

# Forum

Learning and Teaching Committee



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*

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## Value added graduates *enabling our students to be successful*

Graduate employability



Genuine experiences



Authentic learning

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# Editorial

Welcome to the new look *Forum*. This issue of the magazine is linked to the University of York Learning and Teaching Conference which is organised annually by the Learning and Teaching Forum committee and this year is taking place on 7 June (2016). The theme of the conference and this issue of *Forum* is *Value added graduates: enabling our students to be successful*. The Higher Education Academy lists graduate employability as one of the ‘*topical themes of recurrent interest within HE*’ and places it ‘*at the centre of the HE agenda*’. Ensuring graduate readiness to take on rewarding careers and make an important contribution will, no doubt, be something that we are all thinking about.



Most of the articles you will come across in these pages have been written by authors who are either presenting or leading workshops at the conference. Our *Feature* article by Lorraine Dacre Pool (keynote speaker at the conference) lays the foundations for this issue by exploring the key components of graduate employability. Following on from this you will find a wealth of examples of good practice in embedding these components into curricular and co-curricular activities, and employer engagement. This tells us that employability is already an important part of our agenda here at York and that we are working hard to ensure that our graduates are prepared for success after university. Nevertheless, two *Viewpoint* articles also highlight ways in which we could further enhance the employability of our graduates by promoting the development of ‘*thinking graduates*’ (Cecilia Lowe, p8), and ‘*help students reach their full potential*’ by creating stronger links between societies and academic departments (Thomas Ron and Chris Wall, p7).

We hope that these articles and the conference activities to which they are linked will provide inspiration to develop new and innovative ways to continue helping the graduates of your programmes to become ‘value added’.

**Claire Hughes**  
Editor

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**Front Cover image** Ran Xia

# Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University Conference

On Friday 17 June 2016 the Department of Language and Linguistic Science and Languages for All will be hosting the 6th annual conference in the **Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University** series. Following on from the great success in Newcastle (2011), Bristol (2012), Manchester (2013), Leeds (2014) and Nottingham (2015), in 2016 the main theme of the conference will be **Enhancing Employability**.

The Innovative Language Teaching and Learning Conference provides an opportunity for professionals involved in the teaching and learning of Modern Foreign Languages to share their expertise on current

challenges in the Higher Education sector.

This year's aim is to engage in productive collaboration that will enable language professionals to further equip students to succeed in our ever-growing modern intercultural societies.

The central topics of discussion are connected with the role that language skills and content themes play in enriching students' learning experiences to enhance their employability and professional capabilities.

Jocelyn Wyburd, Director of the Language Centre at the University of Cambridge and Chair of UCML and Lizzie Fane, Founder and CEO of Third Year Abroad.com will be the Keynote Speakers at York. Jocelyn

Wyburd has confirmed that her talk will focus on the subject of employability both of graduates of languages degrees and of graduates who take institution-wide language programmes.

This year's conference will include presentations of case studies and projects on innovative ways to enhance employability through teaching and learning Modern Foreign Languages at university, including English as a Foreign Language, covering the following areas:

- The use of technology
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- Intercultural awareness (support and development)
- Curriculum (re)design and assessment

- Learning and teaching methods
- Project based and collaborative work
- Autonomous learning and motivation
- Development of professional skills
- Year Abroad

Registration will be open until Friday 3 June 2016. Details on how to submit an abstract and further information is available from <http://innoconf2016.weebly.com>.

InnoConf 16 will be held at the University of York Exhibition Centre on Friday 17 June, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD UK. Conference Organisers: Carmen Álvarez-Mayo and Dr Elia Lorena López

## Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network (SoTLN) meets regularly through term time to discuss in an open and critical way the research behind teaching and learning in higher education. The group comprises a mix of academic, teaching and support staff with a shared interest in developing an informed awareness of the evidence base for good educational practice. Each meeting takes a particular theme and explores it through a close reading of selected published scholarly work. The aim is to both evaluate the robustness of the research itself and the methodology chosen, and to consider its relevance

for our own teaching practice. Themes looked at so far include:

- Deep, Surface and Strategic Approaches to Learning
- Learning from Mistakes: student response to failure and getting things wrong
- Student Engagement
- Peer Assessment and Peer Feedback

The SoTLN also provides support and development for staff who want to undertake their own scholarship or research into teaching and learning. On 17 June 2016, Jerry Wellington, Professor of Education from the University of Sheffield, will lead a workshop where

participants will be provided with close guidance and practical advice on developing their pedagogical research and scholarship projects. The Autumn Term will also see the launch of the internal York Scholarship of Teaching and Learning journal which will provide a platform for staff to disseminate in an academic format the findings of their scholarship.

The SoTLN is open

to anyone at York who teaches, supports teaching and student learning or otherwise has an interest in finding out about higher education learning and teaching research. For more information, including how to join the Network and gain access to its resources, visit the website at [www.york.ac.uk/sotl](http://www.york.ac.uk/sotl). To book onto the Jerry Wellington workshop, email [academic-practice@york.ac.uk](mailto:academic-practice@york.ac.uk)

*See back page for more upcoming events*

# A practical model of graduate employability

*Lorraine Dacre Pool (University of Central Lancashire) discusses the key components of graduate employability development through an exploration of the CareerEDGE Model.*

Models of employability provide a framework for enabling students to reach their full potential and become successful ‘value-added’ graduates. The CareerEDGE model of graduate employability was introduced in 2007. Since that time it has been received extremely positively, both nationally and internationally. The original article (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) published in the journal *Education + Training*, has been downloaded almost 30,000 times and the model has featured in a number of publications from other authors.

Other models of employability were in existence before the introduction of CareerEDGE but were considered either too elaborate to be practically useable or too simple to capture the meaning of this somewhat elusive concept. CareerEDGE helps to fill this gap by acting as a clear framework for employability development that is useful for academic staff, careers staff and any other practitioners involved in employability activities. It also allows us to explain to students what we mean by employability development without clouding the issue in complexity. In the context of this article it provides a framework for discussing the key components of graduate employability development.

## Introduction

The mnemonic CareerEDGE is used as an aid to remember the five lower

tier components of the model and it is suggested that students should be provided with opportunities to develop all of these components. CareerEDGE highlights that it is essential that students are given opportunities to reflect on and evaluate these experiences, to develop higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem; crucial links to employability.

## Employment and employability are not interchangeable concepts

One intention of developing the model was to avoid the mistaken belief that when we use the term ‘employability’ we are just concerned with ‘employment’ or are just talking about developing the ‘skills’ that many employers now expect to see in graduate recruits. Although these are important aspects of employability they are not the complete picture. Using the model can be helpful when explaining that employability is involved with the much broader development of students into graduates who feel ready and prepared for whatever life holds for them beyond university. As Hallett (2012) states,

*‘It is refreshing to think that ‘employability’ might grow into something broader than a particular set of skills and competencies, into a richer idea of graduate readiness...’ (p30).*

## CareerEDGE – the key components

Exploring the key components of the CareerEDGE model allows us to

highlight what we consider to be the most important facets of ‘employability’, including career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding, generic skills and emotional intelligence.

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING (CDL)**  
CDL in the context of Higher Education has been described as being ‘... concerned with helping students to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes which will equip them to manage their careers, ie their lifelong progression in learning and in work.’ (Watts, 2006, p2).

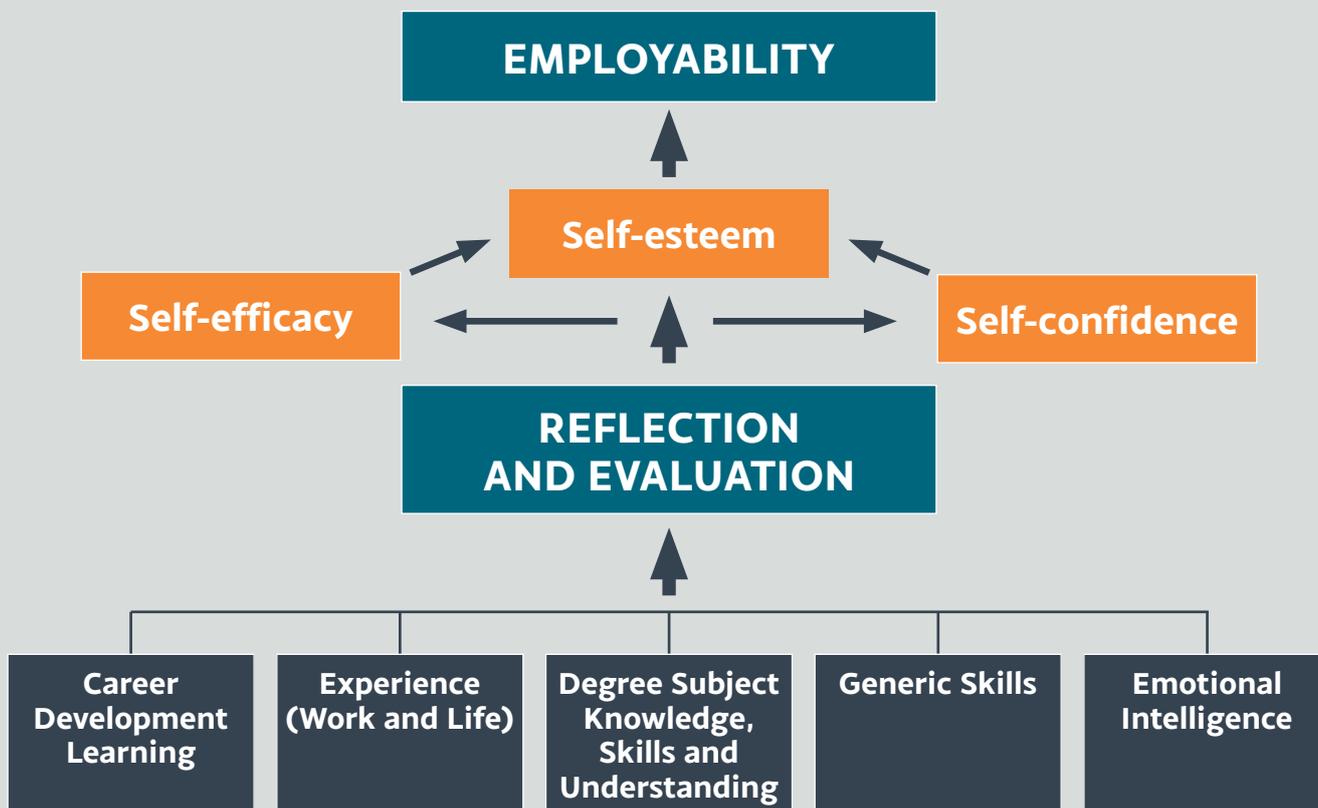
Learning a selection of ‘job getting’ skills, such as writing an effective CV, completing a job application or presenting yourself in an interview, is incorporated in this element but in itself forms only one aspect of CDL. By providing students with support and guidance that enables them to develop their self-awareness, who they are and what they want from their future lives, and to consider what opportunities (local, national and global) are out there for them, we will help them to make more informed decisions. Included here could be activities that encourage students to consider if self-employment is something they might wish to explore. We can also help them to prepare for a competitive graduate labour market by ensuring they know how best to articulate how their time within HE has enabled them to develop both personally



*Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose, secure and retain occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful.”*

DACRE POOL & SEWELL, 2007; 2012

# The Career EDGE Model of Graduate Employability



## Career Development Learning

Experience (Work and Life)  
Degree subject knowledge, Understanding and Skills  
Generic Skills  
Emotional Intelligence

and professionally into the graduate recruits potential employers are looking for. As with all elements of CareerEDGE, CDL is an essential component. A student may gain an excellent degree classification and develop many of the skills employers are looking for, but if they are unable to decide what type of occupation they would find satisfying or are unaware of how to articulate their knowledge and skills to a prospective employer, they are unlikely to achieve their full career potential.

## EXPERIENCE - WORK AND LIFE

Another element from the lower tier of the CareerEDGE model is that of 'experience'. This includes work experience but, importantly for many students, other life experiences too. Harvey (2005) contends

that, in particular, younger, full-time students who have not had significant work experience as part of their programmes of study often leave university with very little idea of the nature and culture of the workplace and consequently can find it difficult to adjust. There is also research which suggests that graduates with work experience are more likely to gain employment upon graduation than those without (Pedagogy for Employability Group, 2006). Other research has found overwhelming evidence for the value of work-based and work-related learning experiences in promoting the employability of graduates (Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011). The necessity for students to gain work experience now seems to be accepted by employers and most HE staff

alike. Indeed this was one of the major points made by the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration (2012). Most universities have recognised this thinking and have staff dedicated to helping students to engage with some form of work-related learning. For many students this will not only allow them to develop the professional skills expected in all graduate recruits, but may also allow them to think about how the theory and knowledge they are gaining through their degree studies can be related to the real world. They will also be able to incorporate these real-life experiences into their studies and hopefully see how the theory and real-world experience can contribute to their overall understanding of their academic discipline.

## DEGREE SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING

This has always been and remains at the heart of CareerEDGE. Students come to university to learn about a particular subject – some with a view to gaining work within this field, others purely because they are passionate about developing their knowledge and understanding of the subject. It is arguable that we all want our students to gain the most from their studies, to develop a love of learning and gain the best degree classification they can.

## GENERIC SKILLS (INCLUDING ENTERPRISE SKILLS)

Although it has been argued that the skills approach alone is insufficient to do justice to the much broader concept of graduate employability (eg Tomlinson, 2012), employers do understand the language of skills and are often quite specific about the skills they expect to see in graduate recruits. As they also attempt to measure these in their recruitment and selection processes, it is difficult to argue that we should not be providing our students with knowledge of these requirements together with opportunities to develop these skills whilst at university. Many of the generic skills listed by employers as vital in graduate recruits, such as communication, team working, problem solving, digital literacy and many more, including those sometimes classified as ‘enterprise skills’ such as creativity and innovation, are also skills that will help students to make the most of their academic studies. As such, they can often be developed within the HE curriculum; but students do need to be made aware of when this is happening, which can be done through ensuring these are included as learning outcomes. This way students are able to see how they are developing the skills and competencies employers are looking for and will be able to offer evidence of these when applying for work experience opportunities and/or graduate jobs.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

This might have been one of the more controversial elements within CareerEDGE but all of the feedback received since 2007 has been distinctly positive. Emotional Intelligence ability is something that has a significant effect on relationships and well-being (eg Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008) and as such deserves a place within any model of graduate employability. It is also a desirable attribute for potential leaders (Walter, Cole & Humphrey, 2011) which many graduates aspire to become. EI ability is concerned with how people perceive, understand and manage emotion;

a graduate who is unable to pay attention to their own and others feelings, understand those feelings and manage them effectively is likely to experience difficulties in their personal relationships and their professional relationships with colleagues, managers and customers. Therefore it is important to make students aware of this and help them to develop their ability in this area. Again, activities to help with this kind of development can be, and in many cases already are, incorporated into the curriculum. Any activities that encourage students to work together, communicate effectively, negotiate with each other and reflect on their learning experiences, can be used to develop EI ability. There are many opportunities to include such activities in most HE curricula and research has demonstrated that it is possible for students to improve their EI ability together with confidence in that ability (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012). It can also be helpful to include activities in other related areas such as diversity and cultural awareness, both of which require us to consider how our words and actions can impact on the feelings of others.

## Reflection and evaluation

Providing students with the opportunities to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes through employability related activities is obviously of great importance. However, without opportunities to reflect on these activities and evaluate them, it is unlikely that this experience will transfer into learning. This type of reflective learning often takes the form of written learning logs or reflective journals but could also include audio, video and e-portfolios. Reflection can help a student to gain employment by providing a means by which they can become aware of and articulate their abilities. But additionally it is an ability that will help them in their employment (many roles now call for reflective practitioners) and as a contributor to lifelong learning skills; as such it is an essential element both in relation to HE learning and in the employment context (Moon, 2004). It is also through the process of reflection and evaluation that our students are able to develop their self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem – crucial links to employability.

The CareerEDGE model is helpful for explaining the concept of employability to students, enabling them to take responsibility for their own employability development. It can also be helpful to inform the planning of programmes and structured interventions by providing clarity

of information about what needs to be considered and included. Importantly, it can serve as a clear, practical framework to help all who work in HE to unite in their common objective of supporting students to develop into well-rounded, employable graduates.

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**Lorraine Dacre Pool**

Lorraine is a Chartered Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Employability at the University of Central Lancashire, based in the Centre for Excellence in

Learning and Teaching. Recognising the need for a clear, practical model of graduate employability, she designed and published the CareerEDGE model and later developed the Employability Development Profile, both of which have appeared in a number of publications and are in use in many universities nationally and internationally. She has particular expertise in the subject of Emotional Intelligence and the role this plays in graduate employability.

# The holistic student

*Thomas Ron and Chris Wall discuss how linking societies and academic departments can help students reach their full potential.*



## Our employability landscape

At York, we spend considerable time and energy on the issue of graduate employability. That said, first year students regularly do not think about employability and it was remarkable that this year was the first one where they made up a significant proportion of Careers Fairs. Our experience as students tells us that there isn't always consistency of approach from academic staff in dealing with employability: some are promoting it, talking about it, embedding it and making it part of the course experience, whilst others are relying on Careers and, as a result, on students making an early and proactive attempt to tackle the complicated employment and employability space. Furthermore, and as a result of a traditional academic approach, many of the skills learned through course interaction are academic in nature, focusing on solving problems or helping students embark on a research career, rather than looking at industrial work. This could put the University at a significant disadvantage: as students have become savvy about the value of an industrial placement, they're more likely to make the decision not to apply or to put York as their first choice.

## What employers are looking for

We all know that employers today are increasingly looking for 'more than a degree' and in some cases are no longer considering undergraduate attainment in and of itself. What this actually means is that they are looking for a rounded individual that has grasped the university experience, has undertaken a part-time job, been in or lead a club or a society, represented other students, or completed a placement. Employers want graduates who have got knowledge about a subject, but also skills and experience that they can apply to accomplishing different tasks and jobs. These skills include but are not limited to:

- Leadership and teamwork

- Effective communication
- Self-management
- Problem solving
- Commercial awareness

## How Academic Societies build these skills

Academic societies provide a basis for these skills and much more. Students who engage in their academic society are often involved in organising events; this in itself requires students to exercise a range of skills. For example organising a speaker event for the committee will require liaising with other members of the committee to consider who they should book, budgeting for the event, engaging with external contacts, and so much more – all providing opportunities to develop skills outside the degree. Balancing all of this with their studies also demonstrates excellent time management. These skills are ones we do not always receive from traditional study or at least do not get the chance to apply pragmatically in a safe environment.

Involvement in an academic society also provides evidence that an individual is engaged beyond their degree and wants to learn more holistically and perhaps independently. The fact that they cover additional course material is also a benefit to the students who ultimately have chosen their degree because they enjoy it. Allowing them to explore areas which they enjoy continues their interest and encourages the independent learning culture we are looking to promote at York.

## Examples where departments and societies have worked well together

It is notable that many departments that have 'bucked the trend' on employability tend to have a strong working relationship with their Academic Societies. One such example is the Law Society who have built very close links with senior lecturers in the Law School as well as a close association with their Employability Teaching Fellow. These links have allowed the Society to bring in leading Law firms to multiple events and those firms end up leaving with plenty of prospective interns. The connection has been there from the inception of the Law School and the Law Society and has allowed them to work with each other and maintain Law as a school that does well. Another good

example is ShockSoc, who have been highly involved in helping students do independent lab work and promoting ideas within Electronics. This has helped students engage in collaborative work, a trait which is highly sought after with employers. Electronics helps this by fully subsidising membership in ShockSoc for all Electronics students. Therefore, as the club is free at the point of use at any point in time it has a large membership of Electronics students who make the club strong and help with the soft skills employers are looking for while the department can get on with the business of teaching.

## Ideas for further links

- Departments and Academic Societies should work together more in order to derive the greatest mutual benefit and ensure they complement one another fully.
- The incentives and help that some departments provide should not be the exception, they should be the rule.
- Furthermore, these incentives should be provided with benchmarks for the society to meet, so that the investment has an obvious quantifiable return.
- Therefore, we would welcome working with departments to create a framework for providing incentives as well as ensuring societies keep up to their commitments.



**Thomas Ron** is the Academic Officer of YUSU for the academic year. He has long been an advocate for student engagement and has held positions in YUSU since 2013. He is particularly passionate about involving students in making changes to their course. He has piloted methods of involving students in all areas of university life and bringing academic societies into academic decision making. He can be contacted at [t.ron@yusu.org](mailto:t.ron@yusu.org)



**Chris Wall** is the Activities Officer of YUSU for this and the last academic year. In his role he has had overall responsibility for societies and our charitable activities. He is particularly passionate for societies to develop into new roles and ways of providing for students. He can be contacted at [c.wall@yusu.org](mailto:c.wall@yusu.org)

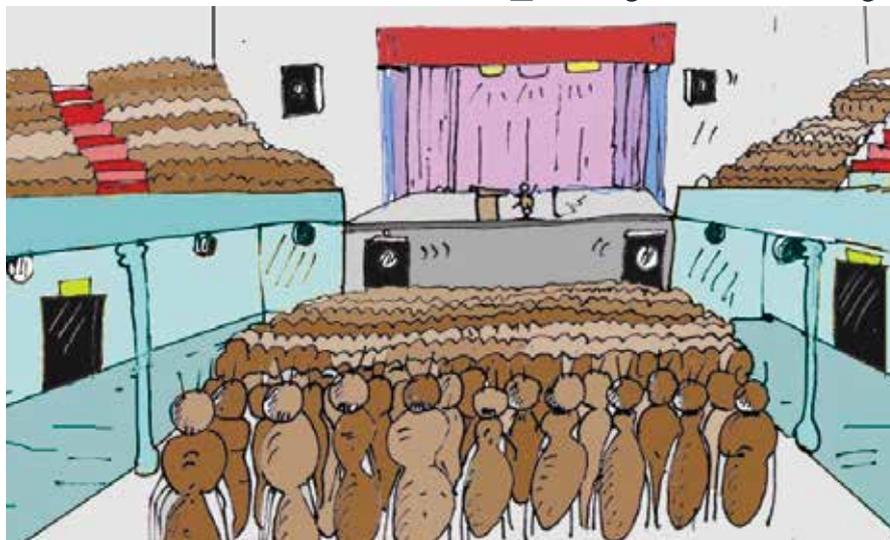
# Thinking at the core of employability

*Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement, considers the value of critical thinking skills in graduate employability.*

The employability agenda is certainly at the forefront of current debate concerning the purpose and value of higher education, whether in relation to ensuring graduates have the key skills needed to compete in the modern job market or the 'soft skills' necessary to build a multi-job career (Atkins, 1999; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Yorke, 2006). This is not surprising as not only are societies, governments and businesses struggling to survive in a fast-moving, highly competitive and increasingly unpredictable world, graduates are also facing overwhelming amounts of information and data, work and workplaces which are more mobile and less time-bound, and requirements to be ever-more flexible and adept in the face of change and disappearing career structures.

If we look to research into employability skills to guide us in how to prepare our graduates for such demands, we may be disappointed: multitudes of lists of attributes, abilities and skills have been produced (Yorke, 2006), resulting in a confused and confusing picture. What I would like to suggest in this article is that while due attention should be given to conative and affective skills, such as team-working and modes of communication, we need to ensure we don't forget the primary skills universities were designed to foster and nurture – the cognitive skills involved in critical thinking.

There is certainly evidence that the most sought after skill for today's 'knowledge worker' is the capacity to activate subject knowledge through critical engagement, but there is also evidence that this is the ability that employers often find lacking (Arum and Roksa, 2014; Korn, 2014). Looking at critical capacities, Dede (2010) highlights the importance of graduates having the capacity to enquire, investigate, and continuously create new methods of discovery through what he terms 'thinking scientifically'. Additionally, in a disordered environment of information overload, he proposes that 'thinking skills' foster the ability to rapidly filter increasing amounts of incoming data to extract information that is valuable for decision making. Similarly, in discussing



*and when you leave some will be account-ants, some will be merch-ants and some will be civil serv-ants ... follow your dream*

managing the complexity of the modern world, Reich (2002) describes a new class of workers – the 'symbolic analysts' who are happy to experiment and analyse by defining the parameters of problems, seeing the path from abstract principles and models to concrete situations, and thinking through a system from its parts to its whole. These will be the most sought after people in the modern workplace and therefore will be the ones with the power to define their own future. The question is: are these the graduates we are producing?

Surely as a research-driven university we should have no worries about such a question. However, all too easily as educators we can feel the pressure to cover the enormity of our discipline in the classroom, or feel pushed into focusing time and energy on introducing an ever-expanding set of transferable skills, and therefore lose sight of the more nebulous critical skills in our module design and our classroom practice. As a result, students on our programmes may gain the impression, or make the strategic decision, that they just have to learn what is put in front of them and compartmentalise their knowledge in order to survive.

In this situation, giving consideration to how we produce graduates who think, question, challenge, analyse and debate and who are therefore curious, rigorous and adventurous in their approach to the world may take a backseat. The workshop session at this year's Learning and Teaching conference – **An academic approach to employability: or 'How thinking environments can produce thinking**

**graduates'** – will provide participants with space to consider exactly what we mean by a 'thinking approach', what we value about it and how we can provide an environment which supports the development of critical awareness and skills. Colleagues from Physics, Psychology (Edinburgh Napier) and Health Sciences will contribute examples of practice.

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# Articulate

*Dr Lorna Warnock and Dr Amanda Barnes present a tool box to help you support students in the game of understanding and articulating their competencies.*

The increase in the number of students expecting to secure industrial placements and attain graduate level employment, as well as enhanced competition from other universities for jobs and placements, led us to reflect upon our resources for student support. We have worked together with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to produce a Competency Framework and a tool box that we can use to help make our students 'work ready'.

## The Mysterious Language of Competency Frameworks

Through our engagement with placements, employability and graduate education, we have recognised that many students at all levels are unfamiliar with the concept of competencies. They are often unsure how to articulate their competencies and unsure how to describe the development of these competencies across their education, work experience and extra-curricular activities.

We have offered undergraduate and Master's placements for a number of years and have recently started a programme of PhD internships (Jones and Warnock, 2015). Our recent work with students revealed that the levels of competencies between undergraduate, Master's and PhD students often differ greatly. For example, undergraduates may have an understanding of what makes a good leader and Master's students would be starting to develop their leadership skills, whereas a PhD student will be project managing, beginning to lead their own research and should be receiving training in leadership. To reflect these differences in competencies, we needed to improve our system of preparing students for placements, further education and jobs, moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach towards a more tailored preparation for each level of student education and life experience.

In order to achieve this, we

*RIGHT: An excerpt from the Framework*

were stimulated to write a Competency Framework for Bioscience students in conjunction with the HEA to reflect the competencies that are valued by employers in this sector. The Framework, importantly, also includes the levels of competencies that are expected from undergraduate, Master's and PhD students respectively – which may be very different.

The Competency Framework was developed with input from employers and the initial competencies identified for the framework were:

- Teamworking, working with others
- Leadership and management potential
- Communication skills
- Self-management, motivation and professionalism
- Commercial responsibility and business development
- Professional development
- Ethical and sustainable practice
- Scientific skills

The levels of each of the skills are described in relation to the training students have received through their courses along with work experience and

TEAMWORKING, WORKING WITH OTHERS	
<b>Undergraduate</b>	Undergraduate students gain teamworking experience through various group work projects that form part of their degree. Those that have completed an internship, work experience or extra-curricular activities may have further developed these skills, understanding the importance of clear communication and delegation and challenging inappropriate behaviours.
<b>Master's</b>	Master's students develop further teamworking experience as part of a group project, building on their undergraduate experience. They may also have received training and feedback relating to their performance as part of a team. Master's students are likely to have had the opportunity to challenge inappropriate behaviours or courses of action.
<b>Doctorate</b>	PhD students should have extensive and well-developed teamworking skills on top of their previous experience – particularly when part of a large research group. They should also have an awareness of their integration into their team and their preferred role, strengths and weaknesses. At this point in their career, PhD students should be giving thought to how they would be developing their own team in the future. They may also undertake training in teamworking/building and personality types. Many PhD students are involved with committees and professional bodies, further exposing them to teams and their function. As part of their research, PhD students are likely to have to negotiate over use of resources and to offer or draw support to/from others.

student activities outside of university. The skills are placed into three student categories – undergraduate, Master's and PhD – and the published Framework is available online (Jones and Warnock 2014).

We have introduced the Competency Framework at a number of workshops, and participants agreed that though designed originally for the Bioscience sector, the Frameworks can be easily adapted for any discipline and level of student education. The Competency Framework forms the starting block, and used as a tool to create bespoke Competency Frameworks, can be designed with input from other stakeholders to provide a focus for a closer working relationship with employers.

## Contents of the tool box

We have continued to work with the HEA on phase 2 of the study, which has recently been published (Jones and Warnock 2016).

This toolbox provides video case studies in which students, employers and academics articulate competencies. We also introduce an interactive Competency Framework PDF, enabling students to create their own Competency Framework, and provide an interactive PDF Internship Planner to chart individual professional development. This resource also provides session plans for workshops on 'The mysterious language of competencies', 'Talking about your competencies at interview' and 'Developing your competencies in the workplace'. You can add the video case studies and the interactive PDFs to the workshops providing a real 'pick and mix' toolbox of materials with which to engage students.

We believe this more tailored support will allow our students to compete in the work place as 'Value added graduates', able to successfully articulate their competencies to employers.

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# The @Work Programme – embedding experience

*Sarah Leith, Experiential Learning, Careers, explores the potential for embedding live community based projects in the current three year curriculum structure.*

Work based learning is a method for engaging students with employers, developing employability through experience of the workplace and encouraging learning through the reflection on concrete experience. Traditionally work based learning assumes the student will be fully immersed in the workplace.

This article will explore the @Work model of short team focused experiences for its potential to offer work based learning at scale within the existing curriculum. Can this model offer an alternative to placement learning and enable students to be confident in their ability to understand and articulate their competence in transferable skills upon graduation?

## What is @Work?

The @Work programme, set up in 2010, offers project based experience to teams of students from the arts, humanities and social sciences, engaging 200 students annually in around 35 'live' projects each summer term. Each project is designed to deliver a tangible outcome, which is valuable to the partner organisation; these include employers, charities and local government, as well as offering students a real, relevant and challenging experience.<sup>1</sup>

Projects have included assembling a radio show with the BBC about York's war time

role<sup>2</sup>; creating an awareness raising film for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation about dementia-friendly practice for businesses and developing a report on the future of independent book shops based on in-depth interviews in the sector.

Each one is designed to link to potential career paths and encourage the application of the wide range of transferable skills and attributes developed in the curriculum: teamwork, critical analysis, and self-motivation to name a few. Incorporating this project model in the curriculum could further demonstrate to students the interconnected nature of academic content and the workplace.

## What can students gain?

Through @Work, students report higher confidence in their skills. The introduction of the risk associated with a live brief, offering both the potential for failure but also the offer of success, enriches the potential learning experience for the student. This generates an emotional engagement with the experience that is difficult to simulate through classroom based exercises. Beckett (2002) describes this as a 'holistic approach to learning engaging the whole person, accounting not just for intellect, but also emotions and values.'<sup>3</sup>

The challenge for us is ensuring that students recognise the learning experience, engaging with reflective practice so they can better articulate their skills, as well as their values and attributes, by drawing upon concrete experience. From this perspective, embedding a project in the curriculum provides the incentive for the student to fully engage in reflective learning.

## Can projects have measurable learning outcomes?

In considering how to embed a project based experience in the curriculum, we can learn from US practice in Service learning. For

*“ Working with an external organisation was the most important aspect of this for me as it made it more of a meaningful achievement rather than just a University based project.”*

NATIONAL TRUST INTERPRETATION MATERIAL PROJECT

example the Homewood Centre for Social Concern assesses the students' preparation, reflection and evaluation of the experience rather than the activity itself.<sup>4</sup> This could be mapped onto the current programme model with assessment at key stages.

In the current model project teams are supported in their learning, by a series of skills based workshops, a project pitch event and personal reflection through the University's online Employability Tutorial. This provides an opportunity if developed in the curriculum to assess learning in written reflective journals, presentation of plans and group discussion on the process.

## Where next?

The @Work model is aimed primarily at first and second year undergraduates. Following participation in @Work we often see students using it as a stepping stone to different programmes or leading their own initiatives. Could it help to build student confidence and motivation to engage with additional experience or a placement year? I will explore this further at the Learning and Teaching conference and consider if we could embed projects with assessments, whilst retaining quality, consistency and parity.

## Endnotes

1 [www.york.ac.uk/careers/@work](http://www.york.ac.uk/careers/@work)

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBYXIL0JCTI&feature=youtu.be>

3 Beckett D. (2000) 'Making workplace learning explicit: An epistemology of practice for the whole person' Westminster studies in Education 23 pp. 191-206.

4 <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/socialconcern/community-based-learning/>

*“ A fantastic experience overall and I feel I have learnt a lot, while I also have a great sense of pride that I have been able to share my passion for human rights with a huge group of children who responded with such enthusiasm.”*

STORIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS WORKSHOPS PROJECT



Sarah Leith is a volunteering project officer based in Careers at the University of York. She is responsible for coordinating a range of community placements and projects for student volunteers, including the @Work programme in partnership with academic departments. She also works alongside the employee volunteering charity York Cares, engaging business volunteers in community and education projects. [sarah.leith@york.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.leith@york.ac.uk)

# Improving the student experience through working with industry

## CASE STUDY OF THE L'OREAL BRANDSTORM COMPETITION

**Fernando Fastoso, Bob Doherty, Nicola Clemmit and Juno Zhu**  
from *The York Management School* discuss how University of York students succeeded to the L'Oreal Brandstorm UK Finals 2015.

In April 2015 a team of three York students, Yiran Hou (BSc Management), Yuting (Juno) Zhu (BSc Accounting, Business Finance and Management) and Jane Fieldsend (BA History) made it all the way to the UK finals in the prestigious L'Oreal Brandstorm competition, held at L'Oreal's head office in London. L'Oreal's Brandstorm student competition requires high levels of creativity and innovation as students address real-life business challenges in relation to one of L'Oreal's global brands.

Last year, our students saw off competition from over 50 other teams of students based at UK Universities to reach the finals. The students impressed L'Oreal executives with a proposal for a new retail experience in the travel retail arena for L'Oreal's Lancôme brand aimed at attracting new customers at major international airports using digital media. At the finals, the students experienced a significant employer-engagement experience spending time at L'Oreal's UK head office, meeting senior managers, and networking with employees. The students presented their work to a senior L'Oreal judging panel made up of Michel Brousset (Managing Director UK&I), Anthony Rankin (General Manager, Luxury Alternative Brands, UK&I), Catrin Roberts (Recruitment Director, UK&I) and Mike McKenna (Creative Director, TAG Agency).

Following their success and graduation from York, Yiran set up her own cosmetics company in China, Juno joined the MSc Global Marketing at The York Management School (TYMS), and Jane became a graduate placement student with L'Oreal UK. Following this success, the University of York is now an official partner of L'Oreal in the Brandstorm competition, which is now embedded into both the MSc Global Marketing and the new BSc Marketing degrees.

### The right support

We see our experience in this competition as an example of good practice in terms of the embedding of employability skills development in programme design, a key objective of the University Strategy 2014-2020. Keys to the success of this employer-engagement effort were the high-level ability of the York students coupled with the specific support provided by TYMS to channel that ability in the right direction. Students were given access to specialised senior marketing academics in the School, Dr Fernando Fastoso and Professor Bob Doherty, as well as having the personal support of our Placement Co-ordinator, Nicola Clemmit, who accompanied the students throughout the process as well as to the UK Finals in London. TYMS also employed a professional trainer to help the students to maximise their presentation skills and several staff from the School attended a practice presentation and gave the students useful feedback. Overall, our Brandstorm 2015 success was a real team effort from TYMS which helped the students to achieve this high accolade.

We measure the success of this experience at different levels. The experience was successful in terms of the students' personal development, as they all proceeded to take a promising next step forward in their careers in three different ways – entrepreneurship, postgraduate study, and work experience career development as an employee with L'Oréal's graduate internship programme. Further success is reflected in the fact that the competition presented us as a School with a great opportunity to increase the employability skills of our students. Finally, the Brandstorm experience was also a success in terms of developing stronger links with industry, a key criterion for prospective students selecting their university of choice.

In the 2016 Brandstorm competition, a total of 11 teams of York students have submitted their work to the first phase of



the competition out of a total of 36 teams UK wide. Again this year, a team of TYMS students from our MSc Global Marketing programme – Juliana Akrobetu, Olivia Batty and Meg French – made it to the finals in London on 5 May and won! We are very proud of all our students and look forward to the competition next year.



**Dr Fernando Fastoso** (Senior Lecturer in Marketing), **Professor Bob Doherty** (Professor of Marketing), and **Nicola Clemmit** (Placement Coordinator) are based at TYMS and supported the students throughout the Brandstorm competition. **Juno Zhu** is a graduate of TYMS, one of last year's finalists in the Brandstorm competition and currently studying for an MSc Global Marketing at TYMS. Lead author email address: [fernando.fastoso@york.ac.uk](mailto:fernando.fastoso@york.ac.uk)

# Chemical Communication projects – inspiring the teachers of the future



*Annie Hodgson celebrates the successes of Chemical Communication project students and explores the far-reaching benefits of this scheme.*

Everyone remembers an inspirational teacher from their school days. I firmly believe that we should encourage our most enthusiastic and gifted students to think seriously about teaching, so that they can inspire the next generation. For the last ten years the Department of Chemistry has given final year BSc students the opportunity to choose a project in Chemical Communication, rather than taking a

lab-based project. Since 2006 the scheme has evolved and undergone continuous improvements and so far 73 students have benefitted, many of whom have become very successful teachers. It could be argued that those students would have pursued a career in teaching even in the absence of the project. However, some students who originally had their sights on a different career enjoyed the experience so much that they decided to train as teachers.

## School or outreach?

The original programme, developed from the Undergraduate Ambassadors Scheme (UAS)<sup>1</sup>, places students in schools. In 2012 we introduced a parallel scheme in which students organise and run a major outreach event for visiting school groups.

### SCHOOL BASED PROJECTS

Students have to spend at least ten full days in (usually) a secondary school. A teacher mentor organises their timetable and advises them on a day-to-day basis. The students take part in lessons delivered by a range of teachers, to get as broad an experience as possible. Whilst their main focus is in the science department, we encourage students to visit lessons in other disciplines, as so much can be gained from observing different approaches to teaching and learning. Students should experience the full range of age groups and abilities, spend time with pupils who have special needs and make the most of any extra-curricular opportunities, such as field trips and science clubs. Students adopt the role of teaching assistant, helping small groups and individual pupils. As they grow in confidence and skill, students begin to prepare parts of lessons, which they team-teach alongside the regular teacher. In many cases students teach entire lessons, with the usual teacher in the background for support.

During the first few weeks of the placement students look for potential project areas, discussing their ideas with their teacher mentor and academic project supervisor at the University. The project should be something that can be evaluated, involve a reasonably substantial amount of literature research and ideally something of lasting benefit to the school. Previous examples have included differentiated practical science investigations for pupils with a wide range of disabilities and special educational needs; supporting non-English-speaking pupils in mainstream science lessons; targeted maths interventions for A-level chemistry students; and investigating the impact of lab practicals on the deep learning of science theory. The experiences, observations and take-home messages from every lesson attended by the student are recorded in a structured log-book, which forms part of the placement assessment.

### OUTREACH PROJECTS

A team of three students plan and run a full day outreach event hosted in YSOC (the York Science Outreach Centre). Each student chooses an area of York chemistry research, spending time with members of that research group to find out as much as they can about the cutting edge science. They then create an hour-long session for Key Stage 3 or 4 students (the project students can choose the year group that they would like to invite). The session must include hands-on activities, contain material that is based in the National Curriculum but extended to show the relevance of school science in a wider context. Grounding the activities in York research provides an opportunity to showcase our work and supports the “impact” element of the REF (Research Excellence Framework) assessments.

The University’s Widening Participation team invites three school groups to take part in the Outreach event. The groups rotate around all three activities, giving each project student the opportunity to assess and improve upon their own performance. The students devise feedback forms to evaluate the event. The students are observed delivering each session by members of academic staff, with the observations forming part of the assessment process.



might ask. There are regular meetings with the academic supervisor and students are encouraged to form their own support network to discuss their ideas and experiences.

### Assessment

The projects are assessed in three parts – the school placement or outreach activity (25%), a project report (50%) and a 20 minute presentation with 20 minutes of questions (25%), delivered at a Chemical Communication symposium. A school placement is assessed using detailed feedback from the teacher mentor, the project supervisor's observations of the student delivering part of a lesson (or similar activity), and the logbook.

### Successes and legacies

There are many success stories, with students gaining places on PGCE courses, having confidently discussed educational theory in their interviews and talked at length about new teaching materials they had developed. One student so impressed her school that she was offered a teaching job for the following year. After a great deal of thought, she decided to go down a more conventional route and within a couple of years of completing her PGCE she was a head of chemistry. Another student, who was applying for graduate-entry medical courses withdrew from the process and decided to become a teacher, as he (unexpectedly) enjoyed being in the classroom so much. A former Chemical Communication project student is now one of our teacher mentors. He recognises what the scheme gave to him, so he is determined to support current and future project students.

Students really make a difference in their placement schools, leaving resources that can be used again and again. But their true legacy will be the next generation of science students inspired by these enthusiastic and engaging teachers of the future.

### ENDNOTES

1 <http://uas.ac.uk>

### The 'right stuff'

Whilst we are not looking for fully formed teachers to embark upon the projects, it would be unfair to set anyone up to fail. Only students who demonstrate that they have the potential to develop the required skills are accepted onto the scheme. There is a rigorous selection process to find the students with the 'right stuff'. Candidates deliver a five-minute talk for 14-15 year

olds on a GCSE chemistry topic. They are not allowed to use a computer, but are encouraged to use visual aids.

The presentations are delivered to a panel of school teachers and a member of the Chemistry Department. The students are asked about their experiences and their motivation for choosing this type of project. They are also asked to prepare answers to eight questions (of which they will be asked two), dealing with issues and situations that they might encounter in a secondary school. All of the students receive detailed written feedback from each of the panel members, providing some excellent advice for improving their teaching skills.

These interviews take place on the first day of term, to allow sufficient time for the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks to be carried out before the successful applicants start their school placements.

### Training and support

Prior to the students beginning their placements they have an intensive training day. Additionally, to encourage them to think carefully about using appropriate vocabulary when describing scientific ideas, they have to prepare written answers to questions that young inquisitive pupils



**Annie Hodgson** completed a PGCE at York and taught in an 11 to 18 school before returning to the University to begin her DPhil in the Department of Chemistry, where she has remained ever since. Annie teaches a Year 1 Skills module, runs the Chemical Communication projects, is the Schools Liaison and Outreach Officer for the Department of Chemistry and edits the full colour A-level magazine 'Chemistry Review'.  
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# Making learning authentic

## 'REAL WORLD' ASSESSMENTS FOR MASTERS LEVEL STUDY

*Jude Brereton discusses how to improve employability and add value for postgraduate students, through course work assessments which exist outside of the campus and have life beyond the programme.*



### Motivation

My initial ideas for designing 'real-world' assessments were inspired by a recent Music Technology PhD graduate who returned to York to talk to our students about working in the audio industry. One of the main reasons, he thought, that he secured a highly sought-after role as a digital signal processing engineer was because he had spent much of his free-time on hobby programming projects, which he posted online, thus joining an ever increasing online community of software programmers.

If this kind of activity is vital in helping to secure employment in a competitive audio engineering industry, it seems logical to design some assessments which involve active and authentic learning and which can form part of a wider online portfolio of work that students can use to showcase their skills to potential employers. It also seemed that any assessments designed to combine active and authentic learning would not only add validity to the learning experience, but might also be fun!

### Background context

Designing the MSc in Audio and Music Technology, a programme based in the Department of Electronics but which shares some taught modules with the MA Music Production programme in the Department of Music, gave me the opportunity to develop a number of 'real-world assessments', some of which involve student work spanning across more than one module. Music

technology is an inherently interdisciplinary subject and as such our masters students hail from diverse backgrounds in terms of their previous education. Some have engineering or science degrees, complemented by skills in music performance or recording. Others have music or music technology degrees and are able to demonstrate an aptitude for the technical content of the programme – usually through 'hobby' projects in electronics, programming or 'tinkering with technology'.

In designing 'real world' assessments the key was to combine active learning which would foster further innovation and creative skills with the reinforcement of critical thinking and problem solving skills, expecting students to work not just on 'authentic simulations' but to get their 'hands dirty' in real-world tasks.

### The Real World Assessments 1 MUSIC TECHNOLOGY SCHOOLS TASTER EVENT

Students designed, organised and delivered

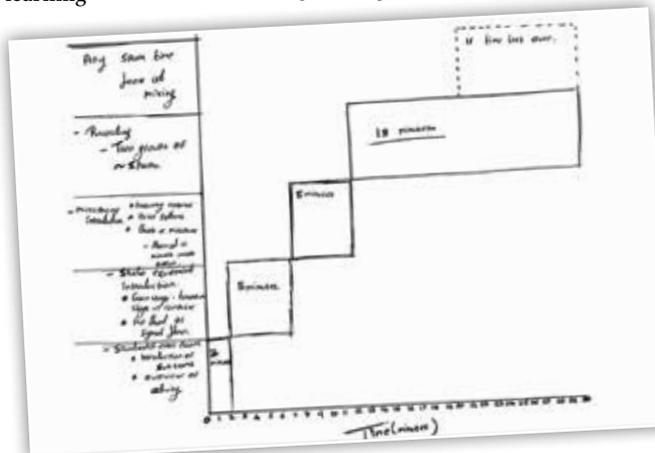
an interactive demonstration on a music-technology topic of their choice (eg. studio processing, room acoustics, levitation via ultrasound) with the aim of inspiring and engaging the next generation of music technology and audio engineering students. They were asked also to produce a paragraph of marketing blurb and a tweet that the Widening Participation Team used to market the event to schools.

On the day, the MSc students managed the event, delivered the demonstrations and answered school pupils' questions. This component of the module was assessed through a self-reflective report of the work undertaken, both individually and as part of the team, and by an appraisal of the event itself, which students were asked to evidence through photos, audio recordings, notes of team meetings, team diaries, feedback from the schools who attended and any other relevant means.

### 2 SELF-PROMOTION VIDEO AND MARKETING LEAFLET

Student Work: As part of the Autumn term transferable skills module, student work and discussion focusses on 'getting into the industry', whether this means working freelance or as an employee. There are sessions on networking skills, self-promotion, entrepreneurship, marketing of technology and some (usually difficult and eye-opening) reflection on their own online presence: 'Google yourself, see what comes up first, is this what you'd like your potential employer to see?'

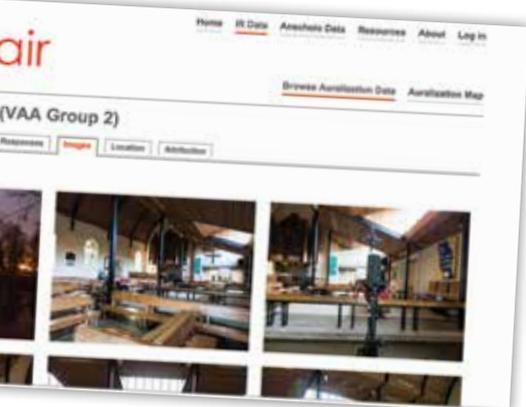
Assessment: we ask students to present



Lesson plan produced by student group for the school's taster event



Screenshot of Self-promotion marketing leaflet



Acoustic Survey uploaded to publicly available research resource

their skills and competencies in an eye-catching and engaging way; more than just a CV, this piece of work could form the basis of a student's approach to their own focused self-promotion.

**3 ACOUSTIC SURVEY UPLOADED TO FREELY AVAILABLE RESEARCH RESOURCE**

Student work: In small groups students are required to find an interesting indoor space (concert hall, church, lecture theatre) and to undertake an acoustic survey, capturing and measuring the acoustic characteristics of the venue, using skills they have practiced in laboratory sessions.

Assessed via a group presentation and a review of the completeness of the results uploaded to the publicly available research resource database [www.Openairlib.net](http://www.Openairlib.net)

**4 RESEARCH BLOG**

Student work: the capstone of the MSc programme is in individual research projects culminating in a written dissertation. The summer term project development module sees students completing a traditional literature survey, but also blogging weekly about their research project and its progression. Students are encouraged to make this blog open to the general public, and to follow each others blogs and to comment on them as relevant.

Assessed via: Selection of six best blog

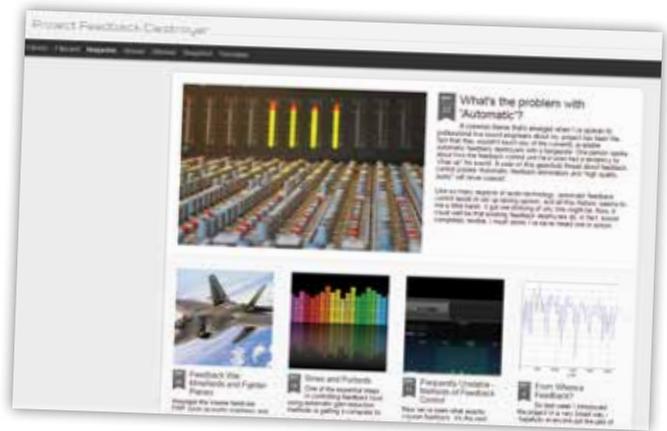
posts which are assessed using a protocol which is published to the students in advance.

**Embedding employability skills**

Whilst problem-based learning is gaining popularity in undergraduate Engineering courses (Clark & Andrews 2012), I really wanted these assessments not only to harness innovation and creativity, but also to produce work that students could keep (and develop if wanted) beyond the end of the masters programme. In particular they were designed to couple academic subject knowledge and understanding with transferable and employability skills. The aim was to bridge the gap between subject theory and practice, asking students to solve real 'real world' problems, not merely 'authentic simulations', thus developing personal and professional skills through combining authentic and active learning. Real world assessments can be more costly in terms of staff contact time, additional need for careful guidance from staff as well as clearly articulated assessment criteria, marking protocols and detailed feedback on student performance.

There is some concern that authentic tasks involve higher levels of variability meaning that "all performances and claims are individual, making it expensive to achieve the minimum tolerable levels of reliability when the assessment purpose is summative" (Knight and Yorke 2003 p103). In addition, some real world tasks that involve students undertaking unsupervised work off campus will need careful risk assessment and planning. Here again is an opportunity to build in planning for risk as student work and learning.

The majority of the 'real world' assessments included in the programme further both degree subject knowledge as well as more generic skills, and all incorporate directed reflection and evaluation, serving to build students' self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy, the "crucial link between knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes and employability". (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007, p19). Indeed the initial terror shown by some students – for example in preparation for hosting the schools event – was followed by a huge sense of pride in what they had managed to achieve. They reflected on challenges overcome through team-work and gained a deep understanding of what they had learned and how much they had developed.



Example of student research blog

**Conclusion**

Real-world authentic assessments encourage active learning where students can see the real connections between what they learn in the lecture hall and lab and the world of work beyond campus.

The real-world assessments included in the programme were well-received by the students, who engaged well with the tasks and gained not only subject knowledge, but increased their own personal efficacy and grew in confidence, given the extra impetus that the work produced for these assessments would also exist beyond campus in the 'real world'. At the end of the year one student commented that they felt they "had developed personally and academically more this year than any other in their life"; I do believe that active learning and innovative assessments played a part. I encourage academic colleagues to consider whether they could also include authentic learning experiences and real-world assessments in the programmes they design and deliver.

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# Apps for graduates

## DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR INDUSTRY

### Apps everywhere

There is a wonderful pair of pictures (NBC, 2013) that sums up how much society has recently adopted portable computing devices by comparing the same public place in 2005 and 2013. So what caused this change?

The public's response to the iPhone's introduction in 2007 is widely seen as the turning point in the adoption of smartphones. When Apple introduced the App Store in 2008 the software industry was transformed, as users instantly downloaded free or cheap 'apps'. By daring to open up their development kit and programming environment to anyone, Apple effectively launched a new industry sector. Their 2009 slogan "There's an App for that" showed that these little software packages were not limited to utilities or games, but had become essential marketing tools for all industries. A new breed of programmers, often individuals or very small companies, emerged to provide rapid app development for everyone who wanted one.

### iOS modules and audio

In 2011 we decided to introduce our students to iOS programming skills, but using the niche application area of interactive musical and audio processing. Students learn the basics of coding, quickly develop their own apps on iPhones and iPads, then work towards creating their own musical instruments or sound processing apps. We teach 3 modules; one for 3rd year BSc students, one for 4th year MEng students and another for our MSc in Audio and Music Technology (MSc AMT). They share the same core lectures, but have individual computer practical labs and then assignments at the appropriate level.

There is a good deal of material online (from Apple and third parties) for learning iOS, and we give a reading and video list to the students several months ahead of the module, so they can gain familiarity with the concepts and be more prepared to start

confidently in the first computer labs. Audio generation or musical control is not covered well in the online material, and that has become the main focus of our modules. In this way we utilise external resources, but bring our own in-house expertise to offer a unique selling point for our modules.

For the first two years the modules ran well, but we were limited to two programming resources for audio; 1) *AVAudioPlayer* (Apple, 2014a), which is a simple - but limited - way of triggering pre-recorded sounds, and 2) *CoreAudio* (Apple, 2014b), a complex low-level coding environment, ultimately more flexible but extremely challenging to cover in a short module.

### Graduate innovators

Nick Arner is a graduate from our MSc by Research in Music Technology, with a final project in iOS audio user interfacing. On leaving York he co-founded *AudioKit* (2016), which has become the missing link in our programming resources. *AudioKit* allows users to work with sound playback and synthesis and thus bridges the gap between *AVAudioPlayer* and *CoreAudio*. It is a continually developing resource that is gaining international acceptance and praise. Nick is now a professional app developer and is working with Google.

### Graduate developers

Whilst *AudioKit* offered tremendous flexibility, it was still daunting for those new to programming. That's where the RRF funding came in. This allowed us to employ another recent graduate (of our four year MEng in Electronic Engineering with Music Technology Systems programme). Sam Beedell worked with us on producing a guided set of tutorials for *AudioKit* that formed the basis of the labs that we ran for the first time this year. Sam's tutorials have been well received by the latest student cohorts, and the experience has also been

*Andy Hunt* obtained Rapid Response Funding to create new audio app development material for helping graduates with marketable programming skills. This article reflects on how graduates not only learn, but shape and contribute to programmes.



of direct use to Sam. As well as offering him some immediate post-graduation employment, this has enabled Sam to work freelance on app development, and he is already working with several clients and becoming known for the quality of his audio app work.

### Summary

This has been a reflection on involving graduates in state-of-the-art software development and teaching:

- How we can help graduates from diverse backgrounds to become programmers.
- How one graduate went on to change the industry by developing a new programming kit.
- How another graduate helped us develop that kit for use in our teaching labs.
- How all of these graduates have benefitted in their careers by this process.

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# PIPped AT THE POST

## Professional internships for PhD students

*Dr Amanda Barnes and Dr Lorna Warnock from the Employability Team in the Department of Biology share the benefits of undertaking an internship during a PhD.*

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) recently introduced three month Professional Internships for PhD Students (PIPS) as part of their four year PhD programmes. The aspiration of the internship is to give students non-academic work experience opportunities (currently only 14% of PhD students pursue academic careers), enabling students to explore the context of their research, investigate the range of career opportunities open to them following graduation and to demonstrate how their research and professional skills can make a positive contribution to science and society outside of academia. In a competitive job market this vital work experience allows our students to graduate with a breadth of professional skills, giving them an extra edge.

Twelve Biology students have currently undertaken internships in a variety of settings ranging from museums, charities, hospitals and research institutes to investment banking. The internships take place in the third year of the PhD, and in addition to the valuable work experience, we have seen that the 3-month respite from their PhD research allows our students to return to their studies with increased confidence and different perspectives on their work. A number of students have also secured employment with their PIPS hosts after completing their PhDs.

### Student led internships

Although we have set up many internships by approaching host organisations, students choose the type of internship they undertake. The internships provide a stipend which allows students to undertake placements across the country, in a variety of settings, with hosts such as charities and local councils which previously may have been unable to offer internships due to the expense. Although they can involve performing research, the internship must not be linked to the student's PhD research area, and many have really pushed the boundaries and opted for placements that are not academically linked.

### A student perspective

Keir Bailey, a White Rose BBSRC Doctoral training partnership PhD student spent her three month internship in Widnes at a branch of Croda, a speciality chemical manufacturing company. 'I joined the Biotechnology Research and Development team that work on products derived from the fermentation process. Croda had been carrying out a specific process in which the yields were variable for almost ten years. My project aimed to scale down the plant process such that it could be carried out in the lab to investigate different variables of the fermentation.'

'Whilst on my internships I enjoyed working with a kind, friendly and supportive team, and the challenge of learning to use new lab equipment, such as 5L fermenters. The PIPS enabled me to further develop my problem solving and time management skills in an industrial setting, provided a welcome break from my PhD research and a great insight into industry helping me form clearer views on my future career.'

Philippa Furnival, Keir's supervisor at Croda, comments: 'It is a great opportunity for both Keir and Croda to complete a three month placement. For Keir, it provides her with the chance to get a taste of working in the chemical industry/industrial biotechnology. It is rewarding to see how far Keir has come in the last few months in terms of progressing her project and fitting comfortably into the team. For Croda, it allows us to work on smaller, shorter term projects that we often don't always have time to address fully. Croda also gets a fresh pair of eyes, knowledge and contacts to bring into the business.'

The PIPS initiative will enable students to take greater responsibility for their career choices and employment, and also strengthen the relationship between the University of York and Industry. Other research councils are now also introducing internships into their PhD training programmes to prevent their students from being PIPped at the post.

The authors would like to thank Philippa Furnival and Croda for hosting Keir, and our other internship providers.



Keir Bailey at the Croda Widnes Plant

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## best practice

*Emily Bowles discusses the risks and benefits of incorporating blogging into our teaching.*

### Introduction

Blogging and social media are increasingly part of the landscape of Higher Education, from profile building for postgraduates and academics to the role they can play in developing graduate skills and supporting student learning. The skills that can be fostered through blogging and social media, from digital marketing to tailoring content for different audiences and levels, can be built into modules in a way that reinforces existing learning outcomes and subject-specific skills. It can also extend learning within modules by incorporating careers development. This adds value for Humanities students by preparing them for some of the most common areas of graduate employment.

### Do the benefits of blogging outweigh the risks?

The literature on blogging and student learning is still in its infancy, and currently most often takes the form of individual case studies that explore what did or did not work for individual practitioners. Although there seems to be a general consensus that bringing learning technology and social media into teaching practice is worthwhile, many of these studies are characterised by the language of fear and risk. One such study by Yakaboski (2011), which looks at introducing blogging into feminist teaching, mentions the benefits of collaborative learning but mediates this with consideration of the risk of judgement and fears around putting work in such a public space. Macduff (2009), in an article on using blogs as a teaching tool in negotiation, concludes with an overwhelmingly negative focus, identifying six risks around blogging: miscommunication, enclave formation, becoming too technology-driven, the need for a certain level of comfort with technology, student reticence and the amount of time sunk into the activity by both educators and students. While there are, of course, always going to be risks associated with this kind of public-facing teaching practice, it is striking that many

# Blogging in humanities teaching

blogging case studies conclude with a warning about the risks rather than a celebration of the benefits and successes brought about by blogging.

One of the key risks identified by Macduff (2009) centres on teaching becoming too driven by technology: as such he views blogging as a time-consuming practice that can in fact inhibit dialogue and encourage miscommunication rather than support students. These fears fly in the face of what we know about good teaching practice. Barnett (2007) argues that students must venture into “anxiety-provoking places” as part of higher education (p.147). Additionally, research by Jonassen (1996) and Dede and Kremer (1999), has shown that the kinds of activities that make the most of online learning methods (like blogging) and

use them as a complementary teaching environment can assist students in developing a different set of skills and support those students who are less confident in the seminar format, enabling them to express themselves in new ways. Blogging also acts well as a flipped learning model, encouraging students to lead the discussion based on the research they have conducted – and that the other students have read – beforehand. While inevitably it takes some time to set up a blog, students can be encouraged to take ownership of the platform and post content themselves rather than submitting work directly to the tutor, minimising the time the educator has to spend managing the site once it is established. One of the great benefits of creating blogs is that they can be added to year on year, increasing the value for new cohorts of students.



# ing

## Using blogging to support student learning and development

The introduction of blogging does not have to lead to the complete redesign of modules and degree programmes. Although it has been successfully incorporated into the 'Skills, Knowledge and Independent Learning' module in the York Computer Science Department, and other universities including Liverpool John Moores run social media skills modules as an option in the English Department, it can simply be used to support existing module outcomes and incorporated as formative assessment. This works particularly well in the Humanities, where blogging can complement the skills students are developing as part of their degree. For example, blogging can be used as a way of measuring students' understanding of threshold concepts (which can be measured by assigning each student a key term to write a post about); as an exercise in independent research, where each student is asked to find an academic article or primary source and summarise it; or as a way of developing understanding of relevant context,

particularly for modules that deal with contemporary issues. Blogging encourages students to become part of a broader conversation, not only with their peers but also outside of the university.

Outside of the small – but growing – body of work that addresses blogging and teaching directly, there is also a strong link between blogging and more established pedagogical theory. Blogging taps into Piaget (1950) and Bruner's (1960, 1966) ideas about social constructivism, establishing a learning environment that is an active, collaborative space, and speaks well to Honey and Mumford's (1982) different teaching styles: activists are able to take on a larger role in innovating through a platform that encourages independent work, reflectors are able to access material published by their peers and reflect on different approaches to topics, while on a theoretical level, blogging presents a logical part of student development. On a purely pragmatic level, it can be used to develop banks of summaries, key terms and articles for students to return to for their summative assessments.

Student feedback from a blogging activity I introduced this year for two groups of students on the first year 'Global Literature' module in the English Department, for which I asked students to contribute one post during the term on an article or news item they had found through independent research, showed that the majority felt blogging was a good way of thinking critically about a module that covers a broad geographical, cultural, political and linguistic area, as well as appreciating blogging as a way of receiving feedback on more basic aspects like referencing and expression. They also recognised the benefit of the activity from a pragmatic point of view, using the blogs as a way of trying out ideas that could be further developed in their essays. Their comments suggested it was a largely positive experience: one student wrote specifically about the benefits of blogging in consolidating learning, while two thirds of those surveyed would consider taking a module with blogging as a part of the formative assessment. While some students were less convinced, my own case study has shown that many recognised the benefits of blogging and in fact wanted the activity, which had been introduced on a small scale to only two groups, to be bigger and more ambitious in scope.

## Adding value

As well as the transferrable skills that blogging and social media offer, it is important to recognise the preponderance

of students going directly into marketing-related roles following their studies. The HECSU's annual 'What do graduates do?' report (2015) indicated that 13.9% of English Literature graduates and 11.8% of History graduates had gone into marketing, PR and sales-related posts. This percentage rises to 16.1% for Language graduates. Other popular areas for Arts and Humanities graduates, including business, and design and media, are also likely to include some aspects of digital marketing and social media awareness. Blogging can expose students to the basic principles of digital marketing even while supporting the aims of individual modules, including guidance about how to write effectively for Search Engine Optimisation, exploring the more technical side of marketing, and how to write for a non-specialist audience. As such, blogging adds value both within the degree and beyond it.

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# Making a drama out of learning

## EPISODE ONE – A POSTGRADUATE (PG) HR MODULE PERSPECTIVE

*Sinéad McCotter, Senior Lecturer  
HRM (Teaching and Scholarship) at  
the York Management School,  
explores the case for introducing  
drama to a Human Resources  
masters module.*



### Setting the scene

Increasingly postgraduate students undertake their Human Resource (HR) studies having never experienced employment, paid or voluntary, before coming to University. As such their appreciation of organisational life *can* be limited which in turn curtails their understanding of the influence that theoretical debates have on the application of HR in different organisations. From the perspective of teaching HR Management (HRM) at masters level, much is focused upon students having some semblance of working with others in an employment context. This is all the more imperative when seeking to expose students to the art of handling sensitive employment conversations, such as those held during a performance appraisal meeting. While guest speakers and site visits can be excellent in aiding student learning on many HR matters, these approaches fall short in providing students with an experience of how to handle matters which tend to remain confidential for legal reason, eg explaining to a staff member why they will not receive their performance reward. As the next generation of HR practitioners there are vital conversations which TYMS HR graduates will be faced with handling as they progress in their careers. As such this article aims to present the case for creating a more innovative way of teaching students

the art of handling such conversations by working with a dramatic arts organisation, and HR practitioners, to enhance a PG reward and performance management module. While the module has received extremely high evaluations, it is considered there is still room for greater innovation to promote deeper learning among students.

### Act 1: Employability

As Pozniak (2013) commented, student employability issues almost never arose in the 1990's before students received their final results. While now students recognise the need to develop their employability given they no longer see an immediate trajectory between their academic performance and success in the job market, (Tomlinson, 2007: 301-302). As a result, academics today are faced with developing learning outcomes to enhance employability skills; from networking, to business etiquette, from as early as year one of an undergraduate degree, an approach cultivated in the principles of the York Pedagogy (Robinson, 2015). Boggs *et al* (2007: 845) propose that interactive drama may contribute to learning outcomes such as: encountering diverse viewpoints; developing students' confidence. However, the proposed inclusion of dramatic arts in an MA HRM module is not to be confused with a re-packaging of role plays. Role plays were a previous staple of many

management training courses in the 1990s and long derided for the uncomfortable exposure participants had to endure before their peers. Back then, Brown (1994: 105-106) extolled the virtues of role play as being 'low risk in expressing extreme opinions ...' while at the same time accepting that role play had 'no resolution contained within it'.

Here, instead, it is proposed that students will observe professional RADA accredited actors as they engage in a challenging performance appraisal meeting where the script is *based* upon actual performance review meetings. The script will be informed by HR practitioners who will draw upon their own experiences of conducting a number of difficult performance review meetings. In the first instance the scenario will be performed in a manner which exposes a badly managed performance appraisal.

Once observed, students will then be asked to critique the characters (manager and employee) in the performance and offer suggestions as to how they could improve upon their conduct and the appraisal conversation. From there the actors present a second performance exhibiting a more effective approach, based upon audience feedback, a technique emanating from the work of Augusto Boal in the 1960's (Pedagogy and the Theatre of the Oppressed). Indeed, Boggs *et al* (2007) put forward the case for interactive drama



as an alternative to role plays in student education. It is upon their work and that of Brown (1998) which this initiative seeks to build. To do so it will include HR practitioners learning and contributing alongside students and seeking to insure a solution is found within the appraisal meeting scenario. As such it exposes students to the need for Continuing Professional Development within their careers, given they will be joined in the audience by HR practitioners. This seeks to highlight that some HR practitioners are faced with employment where restrictive budgetary conditions reduces training budgets forcing HR professionals to access learning through alternative routes such as collaboration with Universities. A fate many current students may face in time. As such this initiative seeks to provide a more equitable learning experience between students and practitioners.

Indeed, Pearce (2007: 75) identified 15 ways in which students learn from drama in a marketing module, including creating multiple chances to practice and helping students observe a case-study as opposed to simply reading it. All of which strengthens the perspective of Stóren and Aamodt (2010 : 312) who saw problem based learning as a positive characteristic in HE which, while it may not influence whether a graduate obtains a job, it does impact how graduates carry out a job.

### Act 2: Drama and HR – really?

Avdi and Chadjigeorgiou (2007:19) cited in Papavassailiou-Alexiou and Zourna (2016: 2) refer to drama in education as a ‘theatrical from’ which brings a pedagogical landscape to a teaching context; one which is vibrant; fusing emotion and cognition. Whereas lecturing is influenced by a lecturers’ research interests, Avdi and Chadjigeorgiou (2007:19) point out that dramatic activities can hone the learners’ attention on a ‘task’ not ‘individual interests’.

In recognising the emotionally challenging themes of the HR scenarios students will be dealing with in this initiative, reassurance is offered by Pearce and Jackson (2006: 22) cited in Papavassailiou-Alexiou and Zourna (2016: 2) when they refer to education drama providing appropriate space between the audience and what is being discussed. As such this approach is influenced again by the work of Augusto Boal (Pedagogy and the Theatre of the Oppressed) who saw audiences as responsive onlookers who can stop a play to offer advice, thus becoming ‘spect-actors’. Whereas Schneider, cited in Fitzpatrick (2013:302) sees performance as all-encompassing, unifying a range of people actions with their daily experiences. However, there is too the challenge of making a case for drama in HR education given the antithesis between the influence business communities have over content in HR education, versus the ‘principles and modes of practices within drama and theatrical studies...’, (Connolly, 2016: 225).

### Act 3: Why bover?

Given that many employment conversations have potential legal consequences, graduates need to be familiar with the nuances of their demeanour / oration when interacting with colleagues. As Wright and Nishii (2004) discuss, there is that which is proposed and that which is experienced within HR practice, a concept all too relevant to sensitive employment conversations. Indeed, unless the complex behavioural aspects of such conversations can be experienced by students, the possible damaging impact language can have on the employment relationship can be lost when students are only asked to read a case study / article. As Kolb and Kolb (2005) propose, HE education is dominated by theory and information giving; whereas drama can amalgamate information with praxis; a commanding tool in the classroom which can engage audiences intellectually, (Boggs *et al*, 2007: 833; Pearce, 2003).

### FOOTNOTE

Next episode... to find out more do tune in to the Teaching and Learning Conference in June to experience the drama for yourself.

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# Introducing group student-led research projects

*Lynda Dunlop and Zoe Handley of the Department of Education discuss the impact of the introduction of group student-led research projects on students' motivation for research methods and self-efficacy for the empirical dissertation.*

Research skills are becoming increasingly important for graduates, yet research methods is one of the least well-received subjects taught at university level. Several studies have reported that students find the content abstract and difficult to relate to practice. They further comment that it is difficult to develop a holistic understanding of the research process.

Our own experience teaching research methods is similar. When we were asked to increase the research methods provision offered to undergraduate students in education, we therefore took the opportunity to explore alternative approaches to research methods teaching.

We found many research studies recommending active and experiential approaches to teaching research methods, including active learning assignments and guest discussion facilitators (Pfeffer & Roglin, 2012), changing from lecturer-led to student-led delivery (Robertson & Kingsley, 2013), collaborative research methods tutorials (Waite & Davis, 2006), and participation in a commissioned research project (Winn, 1995).

To a certain extent our approach to undergraduate research methods teaching was already active and experiential. The second year research methods module comprised thirteen interactive lectures



and follow-up seminars, over the course of which students completed two mini-projects – one quantitative and one qualitative. The module was assessed through a research proposal for a potential research project.

In 2014-15 when the module was extended from 13 weeks to 23 weeks, we decided to adopt an even more active, authentic and experiential approach by introducing group student-led research projects. These ran for 10 weeks during the spring term. Students were required to take a research project from inception to completion, creating their own research questions, designing the study, obtaining approval from the departmental ethics committee, collecting and analysing data and presenting to an audience of their peers. The presentations were assessed

and worth one third of the total marks available for the module.

Topics explored by the 2014-15 students in their research projects included internationalisation and higher education, students' use of feedback from summative assessments, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and social science students' perceptions of learning. Groups were expected to carry out these projects independently, with on-going support from their seminar leader. They were also provided with feedback via a mid-term reflection on the group process, which included a simulation of the mark allocation process. Following the presentations, each group was awarded a mark multiplied by the number of members of the group. Group members then distributed the marks

TABLE: STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO SELF-REPORT QUESTIONNAIRES

ITEM	COHORT 1 (2013-2014)	COHORT 2 (2014-2015)	
	LECTURES AND MINI PROJECTS	LECTURES AND MINI PROJECTS	STUDENT- LED RESEARCH PROJECTS
<b>MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH METHODS</b>			
Intrinsic motivation	2.50	2.62	2.75
Extrinsic motivation	3.44	3.65	3.62
Personal relevance	2.75	2.67	2.81
Self-determination	3.23	3.47	3.32
<b>SELF-EFFICACY FOR THE EMPIRICAL DISSERTATION</b>			
Rationale	5.16	5.74	6.16
Data collection	5.04	5.48	5.61
Qualitative data analysis	3.86	3.60	3.39
Quantitative data analysis	3.74	4.12	3.34
Discussion	5.72	6.26	6.51
Writing up	4.61	4.73	6.04

KEY: Motivation: 1 = never; 5 = always. Self-efficacy: 0 = no confidence; 9 = total confidence

between individuals based on the quality and quantity of their contributions (see Gibbs, 1995).

We are evaluating the introduction of the group projects by comparing the experiences of the 2013-14 cohort (no group project) and the 2014-2015 cohort (with group project).

The introduction of the group projects has presented two main challenges:

1. Management of the workload associated with feeding back on draft research proposals, information sheets and consent forms in order for the groups to obtain ethical approval for their research.
2. Supporting groups where communication broke down, and team members had conflicting expectations (eg ways of working, effort and quality of work).

All groups completed their project and presented their findings to their peers, most doing so independently and to a high standard. Our impression is that the group projects gave students the opportunity to experience the research process in an authentic and meaningful way and prepared them well for future research studies. This was reflected in students' responses to our self-report questionnaires focusing on their motivation for research methods and self-efficacy for the empirical dissertation (see table opposite).

However, the projects and mark allocation process were unpopular amongst some students. This was reflected in some of the open comments made in end of module feedback:

*"the work on our research proposals has ... been helpful in preparing for our dissertation next year."*

*"I feel well prepared for my dissertation next year."*

*"No Group project"*

*"... peer-marking for the group projects is ... unfair."*

So, would we encourage others to introduce group student-led research projects? Although some students expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which marks are allocated to individuals, no-one used the process available to contest marks awarded following the distribution of marks between individuals. At this point, the feedback from students and the quality of work produced suggests that there is some value for students in participating in authentic group research projects.

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**“ the work on our research proposals has ... been helpful in preparing for our dissertation next year.”**

END OF MODULE FEEDBACK



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# GRASPing opportunities for our postgraduate and undergraduate students



Glenn Hurst and Avtar Mathuru

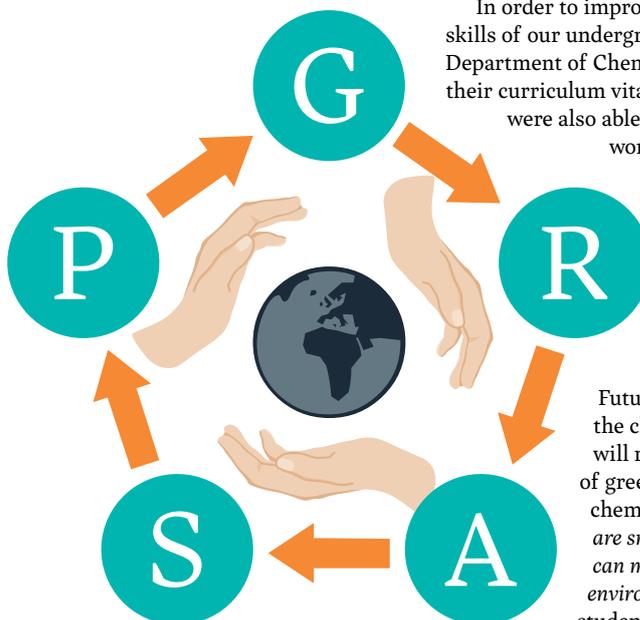
The Green Chemistry Centre of Excellence (GCCE)<sup>1</sup> in the Department of Chemistry at York has always been at the forefront of developing research-led innovative educational and training programmes. In 2014, the GCCE was winner of the prestigious HEFCE S-Lab Award for Laboratory Based Teaching and Learning (2014) in recognition for training graduate and senior undergraduate students from all over the world, and from a variety of backgrounds, in practicing sustainability in modern chemistry laboratories. Subsequently, they were awarded HEFCE S-Labs project funding to further embed green and sustainable chemistry principles within the undergraduate curriculum.

Dr Avtar Matharu, Deputy Director of the GCCE, and Dr Glenn Hurst lead the Green Reactants and Sustainable Products (GRASP) project within the Department of Chemistry. Using 'a students as partners approach'<sup>2</sup>, the team have analysed all the reagents and solvents our undergraduates use as part of their degree programme and identified those that are particularly hazardous according to the Global Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling. Following this, the team were able to suggest, and where appropriate implement, suitable substitutes for such dangerous reagents with green alternatives. Undergraduate students at the Department of Chemistry identified alternative green reagents and solvents together

with conducting substitution feasibility studies, activity that was incorporated as an assessment point within their degree programme. Students in their third year studying for a BSc in Chemistry conducted the GRASP research project over two terms while those on an MChem route worked in teams of six as part of a mini-project, culminating in the production of a research poster and written report. As well as the GRASP projects serving as an ideal opportunity to provide students with a glimpse into green chemistry research, helping to prepare them for graduate studies and scientific employment, the projects also contributed towards enhancing their personal development skills in the form of team working, communication, time management and creativity.

In order to improve the employability skills of our undergraduate students in the Department of Chemistry whilst enhancing their curriculum vitae, Avtar and Glenn were also able to employ students to work in our undergraduate laboratories over the summer of 2015 to contribute further towards the implementation of greener experiments within our degree programme.

Future employability in the chemical sciences will require knowledge of green and sustainable chemistry: 'Manufacturers are snapping up chemists who can make their products more environmentally friendly.'<sup>3</sup> Our students were not only able





*Manufacturers are snapping up chemists who can make their products more environmentally friendly.”*

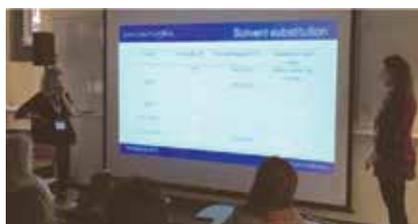
to substitute hazardous reagents for more sustainable alternatives, but they were also able to reduce the amount of solvent required for a reaction to occur. It was exciting to see the students engaging in higher order critical and creative thinking with respect to green chemistry by asking questions such as:

‘Do we need to make this much product?’, ‘What happens to it at the end?’, ‘Wouldn’t the assessment be more discriminating if we scaled down the experiment?’, ‘Do we have to heat the reaction mixture to such a high temperature?’

As part of the GRASP project, students even examined the green credentials of silly putty, a common children’s toy used to illustrate the properties of non-Newtonian fluids.<sup>4</sup> Our students identified that the conventional crosslinking agent has the potential to disrupt the reproductive system and were able to find a suitable green alternative. Such results could find application during demonstrations/ outreach activities. Upon scale-up, our students encountered some issues and turned to a green alginate-based system (or basically seaweed!) as an alternative.

We have developed a new, green experiment based on these studies and we will trial this in the near future.

After our students



tested the feasibility of implementing green alternatives into our undergraduate laboratory experiments, we empowered our students to disseminate their work in the form of an invited talk at the S-Lab Supporting World Class Science Conference in the University of Leeds and, of course, they GRASped the opportunity with both hands!

Our students listened to two fabulous keynote talks from both industry and academia before presenting their own well-attended talk on the GRASP project. It is clear that by empowering our students to become S-Lab Champions, not only did they develop their practical skills further and attain a deeper understanding of green chemistry; they also enhanced their employability and personal development skills in completing the GRASP project. It was fantastic to hear multiple conference delegates commenting on how well our students presented their work. This was exemplified by a whole 15 minutes of questions from our audience.

The outcomes of the GRASP project conducted by students both as part of their degree programme and via summer internships will be implemented this term and in the next academic year where hundreds of other undergraduate students at the

University of York will benefit from a deeper understanding of green chemistry principles and a safer working environment.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the help of Ms Louise Summerton, Manager, Training, Education and Networks Platform, Dr Leonie Jones in writing the HEFCE S-Labs bid and for kick-starting the project and Dr David Pugh for his work in our undergraduate laboratories.

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**Dr Glenn Hurst** is an Associate Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry. Glenn is particularly interested in empowering undergraduate students to develop new pedagogical approaches and resources to confer a deep understanding and application of subject matter. He is a member of the Natural Sciences Teaching Leadership Team for the Department of Chemistry. [glenn.hurst@york.ac.uk](mailto:glenn.hurst@york.ac.uk)



**Dr Avtar Singh Matharu**, BSc, PhD, CChem, FRSC, is Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director of the Green Chemistry Centre of Excellence (GCCE). The GCCE is an internationally-leading academic facility for the provision of excellence in green and sustainable chemical technologies, processes and products.

As Deputy Director he has forged national and international collaborations both with academia and industry. Last year, Professor Clark (Director) and Matharu set up a Global Green Chemistry Centres (G2C2) network which extends our research collaborations to India, Brazil, Australia, South Africa, Europe, Mexico, USA, Canada, S Korea and China. As Scientific Lead for Renewable Materials Technology Platform, he has managed several major projects totalling £10M+ funded from UK and European initiatives, and direct industrial support.

He has enabled the GCCE to be winner of the Rushlight Award for advanced technologies for recycling of liquid crystals (2008), winner of the Green Gown Award for Research and Development (2013) and, winner of the S-Lab Award for Laboratory Based Teaching and Learning (2014) in recognition for training graduate and senior undergraduate students from all over the world and from a variety of backgrounds in practicing sustainability in modern chemistry laboratories. [avtar.matharu@york.ac.uk](mailto:avtar.matharu@york.ac.uk)

# Valued graduates comm

**Victoria Jack and Paul Roberts** introduce CELT's *Transcultural Communication module*.

Among the many ways in which the experience of taking a degree can be a primary contributor to the development of a person's capabilities, the development of international communication skills should rank pretty highly. A recent survey, conducted by the British Council, found that "A common challenge shared by employers around the world is finding employees with adequate intercultural skills" (British Council *et al* 2013:19). An international university such as ours is, potentially, an ideal training ground for future global employment and for integration into current and future pluricultural societies.

But expertise in international communication is not a natural outcome of being a member of an international group of students; the significant number of

students reporting to us in the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT), who feel inadequate in international small-group situations, is a clear signal that participants in international groups seem to need specific help if they are to achieve the goal referred to above. For this reason, we have developed our Transcultural Communication module.

### Why 'Transcultural'?

The range of available words, which, potentially, could describe our endeavours, includes terms which have often acquired unhelpful connotations. 'International' now tends to refer to students who have been recruited from countries outside the UK and 'multicultural' is often used (or misused) to indicate situations in which British people are absent; we are interested in developing communication skills in all students. 'Intercultural' calls up a vast amount of scholarly and practical literature, mostly based on a concept of reified, contained and structured 'cultures'; while British business people, for example, are advised to

learn about eg Japanese culture in order to do better business in Japan, 'international' students are recommended publications about 'British' culture to help them get the most out of their stay in the UK.

In language teaching as well as in research into the global use of English, the terms 'transnational', 'translingual' and 'transcultural' are gaining currency in response to the growing incidence of national, linguistic and cultural 'superdiversity' in many parts of the world. Modern language study is increasingly construed and practised "not as an enquiry into separate national traditions, but as the study of cultures and their interactions" (Burdett 2016). The study of translingual practice views 'language' as a verb more than as a noun: globalized communicators make use of linguistic resources without necessary reference to particular national languages, in order to 'language themselves' into different and transient identities (Canagarajah 2013). Transcultural communication suggests, similarly, interactive processes in which culture is emergent, co-constructed and transient (see eg Kramsch 2010).

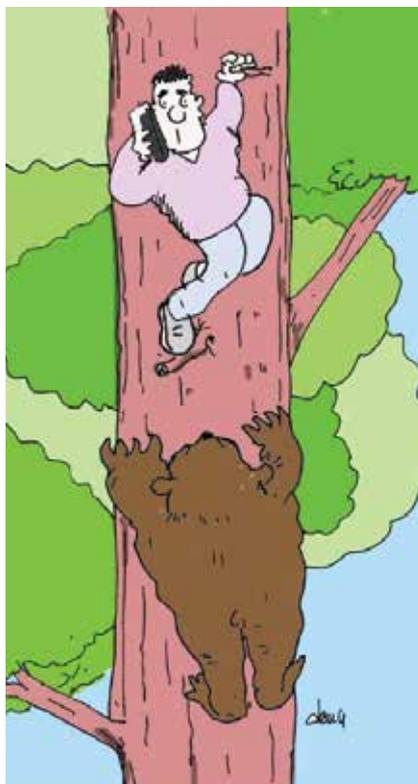
### The Transcultural Communication Module

In addition to developing transcultural communication skills, thus preparing students for the world of work through the development of transferable skills alongside subject knowledge (NCIHE, 1997), the module responds to calls for a) the engagement of students in the assessment process (Rust *et al*, 2010) and b) the diversification of assessment regimes (HEA, 2012).

The module course comprises a series of seminars focussing on a discussion of the theoretical body of literature on culture, cultural identity, the use of English as a lingua-franca and the description and definition of transcultural communication. The aim of this is to provide students with sufficient subject knowledge for them to then work collaboratively with other group members to develop a set of assessment criteria for the evaluation of participant performance in transcultural communication tasks. The formative and summative assessments



# Communicate transculturally



*Sorry, when I said 'bear with me' I didn't mean you would have to wait for me to get back to you.*

involve students participating in such tasks in groups with volunteer students from mixed cultural backgrounds. The tasks involve critical-incident-type conversations, where the aim is for the group to arrive at a consensus solution to a problem. These interactions are video-recorded and made available for students to view both in and out of class. Students use the video content during their written assignments. The written assessment involves two pieces of work: a self-reflection report and a critical evaluation of group performance. Central to these assignments is the use of the student-generated criteria to assess performance. The assessment process also requires the students to offer suggestions, based on their criteria, for the improvement of their own and other students' performance.

## Observations from the Transcultural Communication Module

We have found that the process of students' building a set of criteria plays, in itself, a valid role in evidencing learning

and directing seminar participation, by providing a practical purpose for the development and sharing of subject knowledge. Students have commented, saying how they felt that the building of a practical tool that could then be used outside the parameters of the course, gave meaning to learning. Students have also reported benefitting from the collaboration and some have suggested that they might be able to use the criteria with friends and/or colleagues and, in so doing, help others to develop transcultural communicative competence, while also developing their own. Students have responded positively to the cyclical, looped nature of this aspect of the course assessment.

Feedback on participation in group work and communicative tasks has been universally positive. Students have appreciated the opportunity to mix with students from other backgrounds, reporting that reading about what they were doing brought the topics in the literature to life and suggesting that the experience has served to improve confidence in their ability to communicate, a confidence which has been reflected in students' perceived improved performance in other modules in their programmes.

The self-reflection and group evaluation has given students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to apply their theoretical knowledge to practice. In the first (and non-credit-bearing) iteration of the course it became evident, however, that there was a need for intensive training in the relatively unfamiliar assessment genres of self-reflection and critical reporting, to ensure that students were able to submit work at a standard reflecting their knowledge and ability levels. By implementing this in a more recent iteration, we have found students suggesting that they can imagine future employment settings in which they will be able to prepare reports on colleagues' transcultural interactions and performances, and to offer support and guidance to ensure the success of future interactions.

## Moving forward

The evident (to us!) success of this module has led us to want to share our enthusiasm, to encourage more students to participate and to offer the module, perhaps in tailored forms, to departments looking to help students in the ways we

have outlined above. In short, we, and the students who have completed the Transcultural Communication module, are convinced that we are well on the road to added value. The module is currently on offer to third-year Education students as part of their programme, and versions of it could be incorporated into virtually any other programme.

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**Paul Roberts** joined CELT as Director in 2009. He has taught English and trained teachers of English in six different countries and written, or co-written, several ELT books and a handful of scholarly papers and articles. Paul is interested in the internationalisation of Higher Education with a particular interest in curriculum transformation. He can be contacted at [paul.roberts@york.ac.uk](mailto:paul.roberts@york.ac.uk).



**Victoria Jack** has worked in CELT since 2008. She is interested in internationalisation and accessibility and diversity in Higher Education and the training of teaching staff working in internationalising institutions. She is course leader on the Transcultural Communication Module, Cert TESOL programme and the Practice of English Language Teaching Module. She can be contacted at [victoria.jack@york.ac.uk](mailto:victoria.jack@york.ac.uk).



# Enabling student success through peer assisted learning

*Selina Pope, Beni Ngwamah, and Francis Duah discuss a School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy partnership that develops value-added graduates.*

## Introduction

This article, co-authored with two undergraduate students, describes a staff-student partnership in the School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy (PEP). The partnership, formed in Autumn 2015, was initiated by the first two authors, who graduate in Summer 2016. The partnership is an example of 1) departmental leadership support for enhanced student learning experience, and 2) students taking an active role in shaping their learning. We report some outcomes of this initiative for the partners and highlight the potential of such a partnership to contribute to the development of value-added graduates.

## Staff-student partnerships in the sector

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) commissioned a study (Healey *et al*, 2014) which showed growth in staff-student partnerships aimed at enhancing the student learning experience. The report of the study contains guidance for institutions wishing to embed such partnerships into institutional

structures. Peer assisted learning (PAL) is an example of a staff-student partnership in learning and teaching<sup>1</sup>. It offers opportunities for undergraduate students to play a role in facilitating the learning of their peers (Keenan *et al*, 2014). PAL involves timetabled sessions led by students referred to as PAL or Student leaders. The extensive research literature on PAL shows that it is neither a mentoring nor a social support programme. PAL sessions focus on module content and the development of study skills required for the module. Student and staff involvement in PAL schemes is voluntary and sessions are typically run for challenging modules.

A systematic review of evaluative studies on PAL published in the *Review of Educational Research* concluded that PAL is an effective pedagogical intervention that raises the achievement of students and increases student retention (Dawson *et al* 2014). Dawson *et al* (2014) also concluded that PAL has a positive effect on the achievement of female students and of non-traditional students such as mature and minority students – precisely those groups that widening participation aims to attract and retain. PAL schemes can provide additional learning opportunities for all. PAL has been found to be effective in raising the achievement of students in disciplines including Medicine, Psychology and Mathematics, to name a few (Duah *et al* 2014).

Questions raised about PAL schemes include the quality of learning in sessions

and accountability for what goes on in those sessions. In the studies reported in the review, concerns about quality of learning and accountability were addressed by the appointment of a PAL supervisor. The role of a PAL supervisor is to coordinate training, observations and feedback sessions for PAL leaders. The contexts of many of the evaluative studies are arguably different from the University of York. This raises the question of what PAL sessions for a module at York would look like. To answer that question, let us discuss the PAL scheme initiated by PEP students.

## Student Initiated PAL Scheme at York

Transition from school to university mathematics poses challenges for some first year students, particularly those without a post-16 mathematics qualification. The mathematical demands of Economics and related modules also add complexity to the transition challenges for first year PEP students. In Autumn 2015, a small number of PEP students (including Selina and Beni) and the School of PEP created a PAL scheme which provided additional mathematics learning support for first year PEP students. Scheduled PAL sessions ran in the evenings between 6pm and 8pm from week 2 to week 10. These sessions were regularly attended by 27 PEP students out of a cohort of 100<sup>2</sup>.

The first hour of each PAL session was given in a lecture format, with Selina and Beni providing simplified explanations of the relevant mathematical concepts. They also broke up lecture notes into smaller chunks for ease of comprehension. In the second hour, students were put into small tutorial groups of four or five to solve mathematics problems. Each group was facilitated by second and/or third year students. In creating these groups, students were sorted based on prior knowledge – that is, whether they did or did not have A-level maths – to allow for a more tailored learning experience. Group members were also encouraged to discuss problems and arrive at solutions themselves.

The chart, right, shows the numbers of students with or without A-levels Maths qualification who attended sessions regularly.

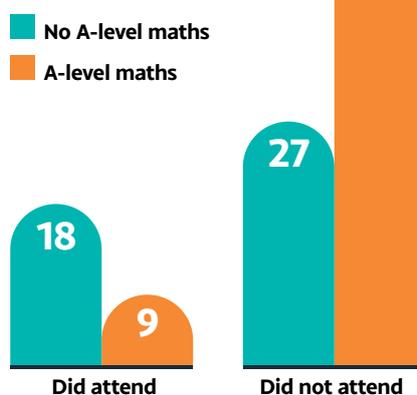
A chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between possession of a post-16 qualification and participation in PAL sessions. The relation between these variables was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 8.34, p = .004$ . This unsurprising result means that students who did not have a post-16 maths qualification were more likely to attend the PAL sessions, suggesting perhaps a need for a PAL scheme.

Francis Duah, the third author, observed three sessions and provided informal feedback to the PAL leaders. Reflecting on the observation notes, we believe that the PAL sessions helped to establish a learning community members of which had a shared identity and purpose. This purpose was to succeed in mathematics and mathematically demanding economics modules. Through the observations and regular liaison with Francis Duah and the Maths Skills Centre, the PAL scheme was supervised and supported to ensure that high quality sessions were held.

### Outcomes of the partnership

The outcomes of the partnership for the 27 first year PEP students, the student partners (the PAL leaders), and the School of PEP are consistent with the published literature. Of the 27 students who regularly attended the PAL sessions, 22 (including 18 without an A-level Maths qualification) passed a mathematics module examination on their first attempt in Spring 2016.<sup>3</sup> Compared to Spring 2015, the number of PEP students who failed the module decreased by two-thirds to five. Of the 18 without A-level Maths, two obtained 100% marks in the exam. Our conjecture, therefore, is that these PAL sessions have made a significant impact on the students'

### PARTICIPATION IN PAL SESSIONS



lives and enabled some students to acquire essential mathematics skills to continue with their studies.

The potential added value to the evolving graduate attributes of the PAL leaders is hard to dispute. Evidence from the session observation notes showed that the leaders gained a much deeper understanding of the subject. The leaders also gained a good understanding of the workings of the department and developed enhanced relationships with staff. Furthermore, they enhanced their communication skills, in particular by adapting and successfully delivering complex information to a specific target audience: the students. Continuing PAL leaders have developed PAL facilitation strategies to enable them to help future cohorts of first year students, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the partnership beyond the current academic year.

### Is peer assisted learning new to York?

Various kinds of informally organised peer learning support can be observed all around the York campus. Hence the PAL scheme created by the partnership is not completely new to the University of York but an organised and supervised variant of existing practice within the undergraduate community. The modest success of the partnership reported here can, in part, also be attributed to the support given by the School of PEP to the student leaders. The partnership demonstrates the School's commitment to their degree programme's success and to the success of their students. We hope that this article will inspire or provoke discussion amongst readers about ways in which such partnerships can encourage independent learning and help contribute to the evolving graduate attributes of student partners as implicitly summed up by this quote: 'As Director of the School I know that our students

are our biggest asset. Beni and Selina are great examples of students who make the School a better place. Their PAL initiative has saved some of our students from transferring or dropping out. It helped them to improve a crucial skill which will have an influence on how their lives are going to develop. Selina has been on the School's Board of Studies for three years. She runs the staff-student forum more efficiently than we run our Board of Studies. Her involvement has always been thoughtful and constructive. She'd be a great Director but, understandably, has set her eyes on bigger things. Beni and Selina leaving is a loss for the School. Their PAL initiative is here to stay. Good luck to both of them and thank you for leaving more behind than memories.'

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### Endnotes

- 1 PAL is also known as Supplemental Instruction in the USA or Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) in other parts of the world.
- 2 Regular attendance was defined as attendance at three or more sessions.
- 3 Three additional 'Economics and related studies' students also regularly attended the classes. They all passed on their first attempt.



**Selina Pope** is a final year student studying for a BA degree in PPE. After graduating she will go on to do a law conversion course before joining a commercial law firm in 2018.



**Beni Ngwamah** is final year student studying for a BA degree in PPE. He is set to join Barclays Bank upon his graduation.



**Francis Duah** is the Maths Skills Centre Manager. His research interest is in mathematics pedagogy and student engagement with tertiary mathematics and quantitative social and educational research.

# Learning from Experience

## WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENTS IN SOCIOLOGY



*Ruth Penfold-Mounce, Gareth Millington and Merran Toerien consider the educational experiences of Sociology students from widening participation backgrounds.*

As the Sociology Department Admissions Team we are faced every year with a relatively high yield of students applying from a 'widening participation' (WP) background. This typically includes students from a low-income background but involves other factors such as gender, age, disability, and ethnicity, the home location or school of an individual, or being the first in the family to attend university. Perhaps due to the nature of our work as sociologists we are acutely aware of how social and cultural factors can impact on individuals and their mobility within society. As such we are interested in how those from a WP background experience their University of York education.

### Exploring Widening Participation Experiences

With the support of the Departmental WP Initiative Fund, we sought to explore the

educational experiences of our students from a variety of WP backgrounds. We wanted to be able to create a knowledge base for the Sociology Department regarding:

- the recruitment of students from WP backgrounds
- the difficulties or specific issues that they may face on arrival at University
- how such issues develop (or not) during their degree

We also wanted to use this information to develop specific policies aimed at improving:

- our recruitment activity towards those from WP backgrounds
- our retention of such students
- their overall learning experience within the Department

The aim was to develop a tool kit that could be shared with other Departments.

Consequently the University as a whole would be better equipped to contribute to institutional goals of equality of access and social inclusion. The foundation of the tool kit is data gathered from 16 semi-structured interviews with self-identifying WP background Sociology students. Student interest and response was better than expected and following the interviews we appointed two interns: one to code the data and contribute to the research analysis, and one to conduct a literature review.

### Meeting Widening Participation Needs

Our participants' feelings were clear regarding what was helpful and unhelpful in making the transition into University. A number of interviewees highlighted that when times were tough and they were questioning whether they fitted in at University, the York Student Support System, its Welfare Officers and College



*We need to remember that the Fresher's Week induction is not enough as students struggle to absorb everything they are told in the first week."*

Communities worked well. It was encouraging to hear WP students say they could also rely on Sociology Department staff who gave them a point of contact who could reassure them and encouraged them not to give into imposter syndrome. Others mentioned the benefits of the College Facebook pages in the run up to coming to university at York. This contact before arriving in York was found to be highly beneficial especially to those who delayed their studies, as Sarah highlighted: 'my next door neighbour in my halls she was the same age, so that was reassuring, [and] we had spoken on Facebook before we met'.

WP students are diverse and complex in their backgrounds and needs. Some participants argued that they were no different to other students. But others experienced themselves as very different to the majority of York students, and expressed this in terms of social class. As Anna put it: 'meeting a lot of my flatmates...they're from private schools...It's not they think they're above you, just I think it's an innate thing in them which makes them feel slightly above you..'. For some there is also an intersection between their being from a WP background and their other roles such as being a carer for a parent or having children. Many interviewees highlighted that the first six months at University are particularly hard (though of course the same could be said for many non-WP students too). A key concern from WP interviewees was not to be treated differently from their peers although they did want particular support. Suggestions included 'giving people advice on the amount of work that they will be expected to do' and providing 'more background info on the course'. As Edward put it: 'the university process for all of us [him and his parents] was very much, we were going in blind really, we didn't know anything about it'. It's important to think about how the language we use in communication with students can work to make them feel included and optimistic about their studies or excluded and feeling that the course is not designed for 'people like me'.

### Developing a Tool Kit

Although much of our data still needs more careful analysis we have identified a

number of valuable interdisciplinary tools for our WP tool kit:

- Liaising with schools in advance of applications

WP students described school support in applying for university as crucial as it directed them and encouraged them to set their sights high.

- Don't underestimate the role of parents

Parental support was central with most interviewees having a least one actively supportive parent who wished their child to go to university and build a better future for themselves. Sometimes this was because the parent was not able to go to university or had to cut short their studies.

- Making research relate to personal experience

The material that we teach can be a powerful means for connecting with students' own life experiences. For example Lucy said: 'I could relate to a lot of the research that was happening. .. and I could actually be like "that's happened to me before, I've experienced that, I've been the victim of that", and it was just so relatable... the whole work around equality is something that I've experienced ...'.

- Course information accessibility

We need to remember that the Fresher's Week induction is not enough as students struggle to absorb everything they are told in the first week. Having a specific webpage as a reference guide is a potential aid to addressing this issue.

- Student bonding

Moreover, some WP students found the Fresher's Week focus on drinking and partying difficult to engage with, meaning they felt like they lost out on opportunities, as Kelly put it, to 'bond with' other students.

In the process of talking with WP students we learnt not only what they wanted in terms of support but, more importantly, how the University of York should value them regarding their particular skills and experience. The WP interviewees consistently talked about how their stamina and drive got them through difficult personal situations whilst studying. They also believed that compared to students from more privileged

backgrounds they found the transition to becoming an independent learner easier, feeling that once they had 'learned the ropes' they were better equipped to 'just get on with things' on their degree programme. Many were proud of studying at the University of York and revealed a clear determination to get the most from their university education. This was especially evident amongst mature students who asserted they were beyond, according to Sarah, the 'generic student thing as when you're 18' and are very 'educationally focused'. From these early findings and as we continue to explore the data in more detail we look forward to producing a better understanding of WP student needs. Perhaps most importantly we hope to share a fully developed WP student informed tool kit to aid in encouraging more applicants and to better support them on arrival not only in Sociology but across the University of York.



**Ruth Penfold-Mounce** is a Lecturer in Criminology at University of York. She is Programme Lead for Criminology and Sociology with Criminology and currently holds the Student Liaison Admissions officer role in Sociology. Ruth is passionate about the student learning experience and sharing her research interests in crime, celebrity and popular culture as well as death and corpses with students.  
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**Gareth Millington** is a Lecturer in Sociology at University of York. He is an urban sociologist who has researched and written about migration, race and urban culture. Gareth is Admissions Tutor for all Sociology undergraduate programmes as well as Criminology and Social and Political Studies.  
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**Merran Toerien** is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at University of York. She specialises in Conversation Analysis of interaction in institutional settings. Her work has spanned beauty salon sessions, recruitment to medical trials, Jobcentre interviews for benefit claims, and neurology consultations. She is schools' liaison officer for Sociology, which has fuelled her commitment to the Widening Participation programme.  
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## Learning and Teaching calendar of events: Summer Term 2016

### WEEK 7 W/C 23 MAY 2016

Monday 23 May	12:30-14:00	Heslington Hall, H/G21 Pedagogy in Action: Programme Skills Progression
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### WEEK 8 W/C 30 MAY 2016

Wednesday 1 June	12:15-13:30	Alcuin, AEW/004
Friday 3 June	09:00-12:30	Heslington Hall, H/G09 Academic Workshops: Assessing and marking writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences

### WEEK 9 W/C 6 JUNE 2016

Tuesday 7 June	09:00-16:30	Exhibition Centre Learning and Teaching Conference: 'Value added graduates: enabling our students to be successful'
Wednesday 8 June	12:15-13:30	Law and Management Building, LMB/008
Thursday 9 June	12:30-14:00	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network Lunch For details, see web page: <a href="https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/develop/network">https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/develop/network</a> and to join the SoTL Network, please contact <a href="mailto:academic-practice@york.ac.uk">academic-practice@york.ac.uk</a>

### WEEK 10 W/C 13 JUNE 2016

Wednesday 15 June	12:15-13:30	Harry Fairhurst, LFA/015
Friday 17 June	09:00-12:30	Heslington Hall, H/G09 Academic Workshops: Student engagement

### WEEK 11 W/C 20 JUNE 2016

Tuesday 21 June	12:30-14:00	Heslington Hall, H/G21 Postgraduate Taught Special Interest Group
Wednesday 22 June	12:30-14:00	Heslington Hall, H/G21 Engagement with Learning Theory: Active Engagement, Flipped Lectures
Wednesday 22 June	12:00-14:30	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network Workshop - Researching teaching and learning: practical advice and guidance
June - July	lunchtimes	E-Learning webinars and workshops for staff. For details, see web page: <a href="http://bit.ly/eldt-dev-webinars">http://bit.ly/eldt-dev-webinars</a>

### Key to the calendar

 Events organised by the Learning and Teaching Forum. Open to all staff and PGWTs. For further information, see [www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/sharing/sharing-practice/workshops](http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/sharing/sharing-practice/workshops); to register, contact [learning-and-teaching-forum@york.ac.uk](mailto:learning-and-teaching-forum@york.ac.uk). If you are unable to attend an event but would like a copy of the materials, please let us know.

 Freestanding workshops offered by learning support colleagues. Please contact [janet.barton@york.ac.uk](mailto:janet.barton@york.ac.uk) for further details or to book your place.

 Postgraduate Taught Special Interest Group: for further information, see <https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/community/peer-support/postgraduate-taught/>; to register, contact [janet.barton@york.ac.uk](mailto:janet.barton@york.ac.uk)

 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network: for colleagues who are interested in engaging with key and emerging evidence-based and philosophically influential pedagogical literature. Please contact [academic-practice@york.ac.uk](mailto:academic-practice@york.ac.uk) for details.

UNIVERSITY of York Tuesday, 7 June 2016

## Learning & Teaching Conference

Value added graduates: enabling our students to be successful



Registration is now open at: <http://goo.gl/KSUGjK>  
All staff and students are welcome to attend.

Posters are still welcome. For full details and to register your interest and attendance visit our web page at: <http://bit.ly/1iRfi7Y>