

## Case Study 2: Curriculum Development

Edinburgh Napier University has a long established reputation for delivering relevant programmes designed to meet the needs of a modern workforce. Our view that the educational experiences of students is central to developing their employability, is reinforced by student feedback which indicates they particularly value skills development when it is embedded within the curriculum and promoted by academic staff. This is partly because embedding into the curriculum means clear linkages into assessment, but also because skills development becomes contextualised, visible and more obviously relevant. It also helps students to understand, articulate and demonstrate their employability to relevant employers.

The current focus on graduate employability has prompted greater activity around reviewing and re-designing of programmes and modules, incorporating work-based and work-related learning into the curriculum. This has been detailed, time-consuming work – in part because there was great variety in ‘starting points’ between programmes on their journey towards realising GEP goals. In addition, it should be noted that the GEP is being launched during a time of great institutional change and so staff are also responding to a broad and demanding change agenda.

Instead of appointing a dedicated curriculum developer, academic staff time has been bought out to provide academic leadership around curriculum change and to consult with employers and professional bodies. This approach has been very successful in raising awareness of GEP aims amongst academic staff and provided some space for them to engage in curriculum review. Staff feedback gathered through external research has confirmed the added impetus that the GEP has engendered in curriculum development:

*“GEP has enabled curriculum developments to highlight more clearly the employability aspects of courses.”*

*“The School has catered for employability but the GEP has enabled us to organise this better and spend some time and resource presenting it as a coherent part of our programmes.”*

*“Curriculum development is always ongoing but GEP has given it a shot in the arm and given employability a real platform.”*

*“GEP has quickened the rate of change and needs to be continued to facilitate this type of curriculum development.”*

The same research has also highlighted the importance of resourced collaboration between academic staff, Careers, Confident Futures and Employer Liaison staff to ensure a comprehensive approach to curriculum development.

*“The GEP resources – careers, employer engagement, curriculum developers – have allowed us to review our programmes in a way we just wouldn’t be able to do normally.”*

For example, the Careers and Confident Futures teams have worked closely with programme teams to support the design of employability modules, programme/module

review and to identify appropriate points within existing modules for skills development and practice. For example:

- The Careers team have supported curriculum innovation across the University including a major role in the development of several new employability and professional development modules. Also career learning outcomes have been developed in all schools to cover each year of study in undergraduate courses.
- Confident Futures works closely with Module Leaders and delivers almost all of its learning using an embedded model and is increasingly trialling new delivery models including online/blended delivery (e.g. the flip training model of getting students to undertake online study before participating in a shortened workshop).

The lead in time for curriculum changes is long and so while a number of changes are already in place, many more are planned for 2014/15 and beyond. This section summarises some of the work to shape curricula undertaken to date.

### 1.1 The Faculty of Engineering, Computing & Creative Industries (FECCI)

At the start of the GEP, FECCI looked across the three schools at existing models for credit-bearing work-based and work-related learning and held a series of good practice sharing sessions. This highlighted a range of useful models that had transferability potential. For example, one successful model that already exists is in the School of Arts & Creative Industries whereby students within a flexible module can undertake project work with an employer, in an exchange abroad, or in the on-campus design studio.

From a strong base, FECCI are now working towards introducing more employability modules across the faculty including placement, internship and professional practice modules. Consequently, increasing the number of placements has become a big priority and the work to create placement opportunities is coordinated through a faculty Placement Office with an open door policy. The Placement Office has been associated with a 32% increase in numbers of students participating in placement, and qualitative data is being collected to capture the experiences of placed students. Feedback from students demonstrate a huge appreciation of these new opportunities. For example, Trimester 1 post-placement survey feedback highlighted the:

- 'real life experience' of shadowing and working alongside professionals
- learning of the different approaches of the field specific work
- application of knowledge and skills learned from their courses
- enhancement of key skills
- the quality of the employer support and guidance

Despite this kind of positive feedback, experience demonstrates that the reasons for making curriculum changes needs to be carefully explained to both staff and students.

New programmes and modules either developed or in development include:

- **BSc (Hons) Digital media (Global) and BSc (Hons) Creative Computing.** Both have a compulsory student exchange abroad and the programme leaders have visited specific potential partners to explore sustainable relationships. One of these partners visited and worked with students to stage the Creative Computing Degree Show.
- The School of Arts & Creative Industries have also introduced new modules: **TV Work-Based Learning** and **Scoping Industry**. A further module for work-based learning on

the BA (Hons) Film course is currently going through the quality approval process. The TV module has been specifically designed to create employability opportunities through the establishment of Edinburgh TV.

- **Professional Identity Through Portfolio** is a new module in School of Computing for final year students. It was developed as a consequence of feedback from previous students that highlighted that many had not begun their portfolio of work to show employers. The module includes two career workshops and a mock recruitment process, providing 56 final year students with intensive practice and feedback on their performance in realistic recruitment situations. Whilst requiring a considerable amount of resource, the positive feedback from students and the positive outcomes (several students went on to secure employment before the end of term) suggests a good return on investment, and provides a good example of the positive impact of increased Careers capacity.
- The **Overseas Study** module is designed in collaboration with Student Mobility to reflect a period of work or study abroad. It incorporates cultural studies ahead of a visit, a report on the work itself and a learning log. Six students complete the module as part of a 3 week trip to China to work with lecturing staff delivering lectures and labs at ZZULI University. The students were funded through the Scottish Government's Saltire Funding and they learnt some Mandarin as part of the module.
- The roll out of the **Professional Practice** module for year 4 students to all subject groups in the School of Computing, where students work with a client in industry on a live project and submit a report on completion of the placement. The range of clients has developed to include community schools, charity projects and start-up companies.

The first year of the Project has seen considerable change at module level and the second year will include a period of consolidation and review. This next phase will also focus heavily on programme level activity, working with Programme Leaders on employability mapping; reviewing programmes to see which elements focus on employability and where there are gaps, with a view to seeing holistically how students can emerge with a strong, sector-focused and coherent profile. The aim is to marry the academic and employability aspects of programmes and is a big project in itself. Other future priorities include:

- Considering how to retain the Placement Office when the GEP ends;
- Increasing placement opportunities in creative industries;
- A focus on student mobility e.g. digital media placement abroad. This programme has a large number of students so impact could be significant, for GEP students;
- A review of School wide modules e.g. on group projects;

## 1.2 The Business School

In the Business School, there was recognition that there was already significant work-based learning and work-related learning options in undergraduate degree programmes, which are well appreciated by students. Where work based learning opportunities existed, a review was used as an opportunity to facilitate discussion between module leaders and the Placement Office, and has helped identify potential enhancements.

Gap analysis highlighted that the School of Accounting, Financial Services & Law (AFSL) had no work based learning on any of the School's programmes. This substantial piece of work provided a catalyst to review programmes across the School and generated a number of enhancements including:

- The introduction of a **Professional Practice** module: Module Leaders collaborating across subject groups to undertake curriculum development of a 'Professional Practice' module that will provide students the opportunity to undertake accredited work based learning within their programme and develop key employability and career management skills. This module is planned for introduction with third years at the start of the 2014/15 academic year.
- **A mapping of employability workshops and skills sessions to core LLB modules.** Law programmes are very structured due to strict professional body requirements and so adding work-based learning modules is very difficult. Instead, LLB module leaders, Careers and Confident Futures collaborated to 'map' employability workshops and employability skills across years 1-4 of the undergraduate LLB programme. The resulting 'mapping' grid illustrates which skills are developed across the programme and can be integrated within modules. An aim is for students to explicitly recognise what they are learning and to be able to translate their degree experience into the employability skills valued by employers. In addition, Law is piloting a new Faculty award scheme for 12 third year Law students which encourages them to capture non-university achievements in an organised way with evidence

The review also highlighted Sales as an area that ties in well with employability skills development. Research shows that graduates with sales skills are viewed positively by employers and this has led to the design of a new module within the Business Management suite of programmes. The **Personal Selling Skills and Sales Process** module will be introduced for 2014/15 and is designed as an option module to provide third year students with an understanding of what is involved in a sales role and career in selling. The module is enhancing student employability through direct contact with the sales industry, sales professionals and employers during student learning. Sales is not a subject group within the Business School, so this module may provide future impetus for this to happen.

The School of Management has also developed a pilot **Employability Programme**, which over 250 fourth year students have already benefitted from. This school-specific programme delivers a series of lectures, workshops and professional networking focused on enhancing graduate employability and preparedness for employment seeking. The collaboration between the School of Management, Careers, Confident Futures and Faculty-based Employer Liaison staff enabled a comprehensive approach of the programme and the potential to adapt it across other areas of the University.

The main priority for 2014/15 is to run, and then, review the two new work-based modules to ensure they are fit for purpose and become well established. In addition, the Business School aims to:

- Review post-graduate work based provision on taught programmes;
- Identify more opportunities for student mobility, currently an area of the GEP which has been under-developed.

However they are aware that it is not possible to do everything at once and are focussing on priority areas.

### 1.3 The Faculty of Health, Life & Social Sciences

Within the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Care, employability is well catered for, with students spending half their time on placements. Consequently, the GEP has focused on the School of Life, Sport & Social Sciences (SLS&SS) where placements are relatively new for programmes. Two academic staff have taken on curriculum developer roles: one to Life & Sport and one to Social Sciences.

The Faculty takes a strategic view of curricula design and commissioned their Curriculum Development Advisers to undertake a baseline audit of existing employability activity within programmes. This work, together with the benchmarking of subjects across the Faculty in relation to employability, relationships with employers and knowledge of curriculum innovations, has greatly improved awareness among Programme Leaders about employability activity and promoted good practice sharing.

A key approach to curriculum development has been the **Skills Passport** initiative which set out to map and match the skills which employers perceive as necessary. During 2013/14, the module was piloted with Biomedical students based on requirements for Biology graduates cited by local Life Sciences employers. Gap areas identified have included lab specific skills and soft skills such as team working. During each term, students are prompted to be aware of, focus upon and plan their development against the key skills they have been developing that term. Further engagement and reflection is then supported by their Personal Development Tutor. Engagement with the Skills Passport process means that a student should be able to describe their personal skills development journey at University, and link that to how it will support their chosen career, and potential employer. There has been positive feedback from students involved, as it has helped them identify strengths and weaknesses.

The skills passport method was chosen as it was judged to be particularly applicable to the programmes in the School. For instance, the Life Sciences sector has recently reported to Government about a perceived lack of skills amongst current graduates (Uk- wide). In light of this, the Skills Passport seemed an obvious approach as it fits in with this broader agenda. The Skills Passport is being rolled out to all year 1 students in SLS&SS in 2014/15 and so the priority is to:

- monitor engagement and impact;
- adjust course content accordingly;
- constantly review teaching versus employer requirements; and
- create a reflective assessment ethos amongst the student body.

In another curriculum development, an established year 2 **volunteering module** has been made a compulsory part of the curriculum in Sports Science (60-80 students). Confident Futures and Careers have supported the development of the curriculum and have delivered content around reflective portfolios, models or reflection, professional online profiles and networking. The standard of submitted coursework was higher than usual after these interventions.

The School is revising its entire programme in 2015/16, moving from 5 strands to 3. This is being informed by employer feedback and the jobs our graduates have been obtaining. This is a huge process which will involve some major changes. The ultimate aim of this is to make graduates as employable as possible.

#### 1.4 Student Mobility and the Curriculum

Developing short-term mobility opportunities is particularly important within programmes where students have not taken up longer term mobility or work based placement opportunities. The European Recruitment & Exchanges team has identified a demand from students and academic staff to develop global employability skills and global professional development. The team have encouraged and supported the Programme Leaders to identify initiatives and where possible to embed them in the curriculum. Additional staff resource funded by the GEP has actively started to collate, format and promote Erasmus and Direct EU partners overseas work-placement opportunities, in collaboration with the Work-placement Officers within the Faculties for wider promotion to students.

As an example, the Business School took the initiative in developing and delivering in partnership with Wendersheim University the International Sales Exchange (ISE) combining short term mobility and sales education for Business School students. The opportunity to participate in the ISE programmes as an extra-curricular activity was given to 3rd and 4th year Business School students. Within the 2014/2015 academic year ISE will be built into the '**Personal Selling Skills and Sales Process**' third year undergraduate module on the Business Management programme enhancing employability skills of students by linking sales skills and short term mobility into the curriculum.

#### 1.5 Conclusion

It is absolutely clear that the additional resource associated with the GEP has allowed the institution to develop curricula and initiatives that might otherwise not got off the ground. A key challenge now is to align these activities as an everyday part of the curriculum and to adjust emphasis and focus within a sometimes already crowded curricula.