Work Ready – Collaboration between Careers & Employability and Development & Training

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Abstract
Careers & Employability and Development & Training have collaborated to develop a new employment focussed provision called ‘Work Ready’. Work ready is delivered via interactive workshops on key themes relating to graduate employment skills and has formed part of both faculty based and central employability provision and part of the intern induction programme.

Introduction
Hitting the ground running when you start your new job is always a big challenge and perhaps even more so for new graduates and students about to start their placement. Whilst ‘Work Ready’ would never claim to have all the answers, it is an opportunity for students to explore how they will take on the challenge of starting a new job.

Employers are telling us that students are getting increasingly better at articulating the skills they have (Graduate Market Trends, 2010) and this is partly due to the coaching we now give students within their courses. However, it does not always follow that students understand how they then apply these skills in a work place context. For example, a student may say they are a good team
worker, but not necessarily articulate what it is that they actually contribute to a team. ‘Work Ready’ tries to explore themes such as this.

It was this need to go beyond simply saying “I have skill ‘x’ and here is the evidence” to now saying, “this is why skill ‘x’ is important, this is why employers want it, and this is how I will apply it as my graduate career develops” that gave us the impetus to develop the course.

The aim therefore, is develop a short course that helps students to recognise how to apply some of the key skills they will need as they start their new graduate (or placement) jobs. Whilst the sessions can be delivered individually, the ideal scenario is for the student to sign up for all four, as each builds on some of the work previously covered. Because of the highly interactive nature of the course, the maximum number of students on the course should be around 30. In the coming weeks, Careers & Employability will deliver in a number of faculties and tutors might want to explore how work ready can help with groups of their students. Work Ready has also been a key component of MMU Intern Training and has played a major role in bringing the Interns together and forging a successful ‘Intern Community’.

This was the first time the two departments have collaborated to such an extent on writing and delivering course material. Careers & Employability were able to bring their knowledge of the graduate labour market and what employers want to the table, whilst Development & Training could call upon their expertise in work based training.

Work Ready is a key component of a much wider MMU Careers & Employability Service workshop programme. This programme is available to download at [www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/events](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/events)

**Delivery**

The course consists of four sessions each running for around two hours. Themes addressed include Team Working, Communicating and Influencing, Project Management and Leadership. Each is explored in terms of how these are applied in the early stages of a graduate level job or placement.

**Team Work:** There is a good mix of academic theory and practical exercises with students looking at how teams form, what makes high performing teams, the roles they play, and the contributions they make, in the various teams they have been in. Belbin’s (2010) theory on how teams form underpins this and students start to identify who they are in a team-working environment. This is a good example of how work ready can also get students to think more closely about how they work and in doing so become more effective in discussing and explaining this in an interview situation. Belbin can get them to understand the different skills and strengths required to make an effective team. It also
gets the students to recognise they take in different roles in different. We debate if a team needs a ‘leader’ or not and how leaders may or may not come to the fore. Team working provides the grounding for the sessions that follow, where team working and working with others underpin most of what we do in the world of work, be that in influencing others, managing projects and leading.

**Communication and Influencing:** Again, students will often say that they are good ‘communicators’ and ‘good with customers’ but how are they using these skills to influence people at work? This includes customers, work colleagues, clients and managers. Influencing clients and ‘managing your manager’ are, for many, new concepts to think about. We look at what can prevent good communication, how to listen effectively, how to question and assertive behaviour in the work place.

**Project Management:** Project management is key, as most graduate and placement jobs will put a big emphasis on new starters getting involved in projects at an early stage. It is a great opportunity for graduates/students to get to know people across the business and to gain a much greater understanding of the business and its priorities. Here we look at the stages of project management and put the theory into practice scoping some real life projects.

**Leadership:** Graduate and placement recruitment is about a business identifying, training and developing their leaders of the future. A key point for students to get their head around is that in many cases, for graduate level jobs, employers are not just recruiting for that job but for potential jobs further down the line. We therefore look at definitions of leadership, and theories of leadership with particular reference to how you might lead within a team, within a task and leading individuals. We also address what makes a good leader and how some employers define leadership when recruiting. Leadership is not just about managing people and tasks; it is also about how you manage yourself in the work place. For example we use exercises to explore the differences between Leading and Managing and look at how a new graduate recruit is a leader from day one, even if they aren’t managing staff.

**Positive Feedback**
The course has been piloted with Fashion/Clothing students at Hollings and as a short course to groups of recent graduates about to start their job seeking. Training & Development have had great success delivering ‘Work Ready’ as part of the MMU Intern Training Programme.

Feedback from students has been excellent, many commenting on the balance between academic theory and practical participation. Feedback quotes include:

*Lots of enthusiasm and interactive tasks made it interesting.*
Leadership: I would not have thought of the usefulness of behaving like a leader if I hadn’t attended this session.

Learnt where I can fit in within a team environment and how I can transfer my skills.

Future delivery (see below), will be influenced by feedback received. For example, one issue that has been identified is to work more closely with our employer contacts to get a wider range of examples of Leadership definitions and how leadership is applied in the world of work. Doing this will enable to us to have some faculty focussed content that could vary from course to course.

**Future Delivery**

- Development & Training will continue to offer ‘Work Ready’ as part of the Intern Training Programme.
- During spring 2013, Careers & Employability will offer ‘Work Ready’ in Hollings, Humanities, Science & Engineering and The Business School.
- ‘Work Ready’ will also be available during The Careers & Employability Service “Graduate to Work Week” (week commencing Monday 3rd June 2013)
- ‘Work Ready’ will form part of the MMU Futures offer. It will be a compulsory element at Silver level. All students applying for Silver Award must have attended all four sessions.
- In the light of experience in the coming months, Careers & Employability and Development & Training will review ‘Work Ready’ in summer 2013.
- For more information on ‘Work Ready’, please contact the authors listed above.

**Successful Collaboration**

The process of putting ‘Work Ready’ together took longer than we first envisaged. Development & Training have a wealth of knowledge and materials that can be adapted and applied to a student audience. In return, Careers & Employability brought their understanding of graduate recruitment and how a graduate career might develop in its early stages, and above all, what would help MMU students to be better prepared for that transition into the work place. The collaboration was first for both Development & Training and Careers & Employability and it has proved hugely successful and has included co delivery within the Intern Training.
References:
(These relate to content of the course, not necessarily the article above)

Graduate Market Trends (2010) *Employability and Graduate Identity*, HECSU
www.hecsu.ac.uk


