Academic Skills to Employability: Supporting the Personal and Professional Development of International Taught Postgraduates

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Summary
This project aims to:
- assess the support needs and expectations of taught postgraduates in the Adam Smith Business School (ASBS) - c. 1,500 students, the vast majority international students – with regards to academic skills and career development
- pilot a new single, unified programme of professional development
- take an action research approach to the development of new resources

Demand for increased support in the areas of personal and professional development and perceived gaps in current provision have been identified in both the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (2012) and International Student Barometer (2012). This project will pilot a new unified programme of support which spans the taught postgraduate (PGT) lifecycle, progressing from a focus on academic skills development in the first half of the academic year to a more career and employability focus during semester 2. As students progress through the programme they will be encouraged and incentivised\(^1\) to map their personal and professional development against the University’s graduate attributes matrix and to articulate their skills development through professional development ePortfolios. Key outcomes will be a report on PGT views of current provision, with recommendations for future development, and the production of resources which assist students to reflect further on their graduate attributes.

Student views will be sought through questionnaires and focus groups. A small group of PGT students will be recruited to provide more detailed feedback on student needs and expectations at points across the academic year. These students will also be involved in developing resources which will be piloted and evaluated in 2014.

The project supports key objectives in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, notably in making transparent the development of graduate attributes (Objective 8). It will also provide a framework for students to engage with the wider benefits of their studies beyond the acquiring of subject-specific knowledge (Objective 7).

Aims and Outcomes
Key outcomes will be:
1. A report on PGT views of current provision in academic skills and employability support for PGT in ASBS in order to identify: any gaps in provision; any barriers to accessing provision; whether provision appears cohesive; and how best to support students in reflecting on connections between academic skills and employability.
2. Resources will be developed and delivered (through face to face workshops or online, as appropriate). These will use the findings from the initial phase to assist students to get the most from support available, through reflecting on their journey through academic skills to career/professional development

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\(^1\) Students’ ePortfolios will be certificated through the College of Social Sciences Graduate Skills Programme and reference to their work will be included on their HEAR transcript. Their ePortfolios will also be reviewed by GSP employer sponsors.
Sustainability is built in to the project as the resulting bank of resources will be used well beyond the duration of the project. By reviewing provision in academic skills and employability support, it will also inform future resource development and prioritisation.

**Previous work**
The project builds on existing academic skills and employability provision co-ordinated by the International Student Learning and Employability Officers. This includes: embedded classes on core academic skills; optional and highly subscribed short courses on academic writing; and the Graduate Skills Programme and accompanying ePortfolio development. The project will provide a framework to assist students to reflect on how the work they have carried out in relation to academic skills relates directly to their development of graduate attributes.

The project will also draw on a survey of the experiences of the 2012-13 cohort of ASBS PGT students with regard to academic skills and employability support. This will be carried out in the summer period of 2013, to allow students to reflect on the entire academic year, and the results will be available at the outset of this project.

**Student Engagement**
There is considerable appetite for enhanced support in this area. Career development is a central factor in student motivation for undertaking PGT study. The national Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (Bennett and Turner, 2012) finds:

- improving employment prospects and making progress in careers were the two most commonly identified motivations for students undertaking taught postgraduate course
- there is demand for increased support with professional and personal development
- Communication and presentation skills were areas where many students would like more support

Careers advice has also been identified as an aspect of teaching and learning where students are less satisfied with their University of Glasgow courses (International Student Barometer, 2012). This project aims to address these key concerns.

Students will be actively involved throughout this project. It is envisaged that the Project Officer role would be suitable for a PhD student with experience as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). A group of PGT students will also be recruited to produce materials for the project.

**Methodology**
The first phase involves research into the experiences and needs of ASBS PGT students regarding academic skills and employability support. This research will be carried out by the Project Officer. Initially, an overview will be produced of all support services currently available in the School, the College and through University Services. Results of the summer 2013 survey into ASBS PGT experiences of academic skills and employability development will also be analysed (this survey will be carried out by project co-ordinators prior to the the project – see Previous Work). This analysis will inform the development of questions for focus groups.

A Project Steering group will be established comprising the College of Social Sciences (CoSS) Dean of Teaching and Learning, the CoSS International Student Learning Officer, the CoSS Employability Officer, the Careers Service Graduate Attributes Development Adviser, the ASBS Careers Service Adviser, the CoSS Student Learning Service (SLS) Effective Learning Adviser, key delivery staff from the English as a Foreign Language Unit and a representative from the ASBS Convenors group.

Participants will also be sought to take part in a longitudinal study which will follow students throughout their academic experience at Glasgow, ideally until graduation at the end of 2014.
These participants will be asked to provide updates on their use and views of academic skills and employability services during focus groups held at points throughout the academic year.

Data from phase one of the project will be analysed at the close of semester one 2013, with the production of a report analysing students’ views of current support and identifying any gaps.

Phase two involves the development of resources to assist students with making links between their developing academic skills and their employability needs. Materials will be developed in January by the Project Officer, with the assistance of ASBS students. Eight students will be recruited for 20 hours work each.

The nature of the resources will depend on feedback received from students during the research phase of the project in semester one, but it is envisaged that online support and workshops may feature. The resources will be piloted in semester two, and student feedback will be sought via online questionnaires or printed evaluation sheets as appropriate. A short report will be produced, evaluating the resource, by early summer 2014. The Project Officer will make any changes to the resources at this time, in response to student evaluations.

In the summer of 2014 an online survey of the 2013-14 ASBS cohort will explore students’ experiences of academic skills and employability support. This will follow the outline set out in the earlier survey with the 2012-13 cohort in summer 2013. The results from both surveys will be analysed by the project co-ordinators to identify any changes in students’ experiences and to evaluate the benefits of the project.

The final report will be produced after the conclusion of the longitudinal study, and is scheduled for December 2014. This will be prepared by the Project Co-ordinators, drawing on earlier work from the Project Officer.

Ethical approval will be sought from the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for the collection and use of data from the survey, focus group and evaluation stages.

**Potential Applicability / Transferability**

Benefits from the projects outcomes will be widely applicable across the University. The resources could also be used by students in other subject areas, and at other levels of study (e.g. undergraduate and research students). The recommendations from the project report are also likely to prove useful to a much wider group.

Plans for dissemination of the project’s outcomes include:

- Dissemination among services/subject areas represented within the Project Steering Group
- Presentation to relevant University committees, such as the ASBS Learning and Teaching Committee
- Presentation of a paper at the University Learning and Teaching Conference
- The publication of a paper in a relevant scholarly journal, and/or at conferences on international student learning or employability.

**Evaluation**

The resources will be evaluated through the collection of student feedback following the pilot in semester two. It will also be appropriate to continue to evaluate the resources in future years, by continuing to seek feedback from users. Comparison of data from the 2013 and 2014 surveys will be used to gain insight into the benefits from the pilot stage of the project.
This project and its findings will inform the way that the University structures and delivers professional development support for its increasing PGT population and will also assess the value of the University’s graduate attributes framework in supporting student development and reflection.

**Timetable**

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment of Project Officer and setting up of Steering Group. Initial scoping exercise and analysis of earlier questionnaire data</td>
<td>Aug 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus groups with students – to continue across the PGT academic year</td>
<td>Sept 2013 – Nov 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of research results and development of resources</td>
<td>Dec 2013 – Jan 2014</td>
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<td>Piloting of resources</td>
<td>Feb – Apr 2014</td>
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<td>Evaluation of resources and amendments if required</td>
<td>Apr – July 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey of PGT student experiences of academic skills and employability support</td>
<td>July-Aug 2014</td>
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<td>Final report (including results of longitudinal study)</td>
<td>Dec 2014</td>
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**Budget**

Project co-ordination will be carried out by Dr Pringle Barnes and Dr Copsey as part of their normal duties. The Project Officer and Student Author posts will both be Atypical workers; they do not therefore attract employer’s Superannuation costs, and will attract minimal employer’s National Insurance costs, if any.

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
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<tr>
<td>Salary costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Project officer: 300 hours at Grade 6 (£14.39 p/hr + holiday pay at 12.0319%)</td>
<td>£4,650</td>
<td>£195</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Student Authors: 8 x 20 hours (160 hours) at Grade 5 (£11.05 p/hr + holiday pay at 12.0319%)</td>
<td>£2,000</td>
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<td>Consumables</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Focus groups: running expenses and transcription</td>
<td>£700</td>
<td>£80</td>
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<td>TOTAL = £7,625</td>
<td>£7,350</td>
<td>£275</td>
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**Approval**

Should this application be successful and be granted funding, I give consent for this application to be published on the Learning and Teaching Centre website.

Gayle Pringle Barnes

**References**
