Embedding 21st century employability into assessment and feedback practice through a student-staff partnership

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Embedding Employability

Aim: Enhance the strategy of embedding employability skills into assessment and feedback in a new Level 2 course.

Gap between skills of university graduates & those in workplace (Hinchcliffe & Jolly 2011; Frankham 2016)

Role of university vs employer (Cranmer 2006)

- "...rejected teaching employability skills outright, and argued that it was not the task of the universities to provide 'training'." - "...confidence that the academic quality of graduates, in conjunction with the degree studied, would ensure good employment prospects."

- Influence of career path: skills better learned at start of employment (Mason et al. 2003)

'Built-in employability' to inform development of assessment methods (Ferrell & Gray 2013)

Successful career planning starts early

Embedded careers programme for Life Science students in Years 1 & 2:

Year 1
- 6 lab practices: 30 min exercise in each 3 hr session
- 2 lectures: 30 min in 1 hr session

Year 2
- 1 lab: 3 hr session
- 1 workshop: 1.5 hr session
- 4 lectures: 1 hr sessions

Why students engage:
- Timetabled lab/workshop sessions ensure captive audience
- Teaching & Careers staff present
- Exercises recorded in laboratory manual/embedded in assessment

Or not...
- Assessment deadlines are higher priority
- Clearly identified careers activities are not attended eg. low attendance in careers focused lectures

Stage 1. Focus Group Outcomes

Q: The most effective way to deliver employability skills

- A) Short sessions integrated into practical lab sessions; Guest speakers from industry from experts in the field

Q: Motivation/Drivers behind student engagement with employability sessions

- A) To learn about external opportunities

Q: How to use feedback on assessments to enhance skills development

- A) Feedback needs to be written in a style associated with skills development & feedback; Improve communication so students receive feedback in the first place; little point if MCQ assessment due to limited feedback

Stage 2. Building skills portfolio workshop for L2 students

- Final lecture slot of L2 Micro course dedicated to students reflecting on skills obtained through in course assessment

Aim: Facilitate student group discussion around skills & experiences

Exercises:
- Developing a library of experiences for use in application & interviews
- Focus on specific transferable skills developed through assessments

Stage 3. Use of Assessing for Employability Tool

Developed by Dr. Anna McGregor Tie Caribede Rocha Toni Dwyer

Aims:
- Support student employability through improved focus on Graduate Attributes
- To increase awareness in both students and staff about the diversity of digital capabilities needed in the 21st century job market
- Support staff with updating their assessment practice to use more digital methods

Created in Articulate Storyline 2

Information sourced from School database & University good practice resource

Embedded in course Moodle site and EdShare

Stage 4. What's next?

Lessons learned:
- A necessity to improve communication with students
- Assessment requires student driven reflection
- Staff need to also write feedback in a skills focused way

Actions:
- Staff visit to Scottish Environmental Protection Agency - Microbiology lab leads to visit students in L2 course to link with focus group feedback

Next:
- Development of an Assessment & Feedback 'Fact or Fiction' guide
- Digital revision resources

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