EFFECT OF EMPHASISING GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES ON WORK-PLACEMENT REFLECTION

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Academic benefits of work-based experiences

‘.....depend largely on the extent to which students reflect on them and relate them back to knowledge gained in theoretical modules.

Reflection must be considered a purposeful activity that is pursued with intent, and involves an inter-relationship between feelings and cognition.’

– Encourage deeper analysis and critical thinking
– To support a community of learning and sharing of experience
Reflective writing workshop

Guide to demonstrate what reflective writing is

Video: Resource to show students how to comment on peer blog

Reflective Writing & Blog Assessment Handbook

Assessment Rubric

Video: Resource to show students how to use Blog tool

Reflective Writing Activities
Instruction

■ Blog:
  - describe
  - reflect
  - relate

■ Peer Interaction
  - Comment and respond within blog sub-group

Weakness Identified

- Difficulty in developing critical reflection
Positive support for high-quality reflection

- Pre-defined guidance providing a mechanism to focus learners on critical points

Critical points

✓ Linking to College (rubric and blog examples)

? Focus on Graduate Attributes development (employability skills)
Employability

...ability to gain, maintain and obtain new employment (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

Inability to articulate and provide evidence for relevant graduate attributes reduces employability

Personal Attributes:

A strong ability to communicate and connect with customers-this ability is the cornerstone of everything we do

Must be highly organised

Must be competent and able to work under pressure

Ability to bring innovation and flexibility to the workplace

Ability to work on own initiative and as part of a team
UK Higher Education STEM Employability Skills Review

...advises that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can help to close the skills gap by offering students the opportunity to develop an ability to articulate generic and other employability skills that can be applied in a professional capacity to address challenges.

DIT Graduate Attributes

- Leaders
- Global Citizen
- Excellent Communicators
- Motivated self-starters
- Ethical
- Critical Thinkers
- Creators of New Knowledge
- Decision Makers
- Problem Solvers
- Digitally literate
- Expert
- Enquiry-Based
- Resilient
- Work based/work related learners
- Disciplinary Knowledge
- Reflective Practitioners
- Enterprising
- Collaborative workers
- Entrepreneurs
- Strategic thinkers
- Active team players
- Emotionally Intelligent
Research question

To investigate if a better appreciation of graduate attributes may help the students to focus on these as critical skills upon which to frame their work based experiences and consequently improve and deepen their reflective writing, and also their employability.
Implementation of Participatory Action Research

- Baseline level of knowledge and confidence to discuss DIT graduate attributes (student survey N=22)
Results: Baseline student confidence
Implementation of PAR

- Diamond 9
- Prioritisation of graduate attributes for the programme (employer survey N=48)
  - Communication
  - Motivation
  - Emotional Intelligence
  - Team work and Collaboration
  - Ethical
Implementation of PAR

Series of activities to highlight the important graduate attributes

- **Ethical debate**
- **Online self-evaluation activities from Assuring Graduate Attributes website**
- **Reflective activity to map prioritised Graduate Attributes to previous experiences, curriculum and potential opportunities in placement**

Coding of reflective assessments

- Interpretation of the reflective assessments through template analysis (King, 2014) for thematic coding.

- Control group (2013/14) vs research group (2014/15)
  - hypothesis driven confirmatory approach using the a priori codes of ‘Reflection’ and ‘Graduate Attributes’.

- Independent double blind coding of a random sample of assessments was carried out.

Overall references to GAs by research and control groups

N=132 sources and 282 references
Breakdown of references to graduates attributes by research and control
Overall statements of Graduate Attributes
Breakdown of Graduate Attribute statements by research and control groups
Explicit references broken into named and unnamed
Conclusion 1

- Emphasising graduate attributes within a curriculum can have a marked effect on the reflective assessment of students when they go on work-placement.
  - *increased tendency to frame their placement experiences in terms of graduate attributes, as well as core skills developed in the curriculum*

Outcome

- Should allow students to articulate their skills in a more explicit and concrete manner, and find evidence for their development.
- This should impact positively on their employability in terms of initially securing employment.
- May encourage them to continue the process of reflection on practice throughout their career, and continue to find evidence for their skills development.
Impact on level of critical reflection

1 : Critical reflection
2 : Non-critical reflection
3 : Thoughtful action or Introspection

A : Control Group
B : Research Group
Critical reflection linked to explicit graduate attributes statements
Conclusion 2

- Increased levels of critical reflection in the research group
- Clear links between increased levels of critical reflection and explicit reference to graduate attributes.
Current work

- ‘Improved levels of critical reflection in student work-placement assessments through emphasising graduate attributes’ (submitted)
- Integrate graduate attributes formally into the curriculum
  - Professional development ePortfolio
  - PDEP2001
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