



Centre for Education
Support and Innovation

Canolfan Cefnogaeth
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Case study title: Employability: Knowledge, Skills and Experience – undergraduate module in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture

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Summary

An optional second-year undergraduate employability module has been developed in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC). The module provides students with the opportunity to undertake a placement as part of their degree. An Academic Lead and a Careers Lead (careers service member of staff), work in partnership to deliver the module.

Background

The QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies (2019) identifies these disciplines as fundamental to the development and varied use of different modes of communication and consequently to shared and contested understandings of the world in national, transnational and global contexts. These disciplines draw on major areas of creative and professional practice in the media, cultural, film and communications industries. Students analyse disciplinary and professional sources and consider a range of approaches to theoretical, critical, practical and creative work in these fields.

One element of undergraduate study is enabling students to develop knowledge and understanding of how media and communication, cultural and creative organisations operate and are managed. In addition, The Way Forward (2018-2023) includes a commitment to offer all students opportunities to undertake placements or employment-rich activities during their studies, and a key performance indicator that by 2023 at least 50% of undergraduate students will do so.

JOMEC provides extensive professional practice and placement opportunities at postgraduate level. Careers & Employability worked with JOMEC to develop an employability module to offer a 'first-step' placement experience in the curriculum at undergraduate level. Many students in the School wish to enter competitive media and communications-related employment sectors where prior experience can be an advantage. In addition, the module encourages students to consider the different contexts in which their disciplinary knowledge could be applied in the future and develops their ability to recognise and articulate their skills, knowledge and attributes.

Approach

The module is 20-credits at level 5 and delivered over 11 weeks (including a reading week), through a combination of weekly 2-hour lectures and 1-hour seminars.

This type of employability module represents the most in-depth collaboration between careers service staff and academic colleagues at Cardiff to date. The case study also provides a cross-section of ongoing debates around employability in the curriculum: discrete or integrated; delivered by academic or careers service staff; practical or theory-based and discipline-specific or generic (e.g. Standage, 2017, 2019).

JOMEC took the decision to deliver academic content related to employability alongside the fundamentals of career building. The teaching schedule therefore includes, for example, academic perspectives on the future of the media, cultural and creative industries, and the media representation of the workplace in these industries. An employer/alumni panel provides industry insight.

A Careers Adviser delivers content related to the contemporary graduate labour market with a particular focus on opportunities for graduates in the fields of Journalism, Media and Culture, as well as the principles of career planning, employability and skill development, and practical recruitment skills.

Students independently source, secure and complete a compulsory work placement (minimum of 35 hours), providing authentic learning. A handbook for the module has been jointly prepared incorporating guidance from Careers & Employability (C&E) and the School. Students also have access to the full support of the C&E team in sourcing a placement, including additional support for widening participation students.

Assessment includes the production of a tailored graduate-level CV and application, and a reflective report on the experience of undertaking the work placement, identifying examples of skills developed. Students also complete a Personal Employment Strategy which requires them to report on the graduate job market in their chosen field and analyse a suitable graduate-level role, identifying their own strengths and development points in relation to this role and the demands of the field. A career plan is produced to identify future direction and develop skills, experience and employability ahead of graduation.

Outcomes

In 18/19, student satisfaction with the module was high – for example, 100% of students were satisfied with the quality and 93% considered that it had ‘provided me with opportunities to explore ideas, practices or concepts in depth’. The video case study of Mia Dutch, (BA Media, Journalism and Culture), provides a student perspective on the benefits of the module: https://youtu.be/Bb4c3y_2bqg

The level of collaboration between JOMEC and the Careers & Employability team is also having a positive impact on the profile of employability within the School. For

example, careers-sourced placement uptake in JOMECE increased by 125% to 115 placements in 18/19 - far greater than the 26 students on the module.

The module also provides potential benefits in terms of widening access. Research has shown that the provision of careers, employability and enterprise support on a purely extra-curricular basis works against students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds because those most likely to be able to 'extend their timetable commitments with extra-curricular activities' (Universities UK, 2019) are also likely to be those students with higher levels of financial and social privilege (Social Mobility Commission, 2019). Incorporating some elements of in-curriculum delivery is more inclusive and enables all students to participate. While this is therefore a benefit of the module, its optional nature is also a challenge: it can widen access, but only if students choose the module.

References above:

Widening Opportunity in Higher Education. The Third Phase: Beyond Graduation, Universities UK (2019): <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/widening-opportunity-third-phase.pdf>

State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain, Social Mobility Commission (2019): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/798404/SMC_State_of_the_Nation_Report_2018-19.pdf

Student feedback

"Thank you for your teaching throughout the semester. I have more confidence in getting in the workforce after gaining the knowledge about employability. This is a really good module that should be kept in the future."

JOMECE student, 18/19

"Just emailing to say thank you for delivering the employability module this year. My placement...has been such a success. Since finishing I have worked at many events with them, being paid to manage their social media accounts... I have now been offered a paid internship with them over summer...and hopefully looking to work for them after I graduate uni... Again just want to say thank you for the delivery of this module, as if it weren't for this module none of this would have happened and I would not have all these opportunities"

JOMECE student, 18/19

Academic feedback:

"We've had consistently positive feedback from students about the undergraduate employability module. It gives students a great opportunity to apply knowledge gained from their degree in a work environment, and to use their analytical, research and reflexive skills to focus on their own career planning. Plus, we've developed an effective and valuable partnership with the Careers & Employability team in the process of designing and delivering the module."

Dr John Jewell, Director of Undergraduate Studies, School of Journalism, Media and Culture

Please see video case study with Mia Dutch: https://youtu.be/Bb4c3y_2bqg

Learning points and insights

The Covid-19 crisis will have an impact on placement provision for academic year 20/21. Students on the JOMEC employability module can complete their placement in the Spring semester, and there is the possibility to extend this if they wish to undertake a summer internship. This provides more scope to be creative with placement options next academic year and possibly make use of virtual placement and volunteering opportunities. We are also planning with colleagues in JOMEC to take account of the teaching and learning context in the next academic year, including the possibility of virtual delivery.

Cardiff University has approved new principles of curriculum design, including a set of graduate attributes. Implementation of these principles, and the associated attributes, may influence the development of the employability module in the future.

Careers & Employability works with the School of English, Communication and Philosophy (ENCAP) on a similar optional undergraduate employability module, and with the School of Modern Languages (MLANG) on a postgraduate taught module. As well as this type of 'unit' provision, the service also works in a range of subject areas on intra-unit employability initiatives. We hope to provide further case studies in due course and would be glad to discuss support available for new employability projects, including online resources.