

Dragon's Den Assessment & Employer Feedback

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Institution	Westminster Kingsway College
Group	Undergraduate (Final Year) Degree students
Activity	Paired work to present an entrepreneurial product or service for the hospitality industry

Aim

- To provide variety in the form of assessments that are appropriate and drive forward employability skills at undergraduate level.
- To get employers more involved in the assessment process of undergraduate students.

Context / Background

In the past students have undergone a large number of essays, reports, exams and presentations as part of their assessment for the 3 years of the undergraduate courses here at Westminster Kingsway College (WKC) – both Foundation Degree and Top-Up Degree. Fundamentally these are the main forms of assessment for any course at WKC and students have begun to disengage and become bored with these formats. So as a team we have all begun to move outside of these boundaries. The Dragon's Den is ultimately a presentation. For the past 2 years since the module began the students have followed a similar design to the assessment but only the module tutor has been part of the assessment process. By bringing in employers to help with the assessment and change how the students present, suddenly what you get is a completely different group of students, completely engaged in the module, excited about the presentations and competitive amongst their peers to do better than each other.

Example

As part of the Hospitality Entrepreneurship and Creativity module on the final year of the degree programme here at WKC (validated by Leeds Metropolitan University) the tutor decided to do something a bit different. Initially the students have to write an essay based on a hospitality entrepreneur of their choice and this makes up 50% of the mark. The other 50% of the module comes from paired presentations, following a Dragons' Den format. For anyone unaware of what a Dragons' Den is – it is based on the BBC2 programme where entrepreneurs present their product or service to a panel of experienced and monied Dragons (also entrepreneurs), including Peter Jones, Duncan Bannatyne and James Caan, in order to try and get cash investment in exchange for a proportion of ownership of the business.

Needless to say the experience at WKC did not involve money or ownership of business. What it did involve was a panel of 2-3 employers over a series of 3 weeks and these included people from John Lewis, Hyatt International, Malmaison, Travelodge, The Lanesborough, Outback Restaurants and D&DLondon.

Students were asked to come up with an innovative product or service for the hospitality industry that didn't already exist. They were asked to consider the PEST framework as part of the launch of the produce or service in the presentation as well as how they would present to include being sharp, snappy and provide a realistic understanding of their finances. Each pair was given approximately 10 minutes to present and 10 minutes for questions.

The employers were emailed the assignment brief as well as a simplified feedback grid asking for their comments on the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. They were given the grading criteria for the assessment as part of the assignment brief and were invited to provide critical feedback to the students and ask challenging questions. At the end they were invited to complete the feedback form and recommend a grade.

Results / Feedback

Students presented a range of services and products that included a Gazpacho smoothie, an IT based Health, Safety and Legislation DIY package for small business, a guest mobile phone that could tell them where they were, where to eat, where to visit or how to ring back to the hotel, Cocktail Man – a party cocktail service, Tailor Made Weddings – an online 3D imaging software for hotels and guests to work alongside each other to plan their wedding, a Butler reminder service for in Hotels and finally, an online room-swap service.

The employers certainly did challenge the students – questions from the employers were at times very difficult but the students rose to the occasion and displayed real passion for their ideas and 'defended their corners well'. Employer written feedback was exceptionally helpful and they all stayed behind at the end of each session to provide verbal feedback for each pair. The grades were at times high but the module tutor took a moderating and overseeing role and took the average grade from each member of the panel, their's included. On the whole this meant that the grades came out at similar to that of the tutor. Occasionally the grades were a little high, but hence the role of the moderator.

The presentations were also videoed and are available on the college Virtual Learning Environment for the students to look back over and one student has even sent it back to their parents in South Africa. The tutor can also use it for good practice and for dummy marking exercises with the students next academic year. The external examiner can view them when they visit the college to affirm the awards and look over the marks and feedback.

Comments from the employers include:

'May I also add that I have been involved in several activities with students from the Hague, Oxford Brooks, etc... and was truly impressed with the quality and potential of W Kingsway College students!! Congratulations on a job well done.'

'Overall I thought all students were very creative and had some really interesting ideas, when it comes to converting that into a business plan they did good market research and positive financial analysis. The presentation skills were good and they were all confident of their products, so there was really no poor presentation!'

'Thanks for inviting me to do this – think a great concept. I wish the students all well with their future careers and hope we can do more with you and Westminster in the future'

'Enjoyed the format'

Further development

The tutor will repeat this assessment again next year and continue the employer links. All of the employers have said they would love to come back and do it again next year. The tutor isn't quite sure how to develop it further for next year so any ideas greatly welcomed. It would be good to try and improve the information the employers used to grade the work as many were a bit too high, based on their feedback.

Perhaps also for next year... Trying to make it more like an exhibition with examples of work from other students from other courses and invite employers in to look at a variety of work and presentations from students (a bit like the Arts students final exhibitions...).

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