

Title - Careers Strategy for Sports and Exercise Undergraduate Students

Keywords - Employability, Professional Development Planning

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School / Dept - School of Sport and Exercise Science (SSES)

Institution - University College Worcester (UCW)

Activity - Developing a careers strategy to enhance student employability

Group - All sports and exercise undergraduate students

Aim - To enhance the provision and opportunities for students to develop their employability skills.

Context / Background - The QAA has made a number of suggestions in the [Code of Practice](#) to enhance the provision, dissemination and support for Career Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG). More specifically, institutions are seeking to ensure that students are equipped to meet the demands of employment (QAA, 2003). A number of essential skills have been identified and embraced within the term employability. Employability has been defined in relatively generic terms which cover similar meanings. ESECT (2003) defined employability to mean the set of achievements, skills and personal attributes that makes students more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation.

Tomkins (2004) in a recent survey of leisure graduates found that employers indicated their requirements for self-assured, independent thinkers who could communicate effectively at a range of levels and in various contexts.

What is clearly evident is that one of the outcomes of higher education is the preparation of graduates to participate fully in the world of work. The Skills Strategy White Paper, '21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential' also emphasised the value of being employable. As part of its mission UCW (2004) aims to 'provide high quality learning and in particular to develop strong employability, entrepreneurial and creative skills in its graduates'.

As a direct result of this, a careers strategy was developed within the School and a Careers Coordinator appointed as a non-teaching duty, to enhance the provision and opportunities for students to develop their employability skills. Additionally, it was considered important to enlist the help and current advice of employers within the sport and leisure field. To this end a specific working group was initiated - the Sport Employers Group (SEG). Its remit is to develop a cluster of sport-related employers which reflect both UCW and partner colleges. Membership consists of a mixture of employers from the public, private and not-for profit sectors within the vocational areas of UCW degree programmes. An outdoor education manager is representative of the HND Outdoor Recreation which exists in partnership with one of the further

education colleges. A talent manager for rowing also sits on the group and this reflects the Coaching Science degree that is delivered at UCW.

The SEG's mission is to champion workforce development and to engage with the skills, employment and productivity agenda. It was felt at the time of launching SEG, in September 2004, that there needed to be some joined-up thinking. At the time SkillsActive (the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning) were developing learner employer networks to champion workforce development and it was felt that SEG should be working towards this. One of the members on SEG now is the newly appointed Skills Active regional manager for the West Midlands.

The role of SEG is to act as an advisory group to:

- Enhance and enrich student employability within the School
- Explore mutual opportunities for innovative development
- Provide a catalyst for networking
- Enhance skills and improve the learning supply within the sector

Example - The main aims of the careers strategy are:

1. To promote awareness amongst UCW undergraduates and diplomates regarding the importance of enhancing the academic profile.
2. To build on the importance of the PDP/key skills/common skills in students acquiring relevant skills and qualities attractive to employers.
3. To promote the opportunities available for UCW undergraduates and diplomates to enhance their experience and knowledgebase

Many of the resulting action points are disseminated through an active tutorial system which is conducted on both an individual and small group basis.

- Mandatory modules Year 1 for undergraduates: (Aim 1 and 2) Seminar sessions on key career skills are held; e.g. enhancing CV, identifying current skills and experience and recording this information in CV format.
- Mandatory modules Year 2 for undergraduates: (Aim 1 and 2) seminar session on careers research will be held; e.g. Prospects package, availability of information, useful websites.
- Modules Year 3: (Aim 1 and 2) seminar session on interview skills with the use of examples.
- Tutor packs: These are available to help students 'fill in the gaps'. E.g. opportunities for developing skills both within the academic setting and external to UCW, are being designed to integrate and enhance the personal tutorial and career development focus

Other comments - Although only recently approved and implemented, the careers strategy is already used as an example of good practice within the School of Sport and Exercise Science.

- The inclusion of career information on the open day and visit day agenda has promoted greater interest and focus on programme pathways and is an excellent selling point for sport and exercise courses.
- The emphasis on extra curricular skill development during induction week has helped to maintain the uptake of coaching and performance awards organised in addition to the curriculum.
- The university college wide careers fair is well attended by employers and students alike.
- The careers strategy was scrutinised by employers through SEG. General approval of the strategy was agreed with a few details suggested for improvement. For instance, one was to update the strategy where there was mention of ILAM and ISRM, when the single body is announced to ensure currency. Many employers supported the notion of employability for undergraduates and endorsed the growing importance of appropriate work placements within the academic setting.

As a result of the SEG and the careers strategy, the integrated nature of academic skills and employability is more transparent both to those delivering the programme and to students and employers. This integration is a dynamic process where employers are invited to list their specific skill requirements and this information is disseminated throughout the group and made clear to the students. Career progression is monitored more particularly and future Alumni students will be invited to participate in specific seminar sessions. Through the initial work of the SEG employers are more committed to investing time to the career process and this will be enhanced in future provision.

References - ESECT. (2003) *Enhancing Student Employability*. Milton Keynes: Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team.

UCW. (2003) *Draft Strategic Plan 2003-2008*. UCW. September 2003.

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