

Title - Developing Reflective Portfolios from Work-Based Learning

Keywords - Employability, Personal Development Planning

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Group - Level 2 Hospitality, Tourism and Festival & Event Management students.

Activity - An opportunity for students to undertake a 24-week full-time work placement.

Aim - To empower students to take responsibility for their own work-based learning and facilitate the development of their vocational knowledge and skills to enable them to plan their personal and professional development.

Context / Background - The value and importance of work experience was emphasised in the Dearing Report (1997) and more recent Government funded projects have further highlighted the benefits of work-based learning to the development of employability skills and personal development planning. Employers are looking for graduates with a range of skills and attributes in addition to the academic skills developed on a degree programme. At the same time, work placement is increasingly being perceived as part of career progression by both students and employers, and many undergraduates are realising that work-based learning can help them develop a significant advantage in an increasingly competitive labour market.

Example - Students are given the opportunity, either as a core or an optional module, to complete a 24-week, 45 credit (out of 120 in the year) assessed work placement. A series of weekly pre-placement workshops enable students to assess their current skills, plan their career goals and research job opportunities. Preparation for employment includes:

- Identifying personal strengths and weaknesses
- Developing the ability to evidence personal achievement
- Preparation of a CV
- Simulation practice interviews with invited recruitment specialists

The later workshops focus on enabling the student to prepare for and plan their learning in the workplace. These sessions include:

- Preparation of a job profile
- Reviewing organisational and cultural implications for learning

- Planning and writing objectives for a learning plan
- Coping with pressure, assertiveness and negotiation skills for the workplace
- Relating theory to practice
- Writing a reflective learning portfolio
- Reflective practices and self-assessment

The assessment is in four parts:

The learning plan (20%) (pre-placement) is made up of three categories of specific, measurable, achievable and time framed (SMART) objectives. The first set of objectives reflect what the student intends to learn from carrying out the job. The second set, course-related objectives, explore the bigger picture within the organisation and determine how the student will relate theory to practice. The third set enables the student to select specific areas for their personal development. The learning plan indicates the methods and resources that the students need to achieve each objective, and the evidence that will be used to prove achievement in the reflective learning portfolio, submitted at the end of the placement. As part of the tripartite collaboration the student is required to discuss their plan with their employer and the tutor at the commencement of the placement and make any necessary changes as appropriate.

In the **reflective portfolio (60%)** (during placement), the students can show both learning and reflection on the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge, the achievement of their objectives and evidence of their personal development. Evidence may include, for example, critical incidents, case studies, or commentaries on documentary evidence along with a reflective statement on the achievements of each objective.

The final 20% of marks are made up of an **employer's report (10%)** and the student's **self-assessment (10%)**. The student self-assesses their performance in the workplace and their portfolio. They are able to compare the marks that they award with those of the employer for performance in the workplace and with the tutor's mark for the portfolio. This formal self-assessment develops good reflective skills and is a means of giving excellent feedback. It is a key tool to self-awareness and future personal development planning.

Other comments

- Structured pre-placement sessions develop crucial skills required for personal reflection and self-assessment.
- Individual learning plans help focus students' career goals, encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning and motivate them to negotiate access to learning opportunities in the workplace.

- Reflective portfolios enable students to provide evidence of their learning and are highly motivational as they help students see what they have achieved.
- Students are better able to articulate their skills for employment which gives them a competitive advantage in the labour market.

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