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Partnership and reflection: Embedding Employability in English

Supported by:

Jo Robinson, School of English
University of Nottingham

The Nottingham HEA project: Embedding Employability in English: work related learning and reflection in the creative industries

Key challenges:

- How can we create opportunities for students to develop vocational skills and experience work related learning in the context of the particular skills and knowledges being developed through their *subject-based study*?

- How can we ensure that such work related activity is appropriately framed and supported to ensure 'learning' takes place, particularly as the numbers of students involved increases?

£18,000

Average salary six months after the course

Typical salary range: £14,000.00 - £21,000.00

Average salary across the UK after taking a similar course

£18,000.00 after six months (salary range: £14,000.00 - £21,000.00)

£24,000.00 after 40 months (salary range: £20,000.00 - £28,000.00)

84%

Go on to work and/or study

This is what students are doing six months after finishing the course.

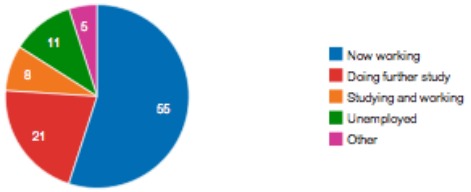


Chart labels explained

Preparation for future employment: University Of Nottingham

Employment six months after the course

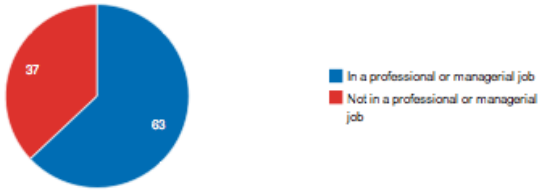


Chart labels explained

KIS data on employment for
BA English, University of Nottingham

http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/subjects/employment/10007154-Q300

Problems with this model:

‘But they’re here to study English, not employability’
‘What about the *content* of my module?’
‘My module is research led – what has that got to do with employability?’

As Day (2010) notes: ‘The concern that “the discourse of employability could jeopardize the established quest for wisdom” (Barnett cited in Knight and Yorke 2004: 19) goes straight to the heart of the matter’.

Key initial focus group findings:

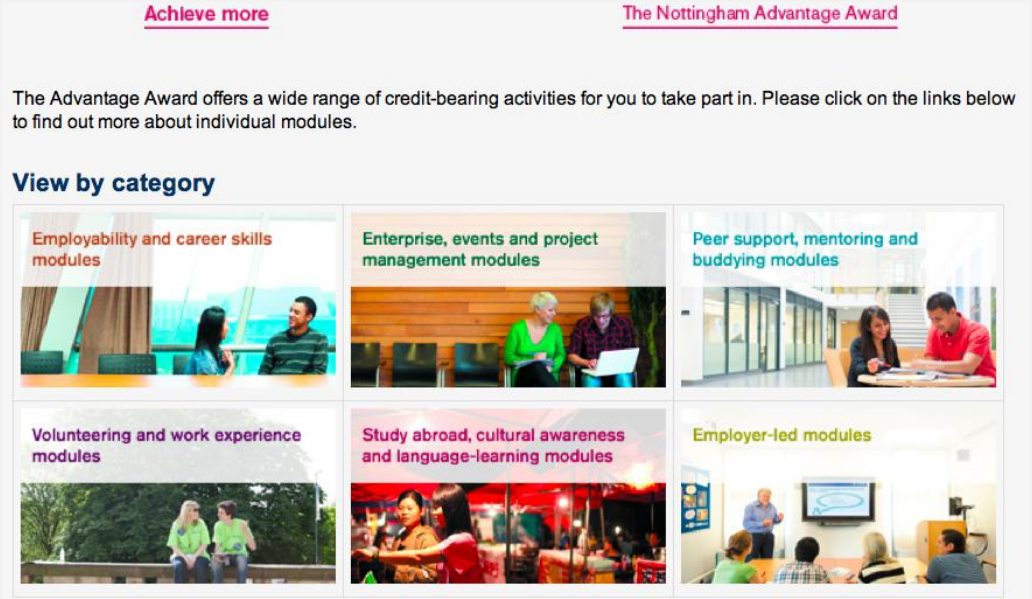
Students

- Were articulate and enthusiastic about what the study of English had given them in terms of knowledge, empathy and independence
- Knew they were learning these skills, but wanted to be able to show prospective employers evidence of having done so in a real world context
- Were keen to link work placement activity into their curriculum learning
- Wanted high quality placement experiences which developed skills (pg students in particular)
- Were anxious about managing placement activity alongside subject learning activities

Key initial focus group findings:

Students

• Were uncertain whether they wanted placement experiences as part of their curriculum/as part of the Nottingham Advantage Award/as a stand-alone activity.



Key initial focus group findings:

Employers

- Saw the key ‘employability’ skill as being able to take notice of the job spec!
- Were keen to find out what skills English students could bring
- Were as concerned as we were about offering placements which used students’ discipline specific and ‘pre-graduate’ skills
- Clearly saw students as offering something to their organisation which would otherwise be difficult for them to access (social media, anyone?)

Key initial focus group findings:

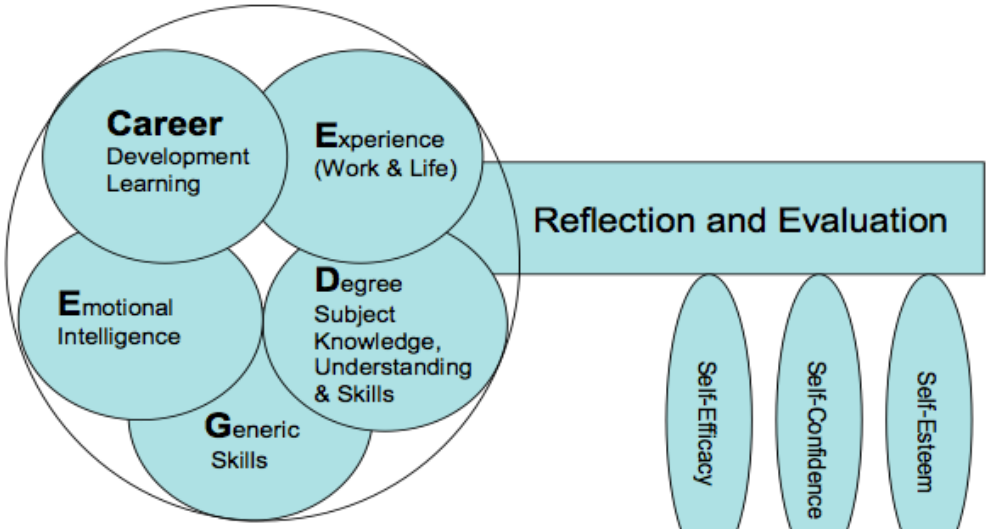
Staff

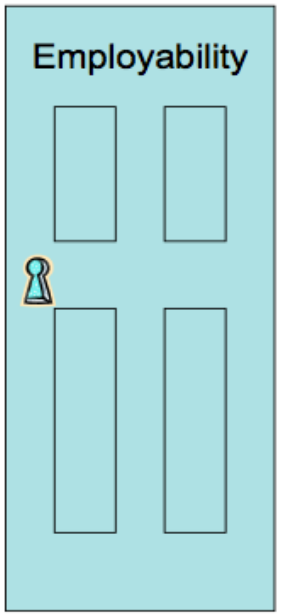
English colleagues:

- Expressed anxiety over how to teach employability, and whether they wanted to do so
- Expressed anxiety over assessing and measuring these skills as part of a degree

Careers and Employability Service:

- Welcomed the chance to embed activities within Schools rather than just alongside them
- Stressed the importance of sharing activity and knowledge





Career Development Learning
Experience (Work & Life)
Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding & Skills
Generic Skills
Emotional Intelligence

CareerEDGE - The Key to Employability

'The Key to Employability: Developing a practical model of graduate employability', Lorraine Dacre Pool and Peter Sewell, 2007

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/EEL_repository_KTE_CETL_thekeytoemployability.pdf

Project aims:

- To build on existing employability frameworks to develop our own framework model of work related learning, teaching and assessment for UG and PG students of English - what are the discipline specific employability skills that work related engagements can develop?
- To map and model the differences between work related engagements at different levels of learning – UG and PG.
- To explore and articulate the ways in which 'English' can help employers in the creative industries and beyond.
- To develop and evaluate the use of ePortfolios and learning sets for English placements.
- And finally, to disseminate and share good practice with colleagues in English disciplines and beyond …

Nottingham Playhouse

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NEW PERSPECTIVES THEATRE COMPANY

Dyslexia Action
Taking Action • Changing Lives

LAKESIDE

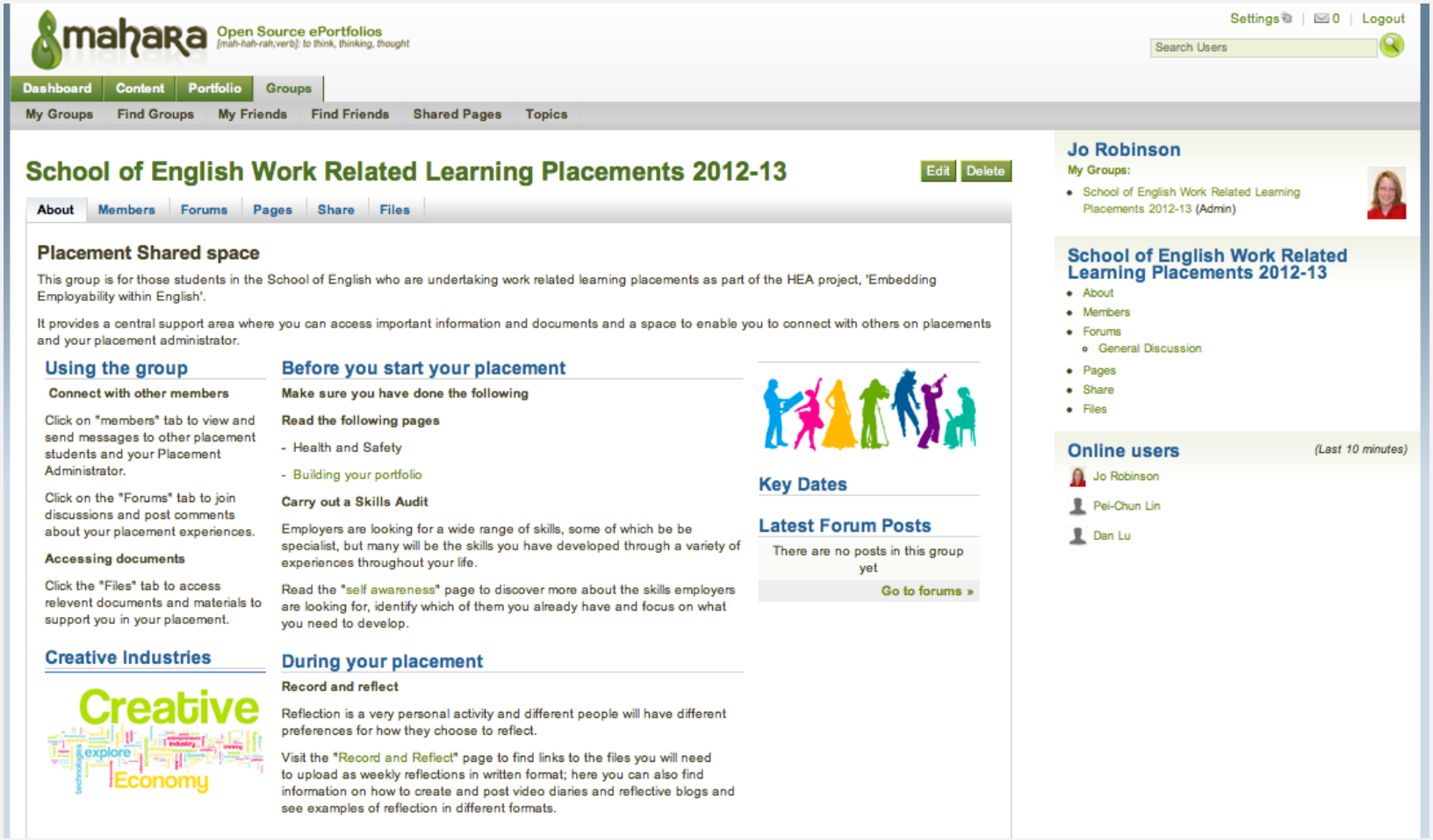
- Identification of projects/roles/skills profile
- Health and safety/risk assessments
- 'Real world' application experience –

  application form listing two preferred roles,

  shortlisting,

  interview

  (with feedback to unsuccessful candidates at each stage)
- Placement one day a week (initially outside curriculum during project trial)
- Encouragement of reflective learning – Mahara ePortfolio



http://uilaplep01.nottingham.ac.uk/maharaNew/group/view.php?id=100

Conclusions and queries going forward:

- MA level students still very hard to address!
- Initial engagement with trusted partners – build from a small base
- Embed within or alongside the discipline curriculum?

  Enforcing or embedding reflection
- The problem of numbers … how to get more students involved?
  - Not just the ones who already have work experience
  - Not just the ones who don't need paid employment
  - Not just the high achievers … without risking relations with employers
  - International dimension – exchange students too?
- Administrative resource and support needed *within* the School
- Importance of whole school engagement, activity and support – employability is not just about employment, or about placements…

Employability everywhere: embedded rather than added on

Rethinking curriculum and assessment: ‘applied’ Englishes mean employability is central concern

Open Days:

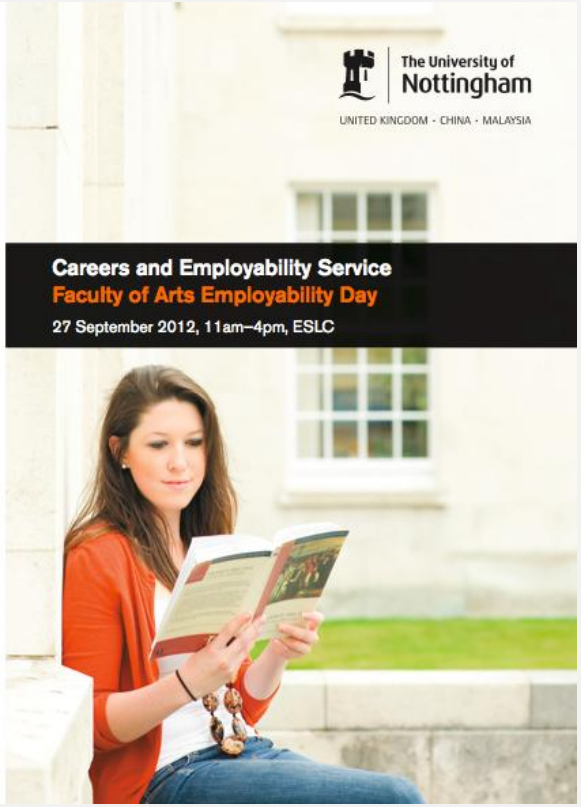
New publicity materials and talks on employability activities to prospective students and families

Year 1:

With the Arts Faculty and Careers and Employability Service: 'Beginning my career journey' activity day in Freshers' Week – 600 students across Arts Faculty

Sessions on core English module, Academic Community, on:

- Personal development planning and careers
- English in the world – impact case studies from outside academia
- Tailoring written and oral communication to different audiences



Year 2:

Opportunity to take discipline specific Advantage Award modules:

- Careers Skills in English
- Literacy Volunteering (over 100 of our students volunteer through our literacy mentoring scheme in local secondary and primary schools)

Module fair: employability skills tied to module choices and advice on careers

Re-thinking second year curriculum to embed skills to allow for area-specific placement activity in year 3

Year 3:

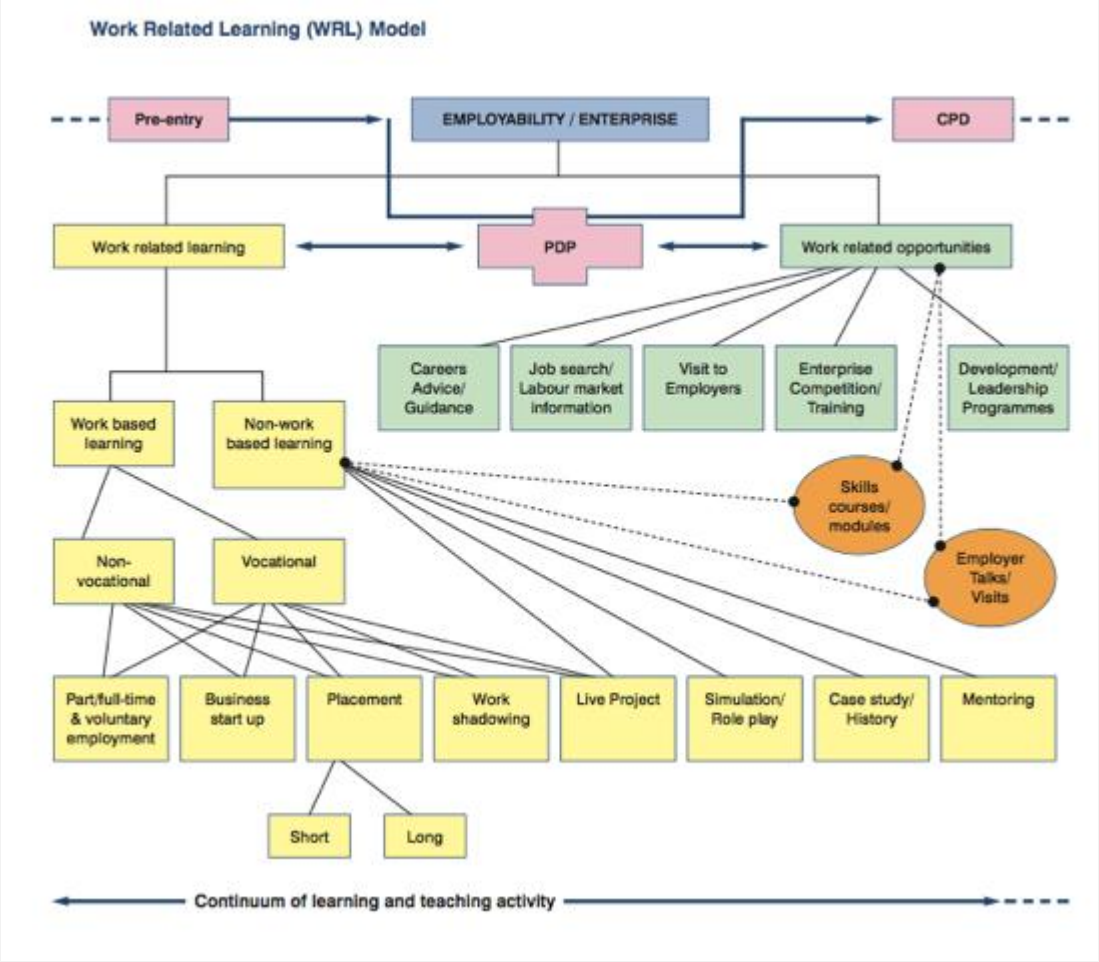
Project-based dissertations: collaborative projects

- currently 12 students; next year 14
- 5 applications for every one project place, and 14 for the 4 Journal places

Work related learning placements (29 students in trial year)

Re-thinking curriculum – 'applied' English in different disciplinary areas

Re-thinking assessment – embedding assessment of oracy skills



Taken from *Models of Recognition for Work Related Learning in Higher Education*, Aiming University Learning@Work publication, 2010.

AUL@W Team: Irene Bell, Margaret Berrie and Lynn Naven.

Any questions?

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Materials will be added to the project site:
http://nottingham.ac.uk/english/teachinglearning/embedding-employability-in-english.aspx