

**Title - Developing Skills from Part-time Employment**

**Keywords** - Employability, Professional Development Planning

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**Institution** - Napier University

**Activity** - Using part-time employment to develop students' employability skills.

**Group** - Any student at Napier University undertaking part-time work.

**Aim** - To enable students to learn and develop employability skills and attributes from agreed part time work and to apply problem solving techniques to selected workplace issues.

**Context / Background** - A substantial amount of recent research, including the Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education's (2004) Learning to Work report, indicates that part-time work can be a major contribution to student learning if 'harnessed' and given focus. With increasing numbers of students undertaking part-time jobs this module provides an opportunity for them to assess some of the skills they use in the workplace and to develop a range of skills and attributes that employers look for in graduates including; teamwork skills, problem solving, communication skills, giving and receiving feedback, negotiating skills, reflection, and taking responsibility for their own learning.

**Example** - Any student at Napier University in appropriate part-time employment can choose the Developing Skills from Employment module as an elective. The programme is designed to provide a mechanism through which students can reflect upon their own employability and investigate the world of work and business practices through their part-time job. They work towards a range of academic and personal work-related outcomes by undertaking a range of assessment tasks including keeping a reflective learning log. The module empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning and personal development.

Module delivery is focused on student-centred learning through their part-time job, self-directed study using a workbook and a problem-based learning exercise. Students are expected to attend four, two-hour workshops in weeks 1, 2, 8 and 14 of the semester. The first two workshops introduce the concepts of work-based learning and the reflective practitioner, explore research on employability skills and focus on the purpose and format of the learning log. Problem solving theory and techniques are discussed along with the criteria for selecting and agreeing a workplace initiative or problem. Mid-module, students outline and review their problem solving initiative, discuss the poster board assessment criteria and critically reflect on one of the

learning experiences from their log. Weekly email bulletins from the module team support the critical reflective learning log (which is new to most students) as well as providing 'helpful hints' on completing the tasks.

- **A portfolio of activities and a reflective learning log:**(60%) This requires students to critically reflect on work-based learning experiences and relate these to their development of employability skills/attributes.
- **The problem solving assessment:** This is in two parts: a) the ability to identify and outline an issue, new initiative, task or problem from the workplace (10%) and b) problem solving application and poster presentation (20%). This is designed to get students to summarise and show how they would apply problem-solving theory to a real life workplace issue.
- **Employer's assessment of performance:** This is completed in the workplace via a structured appraisal form (10%).

**Other comments** - Feedback from both students and employers has been very positive. In particular, students focused on the benefits of keeping a regular learning log and its role in helping them reflect on their personal development.

One student commented:

"I have learnt the importance of self-assessment to the development of [employability] skills and how critical reflection on key events or experiences can take this development even further. I have learnt new skills in problem solving techniques and approaches . . . and how helpful it is to put theory that I learn at University into practice in the workplace. It helps me to understand the theory and also facilitates my work in practice."

One of the tutors appraising the student posters commented:

"The poster presentation session was an exciting place to be. Not only were the students telling me how much they had learned in preparing their posters, they were now showing me how much they were still learning - as they compared their posters with those of others and were buzzing with 'what I'd do next time'!. I was impressed by the students' ability to talk about what they have learnt from doing the module and how it had made them think about what was going on in their workplace."

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