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Exploring enterprising partnerships with West Yorkshire Police

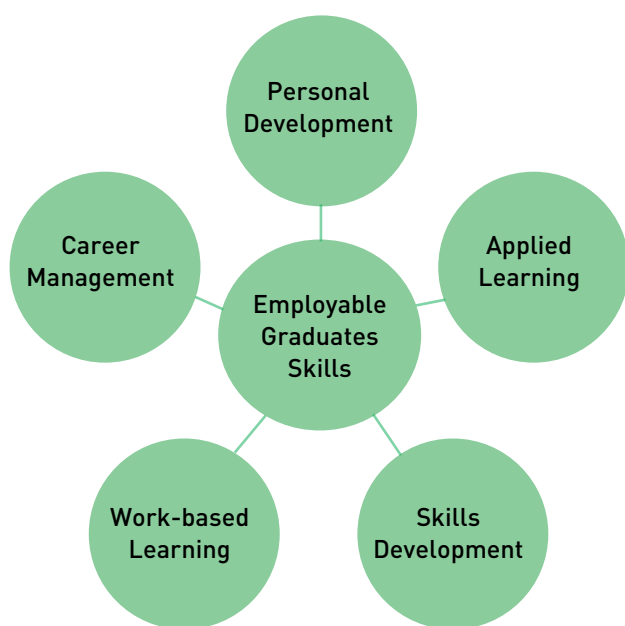
Alexandra J. Kenyon

Introduction

The then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) stated that the UK needs a more employable workforce at Level 4 or above with 'generic' skills such as teamwork, communication, entrepreneurial and 'experiential' knowledge (DIUS, 2008). To embrace this notion universities should no longer consider themselves as a place to 'learn knowledge' but as a provider of holistic learning spaces, enabling students to enter a wider interdisciplinary arena (Gibb, 2005). Universities should provide and assess 'core' knowledge and 'generic' employability and entrepreneurial skills. The 'core' knowledge is associated directly with the subject specialism and disciplines of higher level education. The 'generic' skills are transferable, management skills recognising the self, others, information and the task (Bennett et al, 2000). And as "Promoting student employability and engaging our students in work-related learning" is one of the key tenets of Leeds Met's Assessment, Learning & Teaching Strategy it is imperative we integrate both 'core' and 'generic' skills into our curricula (Leeds Metropolitan University, 2008).

Rae (2007) extended Bennett's 'generic' skills into a practical framework for connecting enterprise and employability (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Connecting generic skills into career learning opportunities



[Adapted from Rae, 2007]

These different 'generic' skills identify enterprising approaches to enhancing employability which in turn can be embedded into curricula; the Best Bar None case outlined below shows how an enterprising work-based learning approach can be applied through a two-way learning link between Leeds Met students and Safer Leeds (part of West Yorkshire's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership).

Two-way learning link

Work-based activities can take many forms from placement opportunities to formal 'doing the job' experiences and informal learning through shadowing or work-related "out of university active learning" (UVAC, 2005). The Best Bar None case provided the latter type of opportunity and enabled Leeds Met students to move into a business environment as research consultants or ambassadors for Safer Leeds.

How our students helped to keep Leeds City centre safe, secure and sociable

In 2003 the Government set four Licensing Objectives to improve the safety and security of the night-time economy. They are:

- the prevention of crime and disorder
- public safety
- the prevention of public nuisance
- the protection of children from harm.

Each local licensing authority must now produce plans detailing how their community will meet the objectives. With over 180 bars and pubs, 90 restaurants and 29 nightclubs in the city centre of Leeds, many business travellers, leisure guests and students enjoy the city centre's vibrant night-time economy. However, too many revellers who 'cross the line' and become drunk and disorderly or commit alcohol-related crimes devalue the perception of Leeds as a 'fun place to be'. West Yorkshire police records show that between 1 in 4 people who attended Accident & Emergency had been assaulted by someone who had consumed alcohol and/or was drunk; alcohol was also a contributory factor for 70% of all domestic violence incidents during 2006-2007 (Safer Leeds, 2008). Safer Leeds, therefore, are tasked to demonstrate how they are addressing the licensing objectives through initiatives that will reduce crime and disorder and enhance public safety.

During the academic year 2008-09 Leeds Met students and Safer Leeds began the Two-way Learning Link. Leeds Met students worked for Safer Leeds on two projects with the aim of improving the safety and security of the night-time economy in Leeds city centre.

What is Best Bar None?

Best Bar None is an inclusive national awards initiative for all licensed premises across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It gives the opportunity for licensed premises to demonstrate they have procedures in place to reduce alcohol-related harm, crime and disorder. Responsible licensed house managers who adhere to the alcohol harm reduction strategy and the Licensing Objectives are rewarded with a Best Bar None Award.

The Best Bar None scheme was successfully launched in Leeds in 2006. Unfortunately, by 2008 the number of pubs, clubs and bars taking part in the initiative had significantly decreased. The Project Officer at Safer Leeds recognised that something needed to be done to investigate why some licensees were no longer interested in the scheme.

Leeds Met and Safer Leeds

The Safer Leeds Project Officer required research consultants and ambassadors for the Best Bar None Award to reinvigorate interest and increase take-up of the scheme. Leeds Met students would be consultants and ambassadors. This would enhance their generic skills and facilitate the application of their core knowledge in a work-related environment. During 2008-09 two projects were launched.

Project 1: Research Consultants

Final-year BA (Hons) Hospitality Business Management and BA (Hons) Entertainment Management students were deployed as research consultants for Safer Leeds. Three teams worked together over a period of four months, improving teamwork, project management, interpersonal communication and self-management skills by conducting primary research with licensed house managers and reporting findings and recommendations in both written and oral formats. The project aimed to investigate the benefits of Best Bar None with pubs/bars who engaged with the scheme, and why some pubs/bars and clubs did not engage with it.

Recommendations from the research have already been put in place by the Project Officer, such as raising the profile of Best Bar None at Freshers' Fairs and providing a brochure of pubs/clubs and bars that have the Best Bar None Award.

Project 2: Best Bar None Ambassadors

Second-year HND and BA (Hons) Hospitality Business Management and BA (Hons) Entertainment Management students were deployed as Best Bar None Ambassadors. Students learnt core knowledge such as licensing law and Best Bar None's objectives and procedures. They worked in pairs, each interviewing licensed house managers. Generic skills gained included managing their own time, leadership, self-presentation, problem solving and communication through written feedback. Students applied their core knowledge with generic skills as they assessed capacity management and CCTV procedures, for example to establish evidence of staff training and identify clear drug confiscation processes and drunkenness procedures. The evidence provided by the student ambassadors was returned to the Project Manager who presented pubs, clubs and bars with the Best Bar None Award and exceptional bars – such as The Viaduct – with the Best Pub Award 2009.

'Generic' skills

The Hospitality and Entertainment students have had a unique experience. They have worked with industry to apply and develop their 'generic' skills. Both projects required students to be resourceful, adaptable and flexible. Basic skills including communication and data analysis were included as part of the project. Additionally, 'intellectual abilities' such as critical evaluation, internal and external planning across the team and with industry were also required. Other, 'softer' generic skills such as work ethic, sensitivity to the nature of the business, influencing and leadership were also highlighted in the students' personal reflections as they realised their actions were helping the local community. Additionally, each student had the opportunity of representing 'a self outside themselves'; no longer were they simply Leeds Met students but also ambassadors for West Yorkshire Police.

Both projects took the students outside the 'comfort zone' of the University environment and into a work-based learning space. They understood how their projects fitted into the Government's 'big picture' and were immensely satisfied with "working for the greater good of the whole".

Conclusion

The professionalism and commitment of the students has been praised by West Yorkshire Police and the Home Office, who are now showcasing their work on their website as best practice for other crime and disorder reduction partnerships in the UK to replicate (Home Office, 2009).

I hope that when asked about their time at Leeds Met our students will reflect on how they became social entrepreneurs, with Safer Leeds and the licensed retail industry, to meet the licensing objectives set by the Government and ensure the night-time in Leeds city centre remains a 'fun place to be'.

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Alexandra J. Kenyon

Centre for Hospitality and Retailing
Leslie Silver International Faculty