

# Employability and Skills

## Mr David Gibson

Queen's University Management School

### **Project Title: Utilising Social Enterprise as a Vehicle to Embed Enterprise and Employability skills in the Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences; Empowering Students to Make Their Mark**

#### **Summary of Project:**

Amongst the growing demand for graduate skills such as entrepreneurship, creativity and leadership in what is now a very dynamic and competitive global market, this project attempts to offer "Enterprise for life" skills through innovative and best practice pedagogies, together with a suite of complementary experiential learning events presented in a social enterprise context.

The proposed "Social Enterprise Skills" programme has the potential to significantly enhance the employability of the typically underemployed graduates in question and represents a very valuable supplement to their degree.

Moreover, this program also offers an ideal opportunity for students to collaborate with industry and engage in valuable workplace learning, in addition to empowering students to engage in personal development and action planning through self assessment and reflection exercises on their PDP e-folio.

Ultimately, this programme will empower students to make their mark on both their local community and career development.

#### **Project to date:**

Initially, the project commenced with a review of good practice in Europe during a number of Entrepreneurship Educator Conferences and Social Enterprise best practice seminars. Social enterprise practitioners in Northern Ireland were also identified and reviewed through The BIG Black Book, a new online trade directory for social enterprises across NI, in addition to social enterprise support organisations such as Business in the Community, Unltd and the Social Economy Network.

An array of innovative pedagogical approaches and learning techniques which were suitable for developing "enterprise for life" skills were identified and developed. Some of which included "live" social enterprise field trips, supermarket sweep challenges, make your mark with a tenner challenges, speed networking events with social entrepreneurs, Not for Profit Dragons' Dens etc.

Thus far, the proposed Social Enterprise Skills programme has been rolled out with a number of diverse students emanating from the Schools of Politics, Philosophy and International Studies, Sociology, Criminology and Social Policy, in addition to the Teacher Trainee Colleges.

Furthermore, on the extracurricular side Queen's SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) has been set up as a student society formed and led by the students themselves. SIFE is a global not-for-profit organisation that works with students in 1,899 universities across 47 different countries.

Queen's SIFE represents the sole team from the island of Ireland and offers students the opportunity to design and implement their own projects with the vision of creating economic opportunity for others. This team is advised by both university and local business/social enterprise advisors and will annually present their projects in a National Competition.

The student project leaders recently attended a SIFE leadership weekend to supplement their skill base in directing students to create, implement and deliver their projects.

It is envisioned that this holistic programme will provide a synergy that empowers the students to use effectively their "enterprise for life" skill repertoire developed within the curriculum to make their mark and to make a difference potentially within the communities of their choice.

## **Dr Fiona Magowan**

School of History and Anthropology

### **Project Title: The Impact of Performance, Postgraduate Skills as an Employability Strategy**

#### **Summary of Project:**

This project aims to develop a practice-based, student-centred postgraduate skills training module that addresses the relationship between academic and non-academic modes of writing and presentation and how they can be adapted for diverse employment contexts.

Through a series of seminars using role playing, dramatic techniques, vocal skills and performative exercises over one semester, postgraduate students will learn effective styles of delivery and communicative impact.

This module will also examine a variety of employment contexts and consider what employers are looking for in terms of different skills such as diverse writing styles and using a range of media creatively to present material to other professionals and the public.

Postgraduate students will have the chance to show what they have learned in a public arena and be assessed on the skills acquired.

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## Project to date:

A number of workshops and seminars have been held and training has focussed on:

- Practice and reflection upon presentational skills. Students have examined what skills are required to create good presentations and how a lack of skills' awareness can impact poorly upon performance;
- Thinking about employment. Students have discussed a range of issues with regard to the specific kinds of communication, mind-body learning and practical skills that each job requires;
- Practising academia beyond University. Each student has been assigned to a school chosen on the basis of widening access, to present a short excerpt of their research topic to fifth and sixth form students;
- Improving recruitment. The aim has been to profile a range of disciplines in schools, particularly non-school subject areas. Students have presented their own research with the opportunity to demonstrate not only what they do but what their discipline is about and how it is taught at Queen's.

## Professor Catherine Clinton

School of History and Anthropology

### Project Title: Internships in Historical Institutions in the US

#### Summary of Project:

The goal is to establish programs to get undergraduates involved in institutions where employability and skills are combined with their chosen field of study – history – by creating opportunities for students to spend a month working in a U.S. institution. These institutions could be the prestigious Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum, or to intern at the equally prestigious Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College – this will be an important program for the students.

The group experience working within an American institution, plus the enhancement of the student's resume will be a valuable programme. Prof Clinton had already secured some accommodation funding for the students from the Abraham Lincoln Museum and Library for 2008, and she is going to Gettysburg this year to discuss trying to create a similar scheme for 2009.

By next summer Catherine hopes to have in place programs at both institutions. If this programme works, she might be able to attract private donation funding to keep this opportunity open for Northern Irish students of all economic backgrounds, rather than those who have the independent means to undertake such a summer project.

**Project to date:**

This past year, Professor Clinton worked with the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois, to initiate a program of "Lincoln Interns" for the summer of 2008.

This coming summer she would like to expand her program to include a new crop of interns to return to Springfield again and she would also like to add another program at the Civil War Institute and Gettysburg College.

There is a possibility that students could work for the Institute and their wages would pay for their room and board for a month in Gettysburg – making this option even more attractive to students without funding.

It is hoped that the success of these initiatives might lead to donor funding to fully support our summer abroad internships for students in future years.

**Dr Ulrich Offerdinger,  
Michele Crilly and Richard Jay**

School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering (SPACE) and School of Education

**Project Title: Certificate in  
Communication and Management for  
Engineers**

**Summary of Project:**

Within the Engineering Disciplines, the employability of graduate students is not only determined by the technical qualifications obtained by individual students but also to a large extent by the level of the students' transferable skills set, including communication skills.

This is evident from feedback provided by Employers and Recruiters for the Engineering Discipline and is furthermore embedded in the programme accreditation guidelines of the Joint Board of Moderators for the Engineering Disciplines.

The requirement for allowing individual students enrolled on the Civil Engineering Pathways to develop their transferable skills set has been acknowledged by the SPACE over the past years by including a compulsory half-module at Level 1 and Level 2 each, entailing lectures and tutorials which focus on developing students' communications skills.

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## **Project to date:**

A first outline of the programme structure and method of delivery has been developed and feedback from both Engineering students and Engineering industry has been collated as to the feasibility and commercial viability of the proposed programme.

The Project members are currently compiling the business plan for the proposed programme for consideration at the next meeting of the University Management Board.

A Programme Evaluation Meeting will then be convened and approval sought from the Courses and Regulations Group. It is envisaged that following approval of the programme, the development of course material for the programme will commence in January 2009 for commencement of the programme in autumn 2009.

## **Mr John Knowles**

Information Services (Library Services and Research Support)

## **Project Title: Enhancing Student Information Skills at Queen's**

### **Summary of Project:**

The project will make available a range of innovative online packages to support the enhancement of student information skills

at Queen's. School-specific 'learning objects' will be produced in collaboration with the Schools of Dentistry, Law and Psychology. These will be fully embedded into the PDP pages of Queen's online and will be accessed within the context of student personal planning and skills development. The skills learnt will be an essential element in the future professional development of students at Queen's, underpinning their capacity for lifelong learning.

## **Project to date:**

A project officer (Dr Li) has been appointed and started work on the project in November. We are fortunate in that she already has considerable experience in the use of online materials to support learning.

Information Services has also undertaken to provide the funding required to extend her employment from the 4-month period supported by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund to 6 months. The initial stage of the project involves the evaluation of existing online learning packages and the selection of software which might assist in the creation of new packages. Dr Li is meeting with Library members of the project team in order to gather subject-specific content relevant to the development of information skills at Queen's.

## **Dr Christopher Scott**

School of Pharmacy

### **Project Title: Improving Employability: Enhancement of Core Skills and Professionalism within the Pharmacy MPharm degree**

#### **Summary of Project:**

This is a pilot project to facilitate students developing core skills and professional attributes to improve their employability. Central to this project is the monitoring of key skill/professionalism indicators and application of the personal development planning (PDP) portal on QOL to identify goals to build these skills.

This project will involve input from personal tutors, but will centre on the student empowering and taking responsibility for their own personal development as is required of them as registered Pharmacists in continued professional development (CPD).

Although initially focused on the School of Pharmacy, such support strategies could be easily implemented across the University in the future providing mechanisms to ensure that not only are our graduates of the best academic quality, but that they are also employable.

#### **Project to date:**

Central to the running of this pilot was the development of a database to allow a survey of student skills and identification of those individuals that may need more help.

At this stage we have selected the sessions in L1 and L2 that will be used for this database. We have also held our focus groups with students in L1 and L2 to find how they perceive skills training and how PDP could be better adapted to address this.

In line with the development of these skills monitoring systems, the introduction to PDP tutorial will disseminate this pilot to the students and explain to them how we anticipate them engaging with their tutors/ PDP e-folio to develop skills and professional attributes as required.

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## **Dr Karen King and Ms Deirdre Deery**

Institute of Agri-food and Land Use (IALFU)/  
School of Biological Sciences/Biosciences  
CETL in Active and Interactive Learning, and  
Careers, Employability and Skills

### **Project Title: A 'How to set up work placement' resource**

#### **Summary of Project:**

The project will create a web-based, 'How to set up work placement' resource for staff wishing to include work placement within their degree programmes.

Whilst generic resources exist advising on all aspects of work placement, this project will go one step further and provide examples of all the administrative and assessment resources needed to implement work placement in Queen's.

The resources will be aimed at academic staff and include information for students and placement hosts. The structure of the resource will be based on the successful work placement within IAFLU, whose 5 overarching learning outcomes are transferable to any subject area.

The resources will be able to support all types of placement i.e. short summer placements, a placement module and a 'year out' and will enable staff to select or

weight the learning outcomes, tailoring the placement to their specific degree programme needs. The resource will also clearly show how work placement may be linked/integrated with the degree Programme Specification, PDP and CEIG and meet the majority of the School responsibilities with regard to implementation of the University's new Student Employability and Skills Policy 2008–2011.

#### **Project to date:**

To begin with, the project management team met with staff actively involved with work placement and ensured the project brief met with their requirements. Further consultations with staff resulted in a proposed framework which would address all issues relating to placement and work-based learning and cover:

- Pre-placement
- During placement
- Post-placement

All of the practical points associated with each stage will address the needs of the key stakeholders: academic staff, students, placement providers and the University.

One of the challenges of this project has been to co-ordinate and collate best practice in relation to placement learning and make it

easily accessible in a format which addresses the needs of the wide variety of practices within the institution.

**Dr Joan Rahilly, Vicky Ennis and Paula Moran**

School of English and Learning Development Service

**Project Title:** The development of a pilot peer support system for first-year English students and to disseminate a template for development of peer support that can be used in other Schools

**Summary of Project:**

To develop an effective peer support programme for first year English students. Students, either recent graduates or postgraduates, will be recruited to provide the role of Peer Support Worker. Training and support will be provided by the School of English, the Learning Development Service and Careers, Employability and Skills.

The project aims to recruit 10 peer support workers and to provide a structured peer support programme to all first year students. Peer support will commence with an opening session prior to 'Welcome and Orientation' and will be continued during the Welcome and Orientation week.

**Project to date:**

The project is gathering a lot of pace so far; those students who are availing of the service are finding it very helpful. We hope it will become an integral part of the School of English. Evaluations will provide essential feedback and a chance for us to make any necessary changes.

# Student Engagement

## **Dr Colin Cooper**

School of Psychology

**Project Title:** Enhancing student engagement via an informed and evaluated student-centred induction programme

### **Summary of Project**

This project seeks to:

- Evaluate the extent to which current Stage 1 students are engaged with the learning process
- Discover the barriers to engagement and the students' aspirations when they began their studies
- Develop an induction programme for new students to address as many of these issues as possible
- Assess the students' engagement with the course both early on and in May 2008, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of the revised induction procedure.

## **Dr Philip Hanna**

School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

**Project Title:** The use of attendance monitoring and an associated programme of tutor support in promoting student engagement with contact teaching

### **Summary of Project**

The project outlines a system for the effective and efficient monitoring of student attendance at lectures and other forms of contact teaching, alongside a package of measures intended to support students identified as not adequately engaging with their studies.

It is hoped that by quickly identifying and supporting students who fail to attend scheduled forms of contact teaching, it will be possible to improve overall levels of student engagement and from this enhance student performance and progression. The issue of student progression has been identified as one of significant concern across Computer Science pathways.

### **Project to date:**

A range of potentially appropriate technology was tested in order to determine how attendance within a large lecture theatre could be quickly and easily captured in an electronic form. Tested approaches

included the use of RFID tags (radio-frequency identification), smartcards and barcode scanners.

It was concluded that smartcard readers, potentially reading the QUB student card, offered the best balance between utility, convenience and overall cost. An attendance spreadsheet has been developed that can accept information recorded from the smartcard readers. Using the spreadsheet it has been possible to: quickly identify and contact students with low levels of attendance; send congratulatory emails to students with high levels of attendance; and review how a student's attendance has changed on a week-by-week basis.

In order to support students with unsatisfactory attendance, the project is currently investigating how the personal tutor system can be used as a vehicle to provide support and forwarding advice to students with low attendance. The project is also investigating measures that can be used to encourage attendance for those students who fail to show improvement following engagement with their personal tutor.

## **Dr John McKinley**

School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering

### **Project Title: Computer Assisted Self-Assessment (CASA)**

#### **Summary of Project**

The overall theme of the project is module level computer assisted self-assessment by students with links to their personal development planning (PDP), as a means to encourage students to engage pro-actively with their studies. Automated feedback will facilitate learning, provide and develop support materials for self-assessment, and a structured framework for PDP.

The project is divided into three work packages: Work Package 1 concerns module level personal development planning, focusing on broad communications and research skills; Work Package 2 concerns development of module level material for online self-assessment revision questionnaires; Work Package 3 concerns module level support and development within Queen's for the existing Helping Engineers Learn Mathematics package of curriculum support tools. The underlying philosophy is that students will take responsibility for their own learning progression, and that staff will provide mechanisms for them to do so at a module level.

# Student Engagement

## **Project to date:**

The overall theme of the project is module level computer assisted self-assessment by students with links to their personal development planning (PDP), as a means to encourage students to engage pro-actively with their studies.

We have created a number of automated quizzes through the Queen's Online assessment tool, to allow students to assess their own competencies in important aspects of mathematics, engineering, and IT skills. From these valuable lessons about quiz design and delivery have been drawn which have wider applicability.

We have also provided as a central Queen's resource web access to a substantial set of mathematics learning resources ([www.qub.ac.uk/helm](http://www.qub.ac.uk/helm)) covering topics from basic algebra and solving linear equations through to calculus, Fourier transforms and analysis of variance.

These two resources provide students with firstly a mechanism for assessing their learning needs against a set of expectations set out by staff, and secondly supporting material specifically for mathematics learning that complements other Queen's resources. These link to students' use of the Queen's PDP tool, where we have developed a framework for student's engagement with their own PDP through a Level 1 professional studies module, which provides useful case study material.

