



University
of Glasgow



Employability Accelerator Programme

Stephen Shilton



Employability accelerator programme

Identifying skills, including GAs, and learning how to articulate evidence in written applications and at interviews.

Context

School of Geographical and Earth Science

Level: 3

Subjects: Earth Science

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Key features



Medium group size (25-100).

Focus on raising general awareness.

A sequence of stand-alone sessions: 2 x 2 hour workshops, followed by a 30 minute CV Clinic and then a 1 hour group mock interview with an employer.

Includes both in-class and out-of-class activities.

Partial impact on syllabus redesign.

Considerable impact on staff's workload as the sessions have to be prepared, then students' CVs have to be reviewed, and commented upon prior to the CV Clinic; in addition, employers have to be recruited to deliver the mock interviews, briefed and debriefed.

No technology used but the handout could be developed as an online document to be shared via VLE.



Activity description

Rationale

The aim of the Employability Accelerator Programme is to help students articulate evidence of their GAs and other desirable skills for postgraduate admission and employability. The programme covers both written and oral (interview) evidence. It is delivered to Level 3 Earth Science students, as they have a perceived lack of confidence in applying for graduate jobs in an increasingly competitive area of the global labour market.

The programme seeks to emphasise to students that their GAs are directly relevant to employment success, especially in the transferrable dimension. In particular, the transferrable dimension of the Reflective Learners GA is vital if application quality and interview performance are to maximise students' competitiveness.

After the programme, students should be able to:

- Research and identify skills and qualities sought by employers and postgraduate admission tutors.
- Reflect on their suitability to desired career opportunities.
- Identify suitable evidence of GAs and any other desirable qualities.
- Articulate such evidence convincingly using the STAR technique.
- Write a CV which is effective in terms of language, content and layout.
- Articulate their evidence convincingly at interview.

Activity description



Implementation

Session One

The skills and qualities desired by employers and PG admissions tutors are identified by looking at appropriate sources of information, including vacancies and job profiles from prospects.ac.uk.

Students are given a handout/worksheet which highlights some requirements from a relevant vacancy. They are then given the task of writing evidence, mapped against one chosen criterion. The teacher provides individual support and students are also given a talk on how to write an effective CV.

Homework: Students are required to identify 2 vacancies, and write 200 words of reflection on the reasons why they would apply for this job and why they think they are suited to the role. They are also required to write a CV.

Session Two

Students are given information on psychometric tests and how to prepare for them. The use of the STAR technique is revisited and applied to the interview situation. Students are given a handout/worksheet which asks them to prepare STAR evidence applied to a chosen interview question. They then work in groups of 3, adopting the roles of interviewee, interviewer and observer. The interviewee gives the interviewer the questions. The interviewer then asks the questions and the interviewee has 2 minutes to answer the questions while being observed by the interviewer and observer.

Activity description



Implementation

The exercise is repeated twice, so that the roles within the trio can be altered to give each student the opportunity to adopt each role once.

Their worksheet/handouts give them a structure to help them observe each other's interview performance. The teacher assesses each group's activity to determine positive performance areas and those that require improvement. There then follows a whole group discussion, where students share positive attributes they have observed in others, supported by the teacher's observation. Students are also encouraged to talk about areas they would like to improve on in their own performance.

Session Three

Groups of 3-4 students bring their CVs to a 30 minute session with a Careers Manager. They are given suggestions for improvement and are also able to learn from the good and bad points of their peers' CVs.

Session Four

Groups of up to 5 students spend 1 hour with a relevant employer and are asked typical interview questions. They are given worksheets similar to those used in session two, to help their note taking and observation of peer performance. The employer then gives individual and group feedback and encourages students to discuss each other's performance.



Reactions

The programme and materials were designed in collaboration with academic staff (Prof. Gordon Curry) to raise students' awareness of the challenges of the labour market and recruitment. Immediate student reactions are different each year with varying student groups. That said, students can present, initially, with a slight cynicism concerning career planning and skills identification and development. However, student feedback is usually much more positive by the end of session one due to the emphasis laid on the relevance of their course work and field work experiences by taking an interactive approach instead of a didactic approach.

By the end of the programme, students are universally positive and confident.

Some of the testimonials submitted online post-event:

- *"The university offers many career related services I wasn't aware of before the seminar, it was great to find out about the vast support available."*
- *"Stephen is fantastic at engaging students, the content is really helpful and the activities – although role-playing isn't anyone's favourite in a seminar – it is a very effective and engaging way to learn, just a shame attendance isn't higher!"*
- *"Stephen Shilton was super enthusiastic and really helpful. He was really easy to speak to, and really encouraging to do this program."*
- *"Very useful, please keep it up!"*
- *"It's great to have someone talk to us about these things, who has some relevant knowledge." [This is purely related to the fact that I mention that I studied Geology for a year, when I was a student.]*
- *"The mock interviews are stressful, but I've learned a huge amount for future applications."*
- *"The employer made me feel relaxed and I'm much less worried about interviews now."*

Analysis

Design

The programme was designed in line with the DOTS model (Tony Watts & Bill Law, NICEC) of career planning. Students were encouraged to self-evaluate and identify skills, including GAs, and provide evidence for these using the STAR acrostic technique, before developing this to a form suitable for a CV. They then role-played how to articulate their evidence at interview, before being given a mock interview by a graduate employer, in a small group session.

Implementation

Initially some students of Earth Science failed to see the relevance or usefulness of self-evaluation in terms of skills, and some others were sceptical as to whether the material would add value to their existing knowledge of the application process. However, the material and content of the talks seemed to convince them that they were perhaps a little complacent and that they did indeed need to engage with the learning in order to increase their competitiveness in the labour market. Another challenge was student attendance overall.

In particular, many students had to be actively followed up and encouraged to attend the small group mock interviews with employers, the last activity of the programme. On research, it was obvious that this was due to lack of confidence, even some fear, in the students, rather than disaffection with the programme.



Evaluation

The students who completed the course were very happy with the experience and the learning itself. They all felt much more confident in how to apply in writing for jobs, and to compete at interview. For the Careers Manager and Academic Staff, it is obvious that it would be helpful to increase student attendance. This could be done via various methods, including making the activities mandatory, embedding them in the curriculum and even simply by encouragement to attend by academic staff.



Recommendations

It is easy to adapt the materials so that they can be used by any cognate group of students. This has already been done to deliver the skill evidence identification element to Level 2 Earth Science as part of a LTDF Project “Where am I now and where do I want to be?” A roadmap for graduate attributes.; Lead: Maxine V. Swinger, School of Psychology, 2017. In this case the material was delivered by a GTA after adapting it in collaboration with a Careers Manager.

If an academic wished to implement the Accelerator, then it would be important to collaborate with a Careers Manager over the adaptation and development of materials. It would also be vital to recruit enough suitable employers for group mock interviews, depending on the expected no. of student participants. The programme dates need to be set months in advance so that employers can ensure that they are able to attend.

It has been delivered to Level 3 students primarily in order that students can apply for internships more effectively. This reflects the fact that an increasing no. of major graduate recruiters recruit graduates from previous interns. It could be delivered to final year students too.



This resource is part of the ‘Graduate Attributes – Roadmap for Staff’ resource:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/goodpractice/graduateattributes>

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