

**Title - SportsLinx & Sport Development students - A Marriage Made in Heaven?**

**Keywords** - Employability

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**Institution** - Liverpool John Moores University

**Activity** - Work-based learning for Level 1 students with a Local Authority project.

**Group** - Level 1 Sport Development with Physical Education students.

**Aim** - To offer students work-based learning opportunities whilst providing continuity between Level 1 modules.

**Context / Background** - Students undertake work-based learning at all levels of their undergraduate programme. At Level 2 students carry out their placement in a 4 week block at the start of the second semester. At Level 3, work based learning is undertaken as part of an optional module.

**Example** - For Level 1, students work with SportsLinx. SportsLinx is an exciting and innovative sports development project, which is targeted at nine to ten year old children in the City of Liverpool and is the first and largest local authority project of its kind in Europe. It aims to:

- Increase the level of children's participation in sport at grassroots level, both inside and outside of the national curriculum.
- Provide accurate information regarding the athletic development of children in order to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attain their full sporting potential.
- Provide a method for identifying children with sporting ability, advise of opportunities available to them locally and 'fastrack' them into sports specific development programmes.
- Promote the advantages of physical activity in terms of health and social well-being.
- Establish and maintain effective school and club links.
- Give children 'easy to understand' information on current health and nutritional issues.

Through a series of scientifically developed aptitude tests conducted at local sports centres, SportsLinx provides accurate information regarding flexibility, strength, endurance and athletic ability of young children. Level 1 students are involved in After School sessions and all students are able to apply to become casual coaches for Liverpool City Council. During Induction Week, students undertake a full day's training staffed by Fitness Officers from the

SportsLinx project to allow them to assist at the testing sessions as well as Health & Safety training and First Aid training. SportsLinx also contribute towards the payment of a National Governing Body award on completion of Year 1 for all students.

### **Level 1 modules, assessment and the student experience:**

While SportsLinx is implicit in all modules, there are two key Level 1 modules where SportsLinx play an important role:

- **Personal Learning & Development:** Part of the assessment in this module involves the creation of a web-based portfolio, of which SportsLinx often play an integral part. Students are asked to plan for the future. Student decisions tend to be affected by outcomes on a testing day or their opportunity to gain funding for further qualifications following completion of SportsLinx.
- **Module 2:** This spans over a year and looks at sporting opportunities in schools and communities. Assessment for this module is in 2 parts. Task 1 asks students to evaluate the SportsLinx project in relation to a sport development model. Task 2 is a 3,000 word essay that asks students to evaluate partnerships that deliver effective sport and physical activity opportunities. Often SportsLinx is offered as a model of good practice for partnership working.

### **Other comments**

- The use of the Level 1 cohort allows the SportsLinx project to test large numbers of schoolchildren.
- The use of the SportsLinx project allows the Sport Development with PE programme to offer all students a structured, organised work-based learning placement en masse.
- Students have the opportunity to develop key skills.
- Students learn important lessons such as self and time management (having to meet the minibus at 8am on a Thursday morning after 'Medication' is a real test for some students).
- Students can gain paid employment, further qualifications and experience.
- It allows students to build valuable contacts for the future. For example one student carried out a study as part of a Level 2 overseas module based on the testing batteries used by the project and is carrying out a study to compare Finland, Sweden & Liverpool results from the Lifestyle Questionnaire completed by participants on the project.
- For those students who are interested, a number of opportunities exist to be involved in further or associated work as a result of their experience and undertaking of this Level 1 work.
- The partnership between the SportsLinx project and the Centre for Sport and Dance is an excellent example of HEI working with external organisations to provide quality experience to their students. In this time of creating 'employable' students such methods could prove invaluable for students and employers alike.

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