

## **Case study G: an embedded approach**

### **Undergraduate business courses in the Business School at the University of Brighton**

#### **The practice**

Level 1 undergraduates study either a single, or in most cases a double, 'professional and academic skills' module (the name of the modules changed from 'personal' to 'professional' as part of the 2007 undergraduate revalidation process, to reflect the emphasis on professional development). The modules are credit bearing, and assessed through end-of-semester coursework assignments, including a literature review, personal SWOT analysis, learning logs, self-assessment and attendance sheets. The modules incorporate the mentoring of year 1 students by final-year students who are taking a 'managing people' module. Implicit in the module content is provision for personal development planning. These modules are delivered through a series of interactive workshop sessions with the aim of developing the students' affective abilities and improving employability. They are supported by online material collected under the heading student profile. The mentoring process forms the basis of the final-year student's assignment for the second semester of their 'managing people' module. Here the final-year student is responsible for mentoring the first-year student through a series of meetings in support of their second-semester assignment, the 'job search portfolio'. We have found that there has been an increased use of technology (Facebook, MSM, texting and emails) to support this process; this is something we are going to review. Final year mentors then go on to form self-selected groups in order to set up assessment centres to which their mentees are invited. The mentors expose the mentees to typical assessment-centre activities. Thus over the period of their course, the student is given the experience of being both mentor and mentee, and of both attending and running assessment centres. As a result of the revalidation process in the second year of their courses, business students participate in a new credit-bearing module 'research methods and business case study'. In addition to the subject study, students have the opportunity to critically analyse the processes within their group and its dynamic workings: a crucial requirement of employers. Students are at the same time identifying industrial placement opportunities (if applicable).

#### **Evolution**

The first-year programme is subject to constant improvement. In 2006 we changed a part of the assignment to include a personal SWOT analysis. We are making more use of technology with links to online resources including psychometric testing and student profile for all years. In 2007 a section was included in the first-year workshop handouts making explicit links to subject study modules and preparing for placement and graduation. In the academic year 2008–09 we are providing a workbook during induction, replacing the weekly handouts.

#### **Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?**

The students receive direct feedback on a range of key interpersonal skills relevant to employment, teamwork, communication, leadership, organisational skills, etc from both their tutors and in the form of a written feedback report from their mentor. They also have the opportunity to participate in an assessment centre, which provides valuable preparation for placement or graduate selection. Students create and update CVs and practise completing application forms. Students also participate in personal development planning in the context of continuing professional development. Large placement employers such as American Express, Xerox, Bosch and IBM regularly take our students as they feel they are well prepared. Smaller companies such as Mango and The Priory Partnership also come back year after year. We are directly aware that students obtain employment by either

describing the activities outlined above or showing potential employers the work produced. The work, especially the assessment centre design and implementation project, directly influences career progression, e.g. a student who now works for American Express was able to use her portfolio to support the design for the assessment of new recruits. From the most recent available data 81% of Brighton business students who graduated in 2006 were in full-time employment after six months. According to the 2007 final satisfaction survey (NSS) an impressive 95% of students were very satisfied with the personal development provision throughout our courses. The majority of resources are available on our student intranet studentcentral; however, they can only be viewed by registered students or staff. Guest access may be possible. Bob Smale and Julie Fowlie have also written a book *How to Succeed at University*, which is due to be published by Sage in February 2009.

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