

2013

Increasing student's awareness of their employability: An impact evaluation of embedding careers education across marine sport programmes

Beaumont, EF

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/12174>

University of Plymouth

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

Teaching Fellowship Award Scheme Guidance on writing the final report

Please read this guidance prior to producing the final report for your Teaching Fellowship Project.

The final report should consist of a brief (1-2 pages) summary of the project and findings, together with a number of more detailed appendices (possibly in the form of conference papers or articles for publication). The summary will be transferred directly onto the Pedagogic Research and Development Database (see www.pedres.net) Please follow the format below as closely as possible to enable this transfer of information.

Name of key contact (project leader): Emily Beaumont

Department: School of Marine Science and Engineering

Telephone: 01752 586169

Fax: N/A

E-mail: emily.beaumont@plymouth.ac.uk

Names of other staff involved: Sharon Gedye

Title of project: Increasing student's awareness of their employability: An impact evaluation of embedding careers education across marine sport programmes.

Type of project: Survey

Information/letter on ethics approval: See attachment to email.

Information/progress on conditions (If your initial TFAS application was 'approved with conditions', please provide evidence that these conditions have been met in at least one of the reports.)

Please provide some information about the project, in the format below: (1-2 pages)

Aims of project

To understand whether embedding careers within a programme enhances a student's awareness of their employability

Background to project (or context)

Graduates in Sport programmes have an ability to 'be well prepared for the wide range of professional and vocationally orientated careers in this still growing and maturing sector' (Rees et al, 2006:130), however Minten (2010:67) notes that there is increasing concern about the employability of sport graduates in the UK 'fuelled by the rapid growth of undergraduates studying sport' and concerns over 'the appropriateness of those graduates to employers' needs'.

More generally, Margaret Dane (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service) also highlights that there is a need for employability to be 'right up there on the agenda, especially in the light of increased tuition fees that has raised student and parent expectations' (Anyangwe, 2011:website).

This study therefore centred on the growing issue of employability within Higher Education, specifically addressing Marine Sport students who have had careers education embedded within their programmes since 2010. This action was taken in 2010 in recognition of the growing concern of employability within Higher Education, and through guidance from the QAA that stated that 'Careers education can be taught via discrete modules...or embedded across a programme of study' (QAA, 2010:web page). Through this action there was considerable short-term informal and anecdotal success, but until recently there has been no formal impact evaluation and therefore the ultimate success of the project was unknown. It was the intention of this study to conduct a formal impact evaluation of the process.

Methods

This study used two qualitative methods: surveys and focus groups. The strengths and limitations of these two methods complement one another in a unified research design (Wolff *et al*, 1993). Initial data was collected using a qualitative survey. In this study, the survey was used to identify current and past Marine Sport Science Students' (MSS) perception and understanding of the term employability. A total of 63 (74% of the current MSS cohort) MSS students participated from all three years of the programme. There was difficulty in obtaining contact with the most recent MSS graduates and a total of 5 responded (13% of the 2012 graduate cohort).

On completion of the survey participants who identified an interest in participation in a focus group were brought together to continue exploration around the findings taken from the survey. Care was taken to encourage all participants to contribute to discussion (Creswell, 1998). Prior to the focus group the concepts to be investigated were defined and clarified to form discussion guidelines which were used by the researcher during the focus group (Knodel, 1993). Data was recorded electronically and transcribed ready for analysis.

In both the survey and the focus group content analysis was used. The method of content analysis utilised within this study is codes and coding. Interpretation can begin at any stage during analysis and in the case of this study it began with the coding of the survey data. Links were then made following the coding of the focus group data.

Results

Through the survey method students across all three years of the undergraduate Marine Sport programmes were asked 'What does employability mean to you?'

In their responses, students framed their definition of employability through the notion of *who* considers the employability traits they were listing to be important; the student/applicant or the employer. This created two distinct groups, one where the students felt employability was more about an employer's perception of the applicant; and one where one where they believed employability to be more about an applicant's perception of themselves. Those who felt employability was more about an employer's perception of the applicant included definitions for employability such as '*How employable*

I am to an employer' (1st year student), *'The skill set, qualifications and attributes which make you attractive to an employer'* (2nd year student) and *'the level to which you are suitable for employment in specific roles'* (3rd year student). The employer was clearly the lens through which employability was seen through for these students. In contrast, there were those who felt that employability is more about an applicant's perception of themselves. Definitions were given such as *'The ability to have a job and earn money for the things I need in life'* (1st year student), *'Employability is how likely you are to get a job and whether you have the desired characteristics to pursue your chosen career'* (2nd year student) and finally *'to have a set of skills that will make you a valuable asset to the employer'* (3rd year student).

Moving beyond the existence of these two distinct group, there is also an interesting finding in that although students tended to have fairly equal responses across these two groups in their first year (58% employer's perception/42% applicants perception), the divide grew year on year with a distinct majority of students in their second (61%) third (86%) year asserting that employability is about an applicant's perception of themselves. One suggestion as to why this occurs is due to the exposure to the careers education being embedded within the programme. Each year a student comes into contact with more careers education embedded within their programme and lectures on employability help build their understanding of the concept. Therefore their ability to perceive it as a concept that they have control and ownership over becomes more apparent and this is reflected in their definition through placing employability within the perception of themselves.

Tymon (2011) presents a further explanation. In their study on undergraduate student's perspectives of employability, Tymon (2011:10) found an indication that confidence in self-expression increased year on year, and that final year students 'were extremely confident in expressing their views'. This was thought to be evidence of 'enhanced communication skills and self-confidence ... which may suggest that these skills have been developed over the academic years' (Tymon, 2011:10). The students increasing self-confidence over academic years means that they have the conviction to again take ownership of their employability and this is reflected in how they define it in framing it from their own perspective.

Student responses also demonstrated the changing sophistication of their definitions of employability as they developed through the stages of their programme. Table 2 lists the key terms used by students taken from the definitions of employability they gave. From this table it can be seen that there is a heavy weighting on three particular key terms in stage one (ability, qualifications and skills). However, although the emphasis on skills remains throughout all three years, there is evidence of an expanded and more sophisticated definition of employability year on year. By their third year students have doubled the number of terms within their definitions of employability. The limited use of key terms by students in the early stages of their programme is comparable to the findings of Tymon (2011) who noted that students in the first and second year of their programme had a narrower view of employability than that observed in the wider literature.

Key Terms	Stage 1 (%)	Stage 2 (%)	Stage 3 (%)
Ability	36	19	19
Qualifications	36	15	12
Skills	27	65	50

Attractive to employers	9	7	4
Experience	9	12	15
Personality	9	7	12
Qualities	9	4	
Requisites	9		
Characteristics		15	4
Communication of attributes		4	
Knowledge		15	4
Attributes		23	4
Traits		4	4
Capabilities			12
Money/salary			8
Attitude			4
Level of suitability			8
Interest			8
Enthusiasm			4

Table 2. Key terms used in defining employability used by Marine Sports Sciences Students.

Tymon (2011) found that students also conceived of their employability as being about the development of skills and personal attributes and similarly Tomlinson (2008) concluded that students perceived the need for 'extra credentials' such as personal, social skills, and experience. It is clearly seen in Table 2 that skills in particular are used heavily by students in their definitions of employability, with there also being an emphasis on experience. This could be evidence of a more holistic approach and understanding of employability by Marine Sport students.

In further support of this is the point that Marine Sport students do not mention terms such as employment, job, work e.t.c. which would suggest that they too saw employability as being about finding a job or employment. This is in contrast to Tymon's (2011:12) finding that: "They seem to believe that employability is a short-term means to an end, being about finding a job, any job, or employment". It is possible then that having careers education embedded within the programme gives the students a more holistic view of employability, enabling them to think of employability as more than just finding a job.

Associated publications (these should relate to the project, and give full reference)

- Beaumont, E. and Gedye, S. (2013) "I prefer not to think about it" Reflections on how to motivate careers and employability education through the curriculum and co-curriculum. Paper presented at the 11th VC's Teaching and Learning Conference, Plymouth University, 28th June 2013.
<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/dynamic.asp?page=events&eventID=7551&showEvent=1>
- Beaumont, E. and Gedye, S (in prep) 'Student Perceptions and Understandings of Employability: the opinions of students studying Marine Sport Science' *Journal of Education and Work*.
- Beaumont, E. and Gedye, S (in prep) 'An Impact Evaluation of Employability Interventions in Marine Sport Sciences'

Website (if directly connected to the project)

Keywords (one or more if possible – see ‘pedres’ database for examples)

Employability

Please forward the final report to teachandlearn@plymouth.ac.uk