and what they wished they had known when they were in the first year.

Anticipated outcomes

While an introductory lecture at the beginning of term 1 had outlined how and why elements of the programme were linked together, having this peer session later in term 1, was anticipated to be a more meaningful time to engage the first-year students and allay some anxieties. By then, they would have some notion of what the course entailed and hopefully feel 'safe' enough to ask questions of their Year 4 peers that they might be unwilling to ask of tutors they didn't yet know very well.

Hearing fourth-year students' real experiences and perspectives would enable them to see 'the bigger picture' and how various strands of the programme meshed together.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The feedback from first-years was extremely positive and several commented that this had been the most useful session from term 1. The Year 1 students were especially enthusiastic about the clinical experiences of Year 4 students as they could start visualising themselves doing the job.

They appreciated that some of their theoretical learning really was going to be usefully applied in forthcoming clinical placements and in their overall professional development. For example, that Year 1 Linguistics and Phonetics theory informed the clinical assessments required for treating a child with delayed language in a Year 3 community clinic placement, or that Year 1 Biological Sciences was essential for being on a Year 4 Traumatic Brain Injury hospital placement.

They were encouraged and motivated by Year 4 students' positive experiences of reflective learning, both formal and informal, especially where it related to placements. This

enabled them to put what they had learned about doing PDPs into a context and appreciate the importance of reflective practice.

First-years were assured that the Year 1 assessments provided essential foundations for future learning and feedback. They were also given advice on time management and where to go for support (programme staff and student services).

Reflection/impact

Information that is given at induction and/or initial lectures isn't necessarily retained and needs to be revisited.

An overview of the course components and progression is given in induction and it appeared that Year 1 students had not retained this. While it is considered important to retain this overview at induction, it would appear useful to revisit it later in the first term when it is more meaningful. The Year 4 students' experiences provided examples that inspired the Year 1 students to frame their theoretical learning.

Action: This peer link between Year 1 and Year 4 has been permanently timetabled at the end of term 1.

Student sharing of experiences between years is mutually beneficial

An unanticipated benefit was the very positive feedback from fourth-years. The session had provided them with a forum to reflect on how much they had learnt and progressed both personally and professionally from Year 1 to date. All the Year 4 volunteers commented how much they had enjoyed the session and that it had made them realise that the end really was in sight and how much their confidence and competence had grown.

As a result of this Year 1/Year 4 initiative, a similar session was set up at the end of term 2 between the Year 2 students with a small group of Year 3 volunteers. Year 3 students enthusiastically shared their experiences of treating clients with Year 2 students who had up to this point only had observation (as opposed to treatment) placements. Hearing from peers in the year above again allayed anxieties and inspired students, and Year 2 students reported being very motivated by their Year 3 peers. Creating a positive mindset with positive role models can be an important factor in developing professional confidence and competence.

Again, the Year 3 students reported that they too had very much enjoyed the experience.

Safety of raising issues with Year 4 peers rather than staff

First-year students raised concerns with their fourth-year peers that they may have been otherwise unwilling to raise on a one-to-one basis with a staff member, such as 'what happens if I fail?' This session enabled some hidden anxieties to be raised.

Action: Although included in the FAQ in the student handbook, in future, the induction session will include a brief mention of what to do if you fail as this appears to be of concern to some students.

Creating opportunities to raise concerns with staff

The feedback from the December Year 1/Year 4 peer session was so positive, that the SLT team arranged a timetabled informal lunch-hour session in January where each member of the team met with small groups of students to offer the opportunity to raise issues of concern. It enabled issues to be raised, myths dispelled, staff to gain some insights of unanticipated concern, and some minor changes to be identified. It is possible this staff-student initiative may foster the perception by the first-year students that their views do count, they are listened to and their experiences are valued.

These initiatives (Year 1/Year 4, Year 1/staff, Year 2/Year 3) were each only an hour long. They were easily manageable and would appear to be beneficial for all parties concerned.

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