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Project Title:

First Year Student Experience

Project Team:

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Abstract:

The application was made on behalf of the undergraduate courses team who sought to enhance the first year experience by engaging students in the practice of business. The intention was to develop and signpost enterprising qualities and characteristics in first year learners and develop confidence as well as competence.

The undergraduate review for FBL commenced in September 2009. This offered an opportunity to innovate and build good practice in enterprise learning as a pilot to inform the undergraduate review. The team sought to provide a coherent and relevant set of learning experiences that could be achieved outside structured curriculum that would enable learning through live projects.

Scope

500 business students on five courses

PACE 1 is PDP module.

PACE module learning outcomes will be achieved through activity-based learning, formative assessment and reflection.

Delivery is blended mode at Level 1

Teaching suspended for one week during week 6 semester 1 and semester 2

Students engaging in activities designed to familiarise themselves with university resources and facilitate their development of independent learning and encourage behaviour achievement of module learning outcomes

Benefits to students

Business practice where they will be required to implement their own ideas recognise the talents they have and gain a better understanding of what they need to work on to improve.

They will be required to move beyond the problems, focus on solutions, to work as a team and to lead and to be led.

Benefits to FBL

Enterprise in action will have a raised profile in business courses.

Links with business will be enhanced through the creation of real world projects

Project aims:

- Design a learning environment that supports and encourages students to engage, create and collaborate.
- Develop confidence and competence through an authentic enquiry-based approach.
- Student will be able to reflect on, recognise, articulate and evidence what they have learned.
- Take advantage of an opportunity to be more creative with the curriculum and enable learning with increased relevance to real situations outside of module contact time.

These are aims of PACE module

- To support the transition from pre-university to undergraduate education by facilitating the development of the attitude, aptitude, knowledge and understanding essential to autonomous learning.
- To encourage and engender employability skills, such as creativity, entrepreneurship, team-working, analysis and evaluation and leadership.
- To embed an understanding and acceptance of the role of the PACE module in the context of the Level one modules and the entire Level One experience, that will impact positively on the PACE module at Levels 2 and 3.

Process:

Research

The PACE module leader developed the scenario from research into real events at similar organisations. The final version produced after consultation with Faculty Dean who had experience in banking and financial services.

Resources

Scenario research and development
 Expertise of academic team
 PACE tutor time
 Tutorial rooms and lecture theatres
 Thirty digital cameras (on loan from library)
 Prizes for winners

Planning and implementation

The PACE module leader has co-ordinated the project. She has undertaken co-ordination of the both Activity Weeks. This involved liaising with all stakeholders including Timetabling, PACE tutors and workshop providers to devise individual timetable for each group. This was major task as each workshop staged several times, each tutorial group needed support session with PACE tutor and tutor availability was limited. Assessment of the e-portfolio by PACE tutors.

Activity Week 1: A Team Event

Student provided with a business scenario (Back to Basics at West Bank) of a failing organisation.

A potential rescue strategy is proposed.

Students work in a team to decide whether strategy if feasible.

Students undertake real world research with organisations to understand feasibility.

Students film three minute 'rocket pitch' presentation of their decision and upload on to Xstream by deadline.

Students receive lecture briefing prior to activity week but all information on Activity week and regular news updates during week provided via XStream.

During Activity Week, a series of workshops are staged to help students complete the activity.

Students were allocated to teams within course groups.

Each team decided which team member should attend each workshop

Workshops on

- Background to financial crisis
- Working as a team
- Managing a project
- Marketing your ideas
- Preparing and delivering a 'rocket pitch' presentation
- Technical support (filming and uploading the presentation)

PACE tutor for each tutorial group decided best team in the group to be short listed.

The module leader and Dean decide on the winning presentation.

Winning team receive prize (£50 each in book tokens)

The role of PACE

With the exception of a few signpost lectures, this module becomes virtual. In week 1 students will embark on a reflective journey in the practice of business. They are introduced to the concept of Enterprise will explore what is meant by this and identify key competencies of entrepreneurial behaviour.

Students will be required to provide an e-portfolio of evidence which demonstrates they have achieved the competencies set out in the PACE module in the first year.

The e-portfolio will comprise images and reflections on a range of activities, formal studies in modules and project work.

Students will be required to write a reflective statement of their development in the Activity weeks. Support will be available through the personal tutor during each Activity week and throughout the first year.

Outputs:

- Approximately 60% of students participated.
- Major inhibitor was lack of participation by some students.
- Positive feedback from both students and staff
- Student comments included:
 - Hadn't been to library before or used XStream – Activity Week participation forced this
 - Enjoyed the pressure and the deadline
 - Good to finally do something after being at university for six weeks
 - Initially concerned but in the end enjoyed working with team members. Even though in same tutorial group had not spoken to them much before.
 - Felt let down by team members who never attended during activity week

Resources for the next intake have been developed in the form of the real life scenario on West Bank.

Dissemination will take place within the undergraduate review team

Impact:

- A major commitment to enterprise – which is great
- Real world experiences, gets students excited in Year 1
- Using student feedback for evaluation
- Inhibitors were the complexity of the undergraduate scheme and the in-built difficulty of relinquishing students from 'the timetable'.
- Originally there was no intention to assess the Activity Weeks, but felt that students would not engage unless they were being assessed. This was reinforced by the 60% attendance on the Activity Weeks.
- Not all staff were prepared to engage with the initiative. This meant that compromises were made along the way.

Evaluation:

Measures of successful outcomes were:

- Student feedback on the experience, i.e. to what extent they recognise they are capable and confident as a result of their experiences. Students were required to comment on Activity Week as part of their e-portfolio
- Tutor feedback on the experience.
- The degree of engagement at both sessions, measured by attendance registers in Activity Weeks.
- Assignment submission in the PACE module and grades achieved in the PACE module.
- Students required to comment on their experience in Activity Weeks as part of their

reflective e-portfolio summative assessment. This will be received at the end of semester 2.

What next?

The Project will remain for next academic year. The project has not been embedded fully as changes will be made based on feedback from this year.

Considerable organisation involved to move outside of timetabled activity. This is a barrier. Thereafter, activity-based enterprise learning will be designed into the curriculum in undergraduate review, but it is difficult to predict what this will look like. Certainly the learning from this pilot will feed forward to influence this.

Next year we making participation part of summative assessment for module will be considered to ensure maximum participation.

General conclusions:

The Activity Weeks were very hard work for a small group of staff. It was very difficult to enthuse all staff regarding the value of the activity.

The complexity of the curriculum is a barrier in 'loosening' the hold of taught knowledge in the first year curriculum. This needs to be influence the undergraduate review.

Those students who did engage fully found the experience rewarding. This was particularly highlighted at prize-giving ceremony.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Christine Daley, PACE module leader, for her relentless efforts to make this work.

Keywords:

active, problem-solving, teamwork, business

Improving the First Year Student Experience

The Concept

To engage first year students in learning through practical activity that would impact on all first year modules.



What Next?

Develop activity for Semester 2 week and learn from lessons of first experience.

Create materials for this type of activity in the future and build critical mass of knowledge and experience to ensure sustainability of similar activities.

Students will design and compile e-portfolios that showcase Semester 1 and 2 Activity weeks.



The Plan

One week per semester to be curriculum-free so first year students can be involved in a range of entrepreneurial activities to:

- Create a learning environment that encourages engagement, creativity and collaborative learning among students.
- Challenge students through authentic activity, thereby building competence and confidence practical business engagement.



The Practice

This was a real business challenge based around a survival strategy for a failing bank. Based on real events, small teams had to decide whether or not this was a viable strategy for 'West Bank'.

Teams analysed the proposal, made decisions based upon a rationale.

They researched and attended workshops to decide the strategy, presented their results and reflected on what they had learned.

The series of workshops were designed to support the challenge with each team sending a delegate to each who had to report back to their teams.

Workshop topics included background to the banking crisis, presentation skills, working in a team, project management, marketing, technical support.

The event can be viewed on the PACE module X-Stream site

Lessons Learned so far

Many students acknowledged they had been forced to become familiar with, and start using, university facilities, such as library, student email and X-Stream.

The Activity Week was a significant undertaking for the module leader. Semester Activity week needs to be shared and owned by a team rather than one person.