 

# Creating Future Proof Graduates

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The Creating Future Proof Graduates project was the result of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme project strand initiative funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and managed by the Higher Education Academy, and matched funding by Birmingham City University.

49 pages

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## 1 Acknowledgements

The Creating Future Proof Graduates project was the result of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme project strand initiative funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and managed by the Higher Education Academy, and matched funding by Birmingham City University. The project benefited from help, advice and assistance from a wide range of partners. In particular, the project team would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following employers, both on the Project Steering Group and in the research:

Employers

* Deborah Walthorne – DWA Housing Consultants;
* Zoe Wakeman – Eversheds;
* Chris Jones – Dudley Performing Arts;
* Keith Stubbs – City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

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* Professor Diana Eastcott.

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* Geraldine McManus and the staff of the Early Years Department South Birmingham College;
* Carl Hopley at Birmingham Metropolitan College.

The project team consisted of five full time members of staff at Birmingham City University: Celia Popovic, Ruth Lawton, Anne Hill, Jenny Eland and Nick Morton. Other members of staff played significant roles. Carmen Tomas was appointed as Research Assistant on the project, and although she moved on to other opportunities before the project was completed she made a significant and valuable contribution to the project while in post. In addition to conducting much of the research, she assisted the project manager by implementing a range of systems and processes to keep the project on track, including an evaluation strategy for the resources.

Several BCU employees assisted in the creation, development and evaluation of the resources. Rachel Curzon (working with Nick Morton) was integral to ‘Ethical Dilemmas’, Alison Turnbull and Suzanne Cooper developed ‘Expecting the Unexpected’, the Library and Learning Resources team, in particular John Ridgway, created ‘Who, What, Where’, and Julian Lamb worked with Celia Popovic on ‘Stone Soup’. Simon Spencer, Mike Jackson and Nicola Bartholomew worked with Anne Hill to develop the scenarios in ‘Too Much Information’. Jo Powell was very creative with the Networking Board Game. Rod Dungate is both a visiting teacher at BCU and an independent educational resource developer with Personal Performance and Synchronicity TV; in both capacities he was key to the creation of ‘Getting On With It’ (developed with Celia Popovic) and through his technical expertise was instrumental in bringing the DVDs for most of the resources to fruition. Ian Phiby took lead roles in several of the scenarios in ‘Getting On With It’. Natalie Hinchley created the cartoon for Stone Soup, we are particularly grateful to her and Ian Whittle for the stylish and quirky characters that were created. Tiger TV ( - a student run organisation at BCU) were heavily involved at an early stage of the project and made significant contributions to ‘Ethical Dilemmas’. Think Creative did a wonderful job of packaging the resources and developing the board for the Networking Game.

Many of the resources involved input from students at BCU, from the Birmingham School of Acting and the Conservatoire. These include:

Stone Soup: Rachel Bright, Teresa Critchley, Simon Lewis Marriott, Gabriel Paul, David Sol, Deborah Tracey

Getting On With It: Grace Evans, Adam Fray, Emma Geddes, Nick Holbek, Alexia Barbera, Anna Holbek, Angelica Bergese

Ethical Dilemmas: Edward Barry, Philip Jennings, John-Robert Price, Bobbie O’Callaghan, Rachel Murphy, Hannah Wood, Paul Gabriel, Kamara Taylor, Simon Marriott

Too Much Information: Teresa Critchley, Rod Dungate, Grace Evans, Paul Gabriel, Jennifer McIntosh, Simon Lewis Marriott and Deborah Tracey

Expecting the Unexpected: Teresa Critchley, Sonia Kaur, David Sol

The project team was grateful for the support provided by Senior Management at BCU, from the initial inception through to the project completion. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Tidmarsh, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic, Professor Mary Carswell, and the Director of Learning and Teaching, Professor Stuart Brand, all gave constant encouragement and support, and it was Professor Carswell who suggested the name ‘Creating Future Proof Graduates’.

## 2 Executive summary

The project team, comprising two National Teaching Fellows Professor Anne Hill and, Dr Nick Morton; project lead Dr Celia Popovic, and Ruth Lawton, Jenny Eland and Dr Carmen Tomas aimed to design, deploy and evaluate methods for engaging a diverse range of students in transformative learning to enhance their skills for employment.. This has been achieved through the development of a suite of simulated critical incident case studies co-authored in collaboration with employers and other partners which can be integrated into any student learning experience. The outputs include eight multimedia resources; these have been evaluated and are accompanied by teaching notes. Our aim has been to take a cross-disciplinary approach to maximise our capacity for preparing students for the workplace, thus creating ‘future proof’ individuals. We are pleased to share these resources with the entire Higher Education community.

Our intention was to provide the sector with an evidence-based set of successful design principles for delivering transformative learning through the utilisation of critical incident scenarios. The term ‘critical incident’ has been used extensively in the Health disciplines. However, we support Cowan’s belief (1998) that, although academics and professionals make much of the differences between disciplines, it is possible to transfer ideas and concepts from one to another when the focus is on the cognitive and affective domains. The resources that we have created can, and have been, adapted and adopted by academics across a range of disciplines. The transferable nature of our outputs has generated interest across the sector and beyond, including employers who have requested copies to use with their employees.

The project has made a significant impact in our own institution. It arose at a time when the University was reviewing its Mission Statement and learning and teaching strategy. Building on a strong tradition of recognising the importance of innovative and effective approaches to learning, teaching and assessment at BCU, the Mission Statement places renewed emphasis on providing the highest-quality learning experience for our students, with a positive commitment to flexible, practice-based learning and employability. In this context we have developed the project with support from across the University and we have benefited from a determination at its highest levels to embed these innovations.

The learning processes that these resources facilitate in students allow them to manage change and gain confidence as they work through the critical incidents, developing decision making skills and encouraging them to examine the implications of their actions or inactions for themselves, their peers and wider society.

## 3 Background

The world of work has changed significantly over the last few years and a degree is no longer enough to secure graduate employment. Students entering HE have an expectation that this will provide a graduate level job and ‘employability’:

“It is clear that, as a more diverse population chooses to go to university, greater emphasis is being placed on long-term employment prospects when choosing institutions and courses”

(Purcell and Elias, 2006).

The Institute of Directors (IoD) Briefing (2007) expressed concerns that employers find most graduates are unprepared for employment and highlighted that employability skills are perceived by employers as more important than subject specific skills.

The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) argues that:

“Much more effort needs to be made.....to get the message across that going to university and coming out with a 2.1…is not enough to land a graduate level job. You have to develop your skills and experience….21st century graduates need to demonstrate to employers that they can ‘hit the ground running'.”

(*Daily Mail,* 30 January 2007).

The UK’s Council for Industry and Higher Education (Archer and Davison, 2008) identified 33 skills and capabilities valued by employers. The skills ranked most highly by employers were communication and team-working, yet in terms of actual demonstration of these skills, employers rated them as 7 and 16. This suggests there is a gap between the skills demonstrated by graduates and those required in the workplace.

The issue facing HE is how to help students to attain these skills, given the myriad of other demands on their time. *Creating Future-proof Graduates* has addressed issues identified by some employers as critical, yet often ‘missed’ in traditional higher education teaching on transferable skills (Longley, Shaw and Dolan, 2007).

An obvious way to develop skills would be through practical experience on placements. However, placements are becoming less common in HE and, in view of the current focus on employability, this posed an important question: how else could the project team offer practical and professional experience to develop confidence, self awareness, and cognitive and affective abilities in a safe, reproducible and yet authentic way?

The team advocate transformative learning as the means to achieve these ends. As described by Mezirow (1991) and others (Harvey and Knight 1996, cited in Corder, Horsburg and Melrose, 1999), transformation can be achieved through cognitive and intellectual change. There is a need to create a learning environment where the student gains metacognitive awareness of strategies which challenge their instinctive approaches, catalysing critical thinking and reflection. This reflects the notion, confirmed by our employer partners, that contemporary work environments require creative thinking, problem-solving, and effective teamwork.

The solution was to identify ‘critical incidents’ where new and recent graduates lacked ability or confidence and then to create a number of resources to enable students to ‘practice’ in the classroom. The project evolved out of a long-standing interest at Birmingham City University in innovative practices, especially in using games and simulations as tools to encourage participation and engagement. Realised through different media, the resources include delivery mechanisms such as cartoon strips, videos, animations and role-plays.

The term ‘critical incidents’ is ‘borrowed’ from the Health Educational field (Lockyer, Gondocz and Thierge, 2005). These are normally incidents occurring in the workplace, so in this project these have been created in partnership with employers on the Project Board and others to reflect real world scenarios. Critical incidents act as triggers which may be used to spark exploration of issues, often by facing students with dilemmas or ethically challenging behaviours and these, supported by discussion, debate and other activities can encourage the deep learning process and development of self-awareness.

Yorke and Knight (2002) identified a number of constructs for employability in HE, any of which enable a good graduate to “stay in the race” (Brown, 2002, cited in Yorke and Knight, 2002). Throughout the *Creating Future-proof Graduates* project, the team have focused on one of these constructs, by devising critical incidents, embedded within the curriculum, to provide opportunities for students to develop, practice and reflect upon a varied range of ‘employability’ skills. These prove a useful addition to teaching repertoires as they can engage learners in ways other teaching approaches do not by offering more opportunities for students to become self aware and self developmental.

Knight and colleagues (2002) suggested it was useful to focus on a few ‘employability skills’ and to “bombard” students with as many opportunities to practice as possible. Simulations and games have a role in providing suitable environments for such practice, especially where students are given the time and space to be reflective, as suggested by Schön (1987). Simulations, within a ‘safe’ environment, can test students’ ability to problem solve real or anticipated situations. This can prepare them for professional, workplace or emergency situations in the real world. Beetham (1997) highlighted that the “imaginative use of ICT can engage more learners in the excitement of learning”. Simulations and games can use ICT formats for group and individual exploration. Although more sophisticated role plays now engage the players in virtual worlds it is also possible to create simulations using, for example, role play type activities in the classroom.

This meets one of the priorities of the project; that the resources are for use in the classroom, not simply as stand-alone tools for students to engage with as an extra-curricular activity. Thus opportunities to practice and experience skills are embedded in the curriculum. Furthermore students are given the opportunity to manage change and to gain confidence as they work, developing decision making skills and encouraging them to examine the implications of their actions or inactions for themselves, their peers and wider society (Deforges, 2000).

## 4. Aims and objectives

The overarching aim and purpose of the project, as stated in the executive summary, was to provide the sector with an evidence-based set of successful design principles for delivering transformative learning through the utilisation of critical incident scenarios. What this meant in practice was that we wished to make available a package of resources that could be used to embed and enhance wider employability skills within the curriculum throughout the higher education sector. The resources would be cross-curricular, multi-disciplinary and therefore highly transferable.

### In order to do this we needed:

* To develop critical incident scenarios which will support transformative learning
* To work with employer partners in developing relevant work-focused experiences for students
* To create innovative tools for academics which provide opportunities for ‘employability’ development in the classroom and through virtual learning
* To ensure that the project outputs will be transferable and not limited by access to resources or specific media
* To implement a longitudinal, action research testing and evaluation regime
* To disseminate findings through national and international conferences, and articles in peer-reviewed journals

Because we had embedded a reflective evaluation strand into the project (see section 7 Outputs and Findings) we were able to review and reaffirm our outcomes at stages through the life of the project. None of the original aims changed.

However, as a result of the first stage of team and project evaluation, we did identify some critical success factors which were concrete, measurable targets that we as a project team all agreed to at the half way stage of the project (October 2008):

* That six to eight products would be created and evaluated according to the timeline of the project
* Each product/resource to be used in a minimum of two different faculties
* At least one product/resource to be used in another institution
* A sustainable strategy to be put into place for embedding the resources, including with employers
* The project team members have had the opportunity to participate in a reflective learning process
* The project as a whole to contribute to the credibility of the Project Team within the home institution
* The Project Team to aim for at least one refereed article and a minimum of two external Conference Papers or sessions

The team knew that we had met most of the critical success factors - and more, before the major dissemination event on December 11th 2009.

The one potential weakness in the list of critical success factors above is the ‘sustainability’ strategy; but the project does not end with 2009 and the team continues to implement the action plans designed to maintain and further develop the resources and their accessibility to the HE sector.

## 5. Methodology

The overall approach of the project was firstly to identify required skills, through reference to the literature and then through primary research with employers, graduates and lecturers. Having identified the skills, we sought eight critical incidents to reflect the targeted skills. We then created eight resources aimed at addressing the critical skills. These were trialled with students. We used a three way evaluation process which examined:

1. The project process;
2. The project team; and
3. The resources themselves.

This project has involved four distinct elements, several of which overlap temporally, but can be examined individually from a methodological point of view. These are:

* Research
* Resource production
* Evaluation
* Dissemination

### Research

Our starting point was to scope out the extent of the skills gap. As explained in Section 2, we were aware of the gap between the skills demonstrated by graduates and those required in the workplace. Following the review of current research, the project team conducted in-depth interviews with students, graduates, employers and academic staff to understand the individual perception and/or experience of ‘graduate employability’ (see Appendix 1). The interviews were exploratory and aimed to elicit areas of difficulty, which, in the early stages in the workplace, were relevant to graduates’ development as professionals. Employers and graduates were questioned regarding the most important employability skills. It became obvious that there were some clear overlaps between graduates’ and employers’ views:

* literacy: writing for diverse audiences;
* personal attributes: developing assertiveness (saying “no”);
* people related skills:
* dealing with shocking situations (what to do when a theoretical model fails)
* career related: finding out what they do not want to do; understanding the profession and knowing how to go about finding information.

The research further showed that cultural awareness or cultural sensitivity is crucial to most, if not all, graduate employment. Employer partners also raised an issue relating to developing good communication skills, recognising that even though the work students cover in their course provides the knowledge, there remain concerns at how this is then communicated to clients.

A survey of graduates undertaken at the University (UCE Birmingham, 2005/6) included a ‘things you wished you had known’ question and 16% of respondents cited networking/social confidence as being essential skills which were not covered in the curriculum. This skill set also came up in interviews with the employers.

Additionally, national research (Gilworth and Thambar, ND) and the project team’s interviews showed that applicants for graduate jobs often do inadequate research which is revealed by their answers to interview questions.

Having identified eight areas where resources were scarce or unavailable, the team had to determine ways to address the skills gaps. An obvious way to develop skills would be through practical experience on placements, but placements are not commonly used for various reasons. Instead we chose to develop critical incidents again as described in Section 3 Background.

### Resource production

The project team met in sub-groups, often involving other people internal and external to the BCU, to develop the resources. The specific description of each resource is given in Section 7. We were committed to involving BCU students where ever possible.

With each resource, the starting point was to devise a critical incident. The sub-group developed ways to illustrate the incident. In some cases this involved the use of multimedia such as video, in others it was less high-tech, as in the case of the Networking Skills Game. The purpose was to find the most appropriate medium for the resource in question.

In most cases resource production involved actors and external technical support. We implemented a process to ensure that participants were fully aware of their contribution to the resource and their intellectual property rights in connection with the subsequent product. All participants were required to sign appropriate forms to indicate their acceptance of the conditions.

At the start of the project we intended using the BCU student-run video production team (Tiger TV). Unfortunately this did not have the required result, as lack of expertise on both the part of the students concerned and the project team led to the decision to complete the resource (Ethical Dilemmas) with the help of a professional video production company.

### Evaluation

From the outset we identified the need to have a thorough reflective evaluation process for the project and identified three strands to our evaluation strategy (see Section 7). We were fortunate to source a key professional in the field, Professor Diana Eastcott, who undertook the first two elements of this evaluation strategy: evaluation of the process and evaluation of the project team, completing the final report in early 2010. The project team themselves managed the third strand, evaluation of the resources.

The methodology used for the third strand of evaluation involved identifying the key learning elements anticipated for each resource, and then surveying students before and after use of the resource to identify whether the learning had taken place. This method was not without flaws, as in many cases the learning would not be evidenced until some considerable time after the intervention, i.e. when the students have graduated and are working in their first graduate level job. We supplemented this initial approach with questionnaires for students and lecturers which seek to identify what, if anything, the resource users value about the resource, the relevance to their needs and to elicit suggestions for improvement.

### Dissemination

The project team’s definition of dissemination extends far beyond the notion of telling others about our work. Although we see this as a vital element of dissemination, we would consider ourselves successful in this area only if our resources are used by other people, both in the HE sector and beyond.

We addressed dissemination from the earliest stages. We identified relevant conferences and events where we could publicise our work. We regarded each meeting of the Project Board as an opportunity to involve our partners in our work, and to share our findings with them. We created a website, which houses all of the resources and supportive documents.

On December 11th we hosted an event in the Banqueting Suite of Birmingham City Council’s Council House. The event attracted around 90 participants. The project team gave an overview of the project, and a demonstration of the eight resources. A resource pack was given to a representative from each of the HEIs in attendance. The intention is to provide each HEI in the UK, with a set of resources. We acknowledge the need to contextualise the resources in order to maximise future use. To this end we will be arranging further events in 2010 at various locations in the UK to distribute the packs. All resources are readily available on the project website at [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof)

## 6. Implementation

Once the bid was accepted, the project team of five BCU members of staff met to plan the project. It was agreed that Celia Popovic would be project manager, working closely with the rest of the team to conduct the research, produce the resources and disseminate the findings.

We began by timetabling project meetings and project board meetings. We followed the time plan that we had devised at the time of writing the bid and, as far as possible, stuck to this plan. However we faced several challenges along the way.

We appointed a research assistant. The process involved in doing this commenced as soon as we heard that we had won the bid. The original plan was that this person would join the project in July 2007, but the earliest we were able to appoint a research assistant was September 2007. Unfortunately the project manager was on sick leave for the first three months of the project. While this did not prevent the start of the project – indeed, a considerable amount of research took place in this period - the team did feel that the project lost focus and initial impetus. The ground was soon recovered once the project manager returned to work.

The research involved employers, students and lecturers. Employer involvement was key to our project and our success. Our first approaches for partners at the bidding stage were to employers who were known to members of the project team. All agreed to join the Project Board and all but one subsequently played an important role in providing time, information, support and many ideas. One initial partner, in the financial sector, was lost in the economic downturn.

Research included national and international large scale projects, particularly with regard to skills gaps and graduate attitudes. Some data gathering was less formal; for example one team member was in the audience at a presentation from the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) where ‘commercial awareness’ was identified by members of AGR as the ‘least well evidenced’ skill by students. This was backed up by other national research and became our first ‘scenario’.

We also undertook in-depth one-to-one interviews with employers seeking to explore their experiences with graduates (see Section 5 and Appendix 1). These stories from employers were crucial to the validity of our project, and also turned out to be a wonderful way to gain insight. ‘Tell me a story about a good graduate’ and ‘tell me a story about a not so good graduate’ yielded superb data.

Having talked to employers we then used the same processes to research students and graduates, including national research, one-to-one interviews and our own data from a longitudinal destination project completed in 2006 (UCE Birmingham, 2005/6). Analysis of all of these sources confirmed some ideas the project team had already voiced such as ethical dilemmas, or identified unexpected scenarios e.g. social confidence.

Finally we researched material already developed for each of the identified skills. Sometimes this yielded unexpectedly fruitful results, as was the case with one of the most mentioned skills gaps: time management. Employers and graduates raised this repeatedly. Simply ‘Googling’ ‘time management resources’ provided 180 million hits – many of which lead to some high quality resources which can be used easily and freely in the classroom; many are specifically designed for higher education and some are designed by employers. There was no point trying to reinvent the wheel when someone had done it extremely well already.

Once the skills had been identified we began work on the resources (See Section 7 for the outlines of the resources created and tested). We did not attempt to work on all eight at once.

### General Resource Production Issues

The project team drew on their network of colleagues around the University to help in the development and testing of the resources. Because the team recognised that, according to Segal (2003), with “the short term nature of project work, there is less room for error or prevarication” it was important to use practising teachers across as wide a range of disciplines as possible to ensure that the resources met the needs of both students and staff.

The project team’s challenge was to create a range of resources using as many different media as possible. In order to create the resources, the project team needed creative and technical support. Staff themselves and students within the institution provided some of the technical ‘expertise’ and support. Students played a vital role, including student actors and musicians for some of the scenarios and a student led company worked on producing some of the resources. Each resource has been used in a different context, covering various disciplinary areas and levels of study. Resources have already been used by more than one discipline or level of study and some are being used by partner institutions. Employer partners have also expressed an interest in using the resources with new recruits or as part of in-house training, with one already using some.

All but one of the resources have been trialled and evaluated. Evaluation throughout the project has been seen as essential. Individual analysis of each resource focused on the creative learning and fitness for purpose. There can be a tendency for such evaluation to only focus on the success of project outcomes. However, it is a characteristic of this project that the evaluation has been both formative and summative, since the findings have been used to inform the continuing development of the resources. The main tool for data collection was a questionnaire before and another one after the session in which the resource was used. The questions aimed to evaluate the students’ perceptions of the value of the resource used in supporting the development of the relevant skills. Therefore, these varied across subject and resource. The overall aim of using these resources was to enhance students’ confidence in their transition to the workplace and all the questionnaires addressed this focal issue whilst including subject-specific questions where it was felt to be relevant. Debriefing about the resource content was found to be essential for students and the content creators to understand and appreciate the way the materials enhanced the learning process.

Students were given a second questionnaire, normally one or two weeks after the session, as we wanted to hear their views after a period of reflection.

Time was one of the problems which had to be managed. Developing the expertise needed to execute the vision and subsequently evaluate the creation of the resources required more training and time than the lead content creators had available, given the demands of teaching and programme administration. With hindsight the team realised that they should have built in more time to allow for this development. Despite this most of the resources were produced ahead or on time.

One of the unpredictable elements of this, and any, project is the fallibility of human beings. The project team experienced more than its fair share of ill health with some members being absent for several months. All of the project team present at the start of the project are still employed at BCU, but the research assistant who was appointed on a fixed contract secured another post elsewhere and left the project before it was completed. These absences presented problems for the team, but between us we managed to absorb the work. We were very grateful to the HEA for agreeing to extend the project from 24 to 30 months, and this was key to us managing eventually to hit our targets.

The project has been evaluated in a three way process: evaluation of the individual products; evaluation by and of the project team and evaluation of the process of developing, managing and implementing the project as a whole.

## 7. Outputs and findings

As already discussed in the preceding sections, in the course of conducting research into graduates’ and employers' views, it became obvious that there were some clear overlaps, especially in the identification of the gaps either felt by recent graduates themselves, or witnessed in them by their employers. Areas of common concern included personal attributes (e.g. developing assertiveness or saying "no"); people-related skills; dealing with shocking situations (what to do when a theoretical model fails), and career-related skills (understanding the profession and knowing how to go about finding information). As a result of this process a series of skills were selected to be focused upon in detail during the project, each one paired with a resource designed to test and improve students’ abilities in relation to the skill area:

### Table 1: The Key Skills Areas and Resources Created

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Resource** |
| Cultural awareness | No Offence Meant |
| Providing relevant answers | Too Much Information |
| Professional Ethics | Ethical Dilemmas |
| Networking and social confidence | The Networking Game |
| Unexpected and extreme emotions & reactions | Expecting the Unexpected |
| Social responsibility | Stone Soup |
| Research skills | Who, What, Where |
| Bullying and the misuse of power | Getting On With It |

### The Resources in Outline

The eight resources which have been created are briefly summarised below. Please see Appendix 2 for a more detailed review of the creative process for each resource.

#### No Offence Meant

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/no-offence-meant](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/no-offence-meant)

The incidents outlined in this scenario relate to all the different aspects of cultural awareness. From national culture through corporate culture to personal and professional. The resource consists of presentations, work sheets, games and advice.

#### Too Much Information

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/tmi](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/tmi)

Employers from a range of disciplines commented on the problem of weaning graduates from the behaviours instilled in them by typical assessment processes. When such graduates are asked to give professional advice, their information is usually correct but goes beyond what is needed by the client. In this resource, students are encouraged to put themselves in the place of the client and recognise the difference between being told the ‘textbook’ response and receiving relevant advice. The resource consists of audiovisual files illustrating four different contexts (housing, health, IT and education) with accompanying teaching notes.

#### Ethical Dilemmas

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/ethical-dilemmas](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/ethical-dilemmas)

In this scenario an employee overhears someone sharing commercially sensitive information. The incident is written with sufficient ambiguity that uncertainty is created in the mind of the participant regarding the best course of action to take, prompting debate and reflection upon what constitutes professional and ethical behaviour. Supporting the scenario, a series of ‘talking heads’ (characters the new graduate in the specific scenario might turn to for advice) provide their own opinions on the actions the graduate might take. The material is produced on DVD for use as a classroom activity or as part of an assessment, with the ‘talking heads’ being used as a tool for opening up additional avenues of debate.

#### The Networking Game

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/network](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/network)

Interviews and research with employers and graduates all cite networking and social confidence as a crucial skill for new graduates. Yet employers say that they rarely see evidence of it at recruitment stage and they avoid putting new graduates in a situation where social confidence is required. This resource includes true & false and multiple choice questions to increase students knowledge and interactive questions to enable them to experience, discuss and rehearse some of the skills and behaviours they will need in the professional workplace.

#### Expecting the Unexpected

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/expecting-the-unexpected](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/expecting-the-unexpected)

Many graduates comment that theoretical models learned during their course do not always translate easily into practice – for example, when confronted with unexpected reactions in the workplace, such as emotional or angry clients or work colleagues. This resource consists of a DVD with actors role playing a client/colleague presenting a range of difficult simulated situations. The DVD is used in class with one group of students chosen to deal with the difficult situation, whilst another group act as “coaches” building self esteem and self confidence or as “reporters”, analysing what happened in the session.

#### Stone Soup

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/stonesoup](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/stonesoup)

This is a rework of the Brothers Grimm story where stranger encourages villagers to produce a nourishing soup by offering to make the meal using nothing more than a stone. By encouraging the villagers to contribute seemingly inconsequential additions such as an onion or a carrot, the whole community is soon enjoying a meal together. This animation is used as a trigger to enable students to discuss the issues raised in the context of a contemporary workplace. The resource is also used to develop students’ understanding of storytelling in modern society and as a tool to convey shared values. It thus encourages them to contextualise team work and social responsibility beyond the classroom.

#### Who, What, Where…

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/whowhatwhere](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/whowhatwhere)

Both national research and the project team’s interviews showed that applicants for graduate jobs often do inadequate research which is revealed by their answers to interview questions. This Web 2.0 based resource is designed to encourage students to connect the actions required for a search for employment to the searches and research required for academic attainment. It supports the process of searching for a job, researching the company and its background; and investigating the graduate market / sector.

#### Getting On With It

#### [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/unaccacceptable](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/unaccacceptable)

Three scenarios illustrate different situations which could be construed as forms of bullying, but are unlikely to be seen as this by the ‘perpetrators’. In each case Birmingham City University student actors create the scenarios. At the end of each one the key players discuss their feelings about the situation. The DVD resource is designed to help students manage their reactions when negotiating with people or groups in perceived positions of power.

### Dissemination and Evaluation of the Resources

As previously described, the resources have already been used in a wide range of different contexts, covering various disciplinary areas and levels of study. It was critical to the project that the impact of these resources was not restricted by subject area or institution, and that they were made available for dissemination as widely as possible. The primary vehicle for this has been the project website, [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof), which contains content, teaching notes, and other supporting material for all of the resources, and which we are committed to continuing to develop after the completion of the project.

The project as a work in progress has been presented at several conferences both nationally and internationally and a number of articles and peer reviewed journal articles have been accepted and published. The project team have also authored a chapter for an international (Australian edited) on-line book on the pedagogy of scenario based learning.

### Evaluation

One of the priorities for the project team right from the start was to ‘learn for next time’. As outlined in Section 4 (Aims and Objectives) we established a facilitated reflective evaluation strand in the early months of the project, led by an external consultant, which enabled us to recognise achievements and challenges and identify outcomes that were crucial to us as a team.

The evaluation strategy for the project was based on the illuminative approach of Partlett and Hamilton(1972). Two key principles underpin the approach to evaluation taken:

* the importance of negotiating and agreeing the purposes for and the processes of the evaluation with the Project Team
* the value of evaluation as a collaborative process built into the life of the project, working as an ongoing cycle contributing to the adjustment and improvement of the quality of the project outcomes and the development of the Project Team members.

In the context of these principles, the basis of the Evaluation Strategy was agreed through a workshop session with the External Evaluation Consultant and the Project Team in March 2008 using the RUFDATA framework (Saunders, 2000). At this stage it was agreed that there would be three main strands, or foci, of evaluation:

1. evaluation of the Project Team process
2. evaluation of the processes involved in creating the products/resources
3. evaluation of the products/resources themselves.

The aim of this was to inform and facilitate the development of local practice in the context of the project. There were two phases; the first took place in May/July 2008 – designed to look forward to the next year of the project - and the second in November 2009. The 2009 evaluation was planned for later in the year because of the extension to the project timeline and it provided the opportunity to look back on 2008-2009 and into the future.

The evaluation was conducted by Professor Diana Eastcott as external consultant to the project. A key objective was to use this process as a vehicle for our own learning and development and for the development of the project as an ongoing iterative process. Having completed a piece of reflective writing, this was followed by a confidential semi-structured interview with each of the project team members. As Rust (1998) advocated, participants are asked to consider whether the experience would change their future behaviours. The first report focused on reflection–on-action (Schon, 1983), highlighting the most positive aspects of being involved with the project and reflection-for-action (Cowan, 1998) moving the project team forward into its second year of development and evaluation.

In the first stage the team were asked to reflect on:

* What are the most rewarding things about working on this project for you?
* What are the challenges involved in working on this project for you?
* What would you like to be different in academic year 08/09, for you and for the Project Team as a whole?

Highlights for the team members included:

* Being strongly committed to the production of professional, high quality resources which could be used in teaching and which would be enjoyed by students and enhance their learning
* How creative and rewarding the creating of new resources was proving to be
* The chance to work with new people across the whole University and the interaction with employers
* The sharing of ideas, which was seen as interesting and stimulating

Some points of action were identified:

* Setting clear aims, outcomes and related critical success factors
* Giving more attention to the process of team working as a means of enabling progress with the project work
* Involving more people in the work of the project, ensuring that the skills of everyone involved are fully used, new ones facilitated and that the team focus on ensuring that everyone involved feels encouraged and included.
* Considering new ways to use the available time for the project
* Planning a much clearer dissemination strategy

We were able to implement much of the learning from the reflective process in the following year.

As identified in Section 4, as a result of the first stage of team and project evaluation, we agreed some critical success factors which were concrete, measurable targets, and which we are pleased to say have now been achieved.

These were:

* The creation of between six and eight resources
* Each resource tested in more than one different context or institution besides Birmingham City University
* Having a sustainability strategy in place – all resources are available via the website [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof) as free downloads and there was a dissemination conference in December 2009. Every higher education institution in England is entitled to receive a set of the resources in a ‘compendium’.
* All the project team members having the opportunity to participate in a reflective learning process
* Wide dissemination of findings - this process included a national conference hosted by the project team in December 2009, two international conference papers and a number of UK conference papers and a book chapter. The team are also in discussions with a publisher about a book focusing on the project, resources and evaluations. Dissemination events have been led by project team members across the University and content creators have been drawn into the project from across the institution.

In the second stage evaluation in November 2009 the first two questions remained the same but two additional questions were added:

1. What have you learnt that can be transferred to other contexts in terms of project team process and creating resources in a multi disciplinary team?
2. To what extent has the project met its broad aim of ‘providing the sector with an evidence based set of design principles for delivering transformative learning through the utilisation of critical incident scenarios.’ (quoted from the Project Bid,

p 2.)

The Project Team members commented on the following aspects of the work as being rewarding:

* The satisfaction in creating a set of resources which were of benefit to students and that were of a professional high standard.
* The fact that there was a tangible outcome from the project, which was produced to time
* The opportunity for a creative outlet away from the day to day workload and responsibilities
* The improved team process provided effective momentum for working to deadlines
* The positive aspects of the collaborative process –enthusiasm and the opportunity for new networks and working relationships
* The opportunity to publish and to encourage others to publish
* The sense of personal journey and capacity building for the future

There were some challenging aspects to being engaged with the project as the samples below demonstrate:

* The lack of time and space for the project in the context of an already demanding full time work schedule. The pressure of balancing workloads in order to meet deadlines for the project
* The context in which the project was operating with other pressures on staff
* The skills required to create the resources, for example the skills of film making- including script writing, casting, rehearsal and editing, had to be bought in and there was sometimes a clash of cultures between film makers and academics.
* Some aspects of team process were described as challenging, for example maintaining ownership of aspects of the project

Evaluation of the team was accompanied by a detailed evaluation of the resources as used with students, testing fitness for purpose. The main tool for data collection was a questionnaire before and another one after the session in which the resource was used. The questions aimed to evaluate the students’ perceptions of the value of the resource used in supporting the development of the relevant skills. Therefore, these varied across subject and resource. The overall aim of using these resources was to enhance students’ confidence in their transition to the workplace and all the questionnaires addressed this focal issue whilst including subject-specific questions where it was felt to be relevant. At a distance from the session where the resources were used, to enable a period of reflection on the session, a second questionnaire was distributed, normally one or two weeks after the session.

Each of the resources shows a difference in the extent to which they impact on students’ reflections on workplace scenarios, and their perceived self-confidence in dealing with similar situations in the future. The findings from the ratings of usefulness of resources also show the importance of embedding the resources in well-structured sessions, and that students valued the opportunity to discuss alternative perspectives and approaches. Adult motivation and learning are enhanced if the learning context and materials are authentic and relevant to the student’s needs, if learning can be done independently and experientially if knowledge can be immediately applied (Caffarella, 2002, cited in Winning *et al,* 2004 ). By creating learning resources to meet these demands, it is essential that packages are motivating, integrated, systematic and self-directed and include sufficient background information and clear guidance from the tutor. The evaluation therefore suggests that the approach the team have taken to produce resources which use critical incidents as triggers complemented by structured activities and guidance so students apply their learning have the potential to enhance the student experience and encourage learners to contextualise the complexities of the workplace using classroom based activities.

The evaluation strategy has proved developmental and forward looking and the value of this being an externally led formative process has been acknowledged by the Project Team. Conference Contributions

2007

Project presentation at the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) Launch Event. 26th of September 2007 at the Higher Education Academy, York (United Kingdom, UK).

2008

Poster presentation at the International Technology, Education and Development Conference (INTED). 3rd - 5th of March 2008, Valencia (Spain).

Presentation at the University of Northampton Learning and Teaching Conference. 14th of May 2008, University of Northampton (UK)

Showcase and presentation at Birmingham City University Learning and Teaching Festival 8th July 2008, Birmingham City University (UK)

Presentation and display at Centre for Recording Achievement Conference 21st November 2008, Manchester (UK)

2009

'Games and Simulations @ BCU' Workshop at University of Bedfordshire 27th February 2009

Hill A, Morton N and Curzon R (2009) ‘The creative dynamic: innovative solutions to teaching transferable skills in the classroom', Paper presented for *INTED*, 9-11 March, Valencia, (Spain)

Popovic C (2009) ‘Every Picture Tells a Story' paper presented at SEDA Conference, Spring 2009 Brighton (UK)

Poster Presentation at NTF Symposium, Leeds Metropolitan University, 11-12th May 2009 Leeds (UK)

Lawton R et al (2009) ‘Transitions to work: Meeting skills gaps in the classroom' paper presentation at the University of Northampton Learning and Teaching Conference 13th May 2009, University of Northampton (UK)

Hill A and Popovic C (2009) ‘Using Critical Incidents to Create Learning Pathways Between the Real World and Places of Learning', paper presented at the 16th International Conference on Learning,1-4 July, Barcelona, (Spain)

Workshop HEA Conference, July 2009 Manchester (UK)

'Creating Future-Proof Graduate Project overview' team presentation at Birmingham City University Learning & Teaching Festival July 2009 Birmingham (UK)

Presentation 'Meeting the current challenges: the humanities and employability, entrepreneurship and employer engagement': LLAS HEA Subject Centre, October 23rd London (UK)

Workshop at CRA Residential 26th November 2009 Manchester (UK)

Creating Future-Proof Graduates Exhibition December 11th Birmingham (UK)

2010

Paper ‘Creating future-proof graduates: bridging the gap between HE and employers’

at CE TH Employability Conference, University of Central Lancashire, June 2010 Preston (UK)

Creating Future-Proof Graduates Showcase, Leeds Metropolitan University , 11 February 2010

Creating Future-Proof Graduates Showcase**,** Sunderland University**,** 11 March 2010

Creating Future-Proof Graduates Workshop, SEDA Conference, place and date?

Creating Future-Proof Graduates Poster and Showcase, NTF Symposium, University of Westminster, 13/14 May 2010

‘Future-proofing Graduates, Learning from an NTF Project’, paper accepted for Emlpoyability CETL conference, Sheffield Hallam University, 10 June 2010

The project team members continue to be pleased to visit HEIs (subject to travel expenses being paid) which are willing to host opportunities for a number of nearby institutions to view and test the resources. For further information contact: [futureproof@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:futureproof@bcu.ac.uk) Publications (by date)

Popovic C (2007) initial press release ‘UCE Birmingham to Create Future Proof Graduates’

Popovic C (2008) ‘All in a day's work? Educational Developer as NTFS project lead', *Educational Development,*  9.3, 17 – 18

Lawton R (2008) *Palatine Newsletter*, October 2008 (PDF)

Morton N, Curzon R, Hill A, Tomas C, Popovic C, Lawton R, Eland J (2008) 'The Creative dynamic: innovative solutions to teaching transferable skills in the classroom', *INTED2009 Proceedings* CD, available from [www.iated.org/inted2009](http://www.iated.org/inted2009)

Popovic C and Tomas C (2009) ‘Creating Future Proof Graduates', *ALT journal*, Leeds Metropolitan University, Spring.

Lawton R, Eland J, Popovic C, Hill A and Morton N (2009) ‘Transitions to work: Meeting skills gaps in the classroom': *Transitions,* University Of Northampton Conference, May, and Proceedings of HEA Conference, July

Lawton R (2009) ‘Anyone for a game of networking?’ *Phoenix Journal (AGCAS)*, November

Hill A, Popovic C, Lawton R, Eland J, Morton N, Curzon R , Eastcott D and Tomas C (2009) 'Using Critical Incidents to Create Learning Pathways Between the Real World and Places of Learning: Findings from a 2 Year Funded Project Aimed at Improving Understanding and Capability in Key Employability Skills', *The International Journal of Learning*, Volume 16, December

#### Publication date March 2010

Hill A, Popovic C, Morton N, Lawton R and Eland J, 2010, *Creating future-proof graduates using scenario based learning* in Errington E (ed) *Preparing Graduates for the Professions using Scenario Based Learning*, Brisbane, Australia, Post Pressed Publications

## 8. Outcomes

We feel that we have met all of the project aims. Below is a copy of the aims presented in Section 4 with a commentary explaining how the aims have, or are being, met.

### Initial project aims:

* To develop critical incident scenarios which will support transformative learning
  + We developed eight resources based on critical incidents ([www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources))
* To work with employer partners in developing relevant work-focused experiences for students
  + We involved employers at every stage of the project, in the research, in development in the Project Board, the final dissemination event and in using the resources.
* To create innovative tools for academics which provide opportunities for ‘employability’ development in the classroom and through virtual learning
  + As with the first aim, the evidence of our achievement can be found at the project website.
* To ensure that the project outputs will be transferable and not limited by access to resources or specific media
  + While the critical incidents are located within a specific context, the issues are totally transferable. An example can be found in the incident in ‘Getting On With It’ where musicians are discussing their future business plans for their quartet. This was created in the context of music students, but it has been used to great acclaim with photography students in an FE college. This is not an isolated example, but is indicative of the transferability of the resources in general.
* To implement a longitudinal, action research testing and evaluation regime
  + This aim has been achieved largely through the team engaging and external consultant to advise on the strategy and to carry out some of the evaluation to ensure impartiality and objectivity.
* To disseminate findings through national and international conferences, and articles in peer-reviewed journals
  + The list of publications in Section 7 illustrates our achievement of this aim.

### Subsequent project aims:

* That six to eight products would be created and evaluated according to the timeline of the project
  + We produced eight products, all of which have been evaluated to some extent. Some of the products have only recently been completed and so evaluation is still underway. As the products are used more widely in other institutions and with employers we expect to collate a wide range of evaluation data.
* Each product/resource to be used in a minimum of two different faculties
  + Please refer to Table 2 below for a summary of the current use of the resources.
* At least one product/resource to be used in another institution
  + No Offence Meant and Getting On With It, have both been used in FE colleges as well as in BCU.
* A sustainable strategy to be put into place for embedding the resources, including with employers
  + This is underway. Following the exhibition on December 11, we have received many indications that people intend using the resources. An example of the feedback from the event: ‘'Really looking forward to using the resources and evaluating them. Thinking about developing 10 credit modules using some of the resources'
* The project team members have had the opportunity to participate in a reflective learning process
  + This has occurred during the project and is currently underway as we are still completing the evaluation process with Professor Eastcott.
* The project as a whole to contribute to the credibility of the Project Team within the home institution
  + This appears to have been achieved as the project has helped to raise the profile both of the two National Teaching Fellows involved, and the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT).
* The Project Team to aim for at least one refereed article and a minimum of two external Conference Papers or sessions
  + See list of publications in Section 7.

### Table 2 Resource Use

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Current use** | **Planned use** |
| No Offence Meant | Early years  BA Fashion Retail Management (year 2) students | Embedded in Foundation Degree Early Years module |
| Stone Soup | Property Management MSc. students | To be arranged – several indications from other HEI’s that intend to use it on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various disciplines |
| Getting On With It | Photography students in FE | Students in School of Acting |
| Too Much Information | Undergraduate students:  School of Social Sciences (housing)  School of Secondary and Post Compulsory Education  School of Radiography  Postgraduate students:  School of Social Sciences (housing) | As before and with students in:  The Business School,  The Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, and  Performance, Media and English |
| Ethical Dilemmas | BSc.Property Construction and Planning  BSc. Computing | In use with Undergraduate students in Property Construction and Planning |
| Expecting the Unexpected | BA Law students | To be arranged – several indications from other HEI’s that intend to use it on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various disciplines |
| Who, What, Where | Recently completed | Also available through the Library and Learning Resources website as well as [www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof) |
| The Networking Game | MSc Real Estate Management  BA Fashion Retail Management (year 2) | Being used by DWA Housing (employer partner) with tenant groups and at Liverpool John Moores University with media students |

There are many aspects of ‘value’ with regard to the project. The first would be the value of the resources we have created in terms of meeting our original aim to enhance the employability of higher education students, by providing them with an opportunity to practice critical skills and behaviours within the curriculum. As you have seen above (Section 7) we have achieved this.

There is also the value of the resources to the HE sector – early indications are that the resources are being well received by academic staff in our own and other institutions. We have been approached by a Sector Skills Council who is interested in adapting one of the resources for use in their industry. Some of our employer partners are interested in using the resource with new and recent graduates as part of induction and / or in-house training programmes

Value can also be attached to the ‘cost’ of the project – not only financially but also in resources such as donated staff time. Major costs were the design, creation and manufacture of the resources. Evaluation and feedback so far would indicate that the resources produced have been worth it and the costs associated with the ‘packaging’ have also added to the attractiveness of the product and we hope that will appeal to practitioners and encourage wide use.

Staff time on the project, although costed, was essentially donated since none of the existing staff were ‘replaced’ for project time and the full time research assistant recruited to manage the project (see above) left early and was not replaced. The team and project evaluation discussed earlier in Section 7 will help us to reflect on whether or not the resulting sacrifices with regard to work priorities for the project team were worth it.

Finally there is the value to the project team in meeting the initial objectives – and also our Critical Success factors’ identified at the half way stage. In Professor Eastcott’s first evaluation report it was highlighted that ‘*The wish was expressed that at the end of the Project the team members could look back together on a task well done culminating in a set of materials that students would learn from and enjoy working with.’* What is obvious from our trials, resource evaluations and feedback from academic staff users is that that ambition has been achieved.

## 9. Conclusions

In creating learning resources to meet the demands of authentic and relevant adult learning, it is essential that the packages created are motivating, integrated, systematic, include sufficient background information and are supported by clear guidance from the tutor (Winning *et al.,* 2004). Following these principles, evaluation of the eight resources to date suggests that critical incidents have the potential to enhance the student experience and encourage learners to contextualise the complexities of the workplace through the classroom.

However, the findings also point to the difficulties of research and evaluation where variables impact on the student experience. The project team have used an iterative process to learn lessons from the development and evaluation of each resource and to inform the development of others. They found it was not sufficient to develop any resource in isolation as its value is enhanced by context and the supporting activities that underpin the learning.

The need for the project team to develop technical skills impacted on the original time scale. This was aggravated by other staffing factors. However it is quite possible that had the project been initially designed to last for three, rather than two years, time would still have been an issue. It is always tempting to argue the case for more time to devise a resource, to allow for further testing, or to disseminate results, and most projects are driven by deadlines.

The collegiate approach enabled the project team to find creative solutions when inevitable issues arose. In particular, the project team can reflect with satisfaction on the value of building a network of supporters across the institution and beyond, providing the momentum and enthusiasm to drive the project forwards. The evaluation strategy has enabled the project team to point to evidence of good practice and innovation in the use of the employer partners to direct the research and resource production, and in the embedding of a robust and rigorous testing and evaluation process across many different sectors of our own institution and beyond. In so doing, we have provided opportunities for reflective, practice focused learning from this project and a set of resources which provide support towards deeper learning and the development of transferable employability skills. Therefore, this project has met its broad aim of ‘providing the sector with an evidence based set of design principles for delivering transformative learning through the utilisation of critical incident scenarios.’

## 10. Implications

We all need to understand that graduates need to be able to ride to the challenges in the 21st century world of work. The Institute of Directors (IoD) Briefing (2007) highlighted that employability skills (in a generic sense) are perceived by employers as more important than subject specific skills. If we take this as true then the implications of not “future-proofing” our graduates have far reaching political and economic consequences.

Although evaluations to date by users and developers suggest that the resources produced are beneficial and useful tools this does not mean that they are a finished product. As the real world of work moves and changes so too must the resources. A negative implication for the resources would be if they remain static, fixed to one space and time, and thus become moribund. In developing the scenarios space has been allowed for fresh insights and new skills. Each cohort will find their own interpretations and as a result grow and develop the resource to fit the ever changing environment both in higher education and in the work place.

The development of the resources was built on a sound research base and for them to maintain currency this needs to be continued, not just by the project team but by all those accessing and using them. In so doing they will remain a powerful tool in which to embed employability in a range of disciplines.

Each use of any of the resources should be fully evaluated to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and are serving the needs of all those concerned. There is wide scope for users to develop their own methods of implementation, we have provided the framework but have not been proscriptive in the manner in which the sector may use them.

## 11. Recommendations

### 11.1 Learning about project management

* **When planning a similar project, consider appointing someone to oversee the project**, possibly reporting to a project manager, but whose role is clearly defined as administrative. While it was helpful to have a research assistant, it was frustrating for the person appointed to have to spend so much time on administrative tasks, liaising with suppliers, keeping the project team informed and so forth. It may be easier to absorb the research elements than the administrative elements.
* **Although there are cost implications there should be some contingency plans** should a member of the team leave before completion. The loss of the research assistant came at a time when we needed to get a grip on the evaluations and to look to wider disseminations. Her work fell to the rest of an already overloaded team and in hind sight maybe she should have been replaced.
* **Consider the motivation of all concerned:** different people bring different skills and expectations to the project. It may be possibly to minimise if not avoid, conflict and disappointment if all concerned are very clear about their aspirations and motivations from the outset. However it can take time for these motivations and aspirations to be expressed, and it may be the process of taking part in the project is necessary to allow these aspects to emerge. It is also fair to say that some tension and discord can be an essential element of the creative process, so if it all runs smoothly, the creative spark could be missing.
* **We do recommend that any project teams in future take the time which is available.** In addition to clarifying the administrative role, try to identify the technical support mechanisms needed and put these in place as soon as possible. We also suggest to any other project team – do not be afraid to ask for help - enlist as many people as you can, both so the project is institutionally owned and also so you have the back-up necessary to complete any project outcomes.  Be realistic about what can be achieved within timescales.
* **Be aware that sometimes promises may be made in a bid which are difficult to realise once a project is underway.** In our case there were some agreements made regarding time and space which never fully materialised. It would have been helpful if we could have released colleagues from teaching and other responsibilities to work on the project. If the Deans or Associate Deans had been more closely involved with the Board they may have seen the value to their faculty and pushed for greater involvement. However in view of the reorganisation that took place at BCU at that time, this was an unachievable aspiration in our case.
* **Accept that it is rarely possible to fully ‘release’ staff** to projects such as this, and therefore there will be a burden upon project members of extra work which is unrecompensed. The politics and finances of most higher education institutions can lead to a ‘claw back’ or inability to honour promises made at a more affluent time. With hindsight we would suggest that ‘pay’ money’ be used to bring in people with targeted skills for short periods eg a researcher to do analysis once data has been gathered, an event organiser, a web designer. Although we managed to learn how to do all of these things it was stressful, costly in terms of time and resources and in most cases it is unlikely that those skills will be re-used.
* **When choosing the project team and project board pick people who are genuinely champions or potential champions in that field.** It is easy to choose politically or strategically but real commitment comes from those who have a buy–in to the aims of the project. It is commitment you will need once the bid writing is successful.
* **Do not underestimate the amount of work required to deliver a project.** It is not good enough to assume that the project team just have to turn up and put on a presentation.
* **There will always be someone who** approaches you at a dissemination event and says ‘who wrote this paper?’ and then points out individually seven grammatical errors. Accept this. Expect this.
* **Keep a ‘brainstorming book’** of everything that needs to be done and keep checking it and adding to it and sharing out the tasks. This will become vital in the later stages. Leave plenty of space as you will be surprised at all the little jobs. This book is also – later – a record of everything that has been achieved.
* **Establish a project generic email** so that all work does not fall to one in-box – particularly once dissemination begins. This will ensure that if a project team member leaves the in-box remains open but make sure that a number of people have access to it and take their share of checking it.
* **Do not be afraid to ask for more time or admit failure** – learn and move on
* **Establish what constitutes the ‘end’ and stick to it.** Anything else MUST be negotiated, agreed, costed and managed. What is sustainability and what is death by project? Discuss, but discuss it in a restaurant over a nice meal with a lot of wine!

### 11.2 Learning for the sector

* **The importance of a well constituted and effective Steering Group**. A Steering Group with appropriately influential representation from inside and outside a University would also serve a useful function in building relationships and raising the profile of the project within a University. For example, through working to align the project with other institutional priorities in order to create synergies within a University. A further potential benefit of a Steering Group would be to provide support in facilitating time release for members of a Project Team to work on the project in the context of their other responsibilities.
* **Cultural issues- project management in an academic environment**.‘Project management is not generally seen as worthy of specific academic analysis’ (Baume *et al.*, 2002). The academic culture tends to be different from the team culture of running a project and there are sometimes clashes between the two worlds. The skills of bridging the two worlds include awareness and deliberate practice of the principles of project management. There is an argument for appointing a Project Manager to a project of this scale, working closely with the Project Leader or Project Director.
* **Achievement of critical success factors.** Create and align critical success factors with the broad aims of a project and constantly monitor both to ensure the alignment remains true and is being achieved.
* **Evaluation as a reflective process.** The value of an externally lead formative evaluation process is acknowledged and has been developmental and forward looking throughout this project. Team members valued the illuminative approach to evaluation, which formed part of the life cycle of the project and was grounded in a learning process which will help to inform future developments, planning and capacity building for staff. A half way break in the project to take stock through an evidence based reflective away day was also valued by the team members.
* **The importance of motivating a multidisciplinary academic team and networking with other people and projects.** The encouragement of open discussion and a participatory environment were seen as important motivating factors. It was also found to be motivating to have the opportunity to discuss and realise the academic benefits from the project. Networking and collaboration with projects and people outside the project team proved to be essential in finding ways to deliver the project outcomes.
* **Give attention to the process of team working** as a means of enabling progress with the programme of work. A crucial factor in effective project team working is the negotiation of an appropriate balance between the individual needs and motivation of the individual team members and the overall purpose of the project. Team processes which will encourage a sense of ownership of the project are important from the outset. Conducting a skills audit and a risk assessment exercise at the beginning of any project would have two purposes: firstly, both are crucial tasks in themselves and secondly such tasks enable colleagues to share concerns about a range of factors which may put the project at risk and to consider skills which may have to be bought in. Such activities start the process of team building. Project Team members also recommend exploration of different types of meetings with different purposes.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Outlines – How the resources were created

No Offence Meant

The starting point for this was the identification of “cultural awareness” as a skill or attitude through interviews with employers. The discussions highlighted the need for employees to be aware of the particular ethos and methods of working in their particular setting. Sometimes this was referred to as organisational awareness or knowledge of the company. However as a team we felt that the issues were much wider and that there was a need to look at “culture” in its widest terms. Ruth Lawton and Jenny Eland took as their starting point the international incident in 2007 when teacher Gillian Gibbons named the teddy bear ‘Mohammed’, while working in a devout Muslim country.

We took two approaches in developing this resource:

* One approach is based solely in the classroom with resources to be used by students in table groups alongside reflective opportunities. This includes initial definitions of cultural awareness. The definitions are grouped into four areas: national culture; professional culture; organisational culture; and personal culture. Each area has a series of games or quizzes that can be used to stimulate discussion and help with reflection.
* The second approach incorporates the first, but also makes use of web based resources which provide detail about the Gillian Gibbons incident. We include links to the different press coverage as well as links to other learning materials and resources relating to broader cultural awareness. Materials are provided for students to complete unsupported and un-assessed reflection if they wish.

The resources are extremely flexible and can be used as an integral part of a module/course or as individual packages to explore identified areas. They have been trialled as an embedded component of a Foundation Degree Early Years module in which students made use of the classroom and web based activities over a six week period. Fashion Retail Management students also used them in a stand-alone workshop to explore the issues they may encounter in their first placement.

Networking

The longitudinal destinations project mentioned earlier looked at how the university could enhance the employability of its graduates. 750 graduates from two subject areas - marketing (BA Marketing) and music (BMus and BMus Jazz) - were surveyed between 18 months and five years after graduation. The primary purpose of the survey was two-fold: the first was to compare the national Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) destinations of leavers from higher education (DLHE) data taken 6 months after graduation with data we could gather from graduates 18 months to five years on; and the second was to identify potential gaps in the curriculum in terms of preparing students for the graduate labour market. The survey form asked graduates what skills they wished had been included in the curriculum and the most mentioned ‘skill’ was networking or social confidence. This tied in neatly with stories we had gathered from the employer interviews. More than one employer talked about the inadequacy of new graduates’ confidence in social situations, particularly with clients. One employer told a story about not trusting a new graduate to accompany a client to the airport if they were expected to make ‘small talk’.

This resource is a board game. In creating the board game it was necessary to overcome an assumption amongst some academic staff that students cannot be ‘taught’ social confidence or networking in the classroom. A group of academic staff were overheard agreeing that students would ‘never shake hands publicly in the classroom’ yet this is exactly what the resource has been designed to do. The questions used to propel students round the board came from members of the project board, employers and students themselves at the trials. At every trial the ‘shake hands with everyone around the table and introduce yourself’ card came up and no student refused to comply.

The game has been used by students in several subject areas at BCU, and one of the employer partners is using it with new graduate recruits

#### Ethical Dilemmas

The resource developed to address this skills gap explores a scenario about professional ethics – in particular, overhearing someone sharing commercially sensitive information in a fictional office environment. A paper-based version of this idea had been used in previous teaching sessions, with some success but ultimately limited because the scenario was difficult to visualise. As part of the Creating Future-Proof Graduates Project, a completely new approach was taken to script and film this incident. The same fictional company has been expanded and the cast of characters now appear in an exchange which assumes the student is a recent graduate-level recruit, confronted with a range of tasks and information as before. The incident of potential commercial espionage, set within an already difficult professional environment, is written with sufficient ambiguity that uncertainty is created in the mind of the participant regarding the best course of action to take. This is intended to prompt debate in class and further reflection upon what constitutes professional and ethical behaviour.

From the outset, we were keen to use video clips for the primary component of this resource as the best means of visualising the incident. As part of the project, we were committed to fully utilising the resources of the University, including the student body, and therefore it seemed appropriate to make use of our own School of Acting. Character descriptions were produced and auditions held to select the most suitable people for the roles.

In parallel with this process, a script was developed for the video, and again we relied on in-house expertise for this task. The script-writer and production crew were contacted through the Students’ Union and were current or former students. The resultant script was filmed over the course of three days in summer 2008, adapting locations within the University buildings to serve as a generic office environment. Alongside the main film, ‘talking heads’ were scripted and filmed which allow the students participating in the scenario to ask a selection of ‘work colleagues' and others for further advice concerning the situation. As previously mentioned, a shortfall in the required skills in-house led to the final product being finished and ‘polished’ by a professional video production company, with excellent results.

The scenario is centred on the theme of appropriate conduct and communication in a professional context. In addition, it also enables the investigation of related notions of good practice in areas such as team-working, leadership, negotiation, and motivation. In so doing it encourages students to combine existing knowledge and common sense with new concepts introduced in the classroom, substantiating personal experience gained through active learning with reference to established theories and models. The video material can be used as a classroom activity or as part of an assessment, with the talking heads being used as a tool for opening up additional avenues of debate.

The scenario is now being used to drive not only classroom debate, but also an assessment option as a reflective essay on the nature of professionalism and teamwork for a module taken by some 180 second-year undergraduates studying Built Environment disciplines. It has also been used for one-off sessions with Computing and Housing students.

#### Stone Soup

The initial impetus for this was to address the issue of sustainable development and teamwork. Celia Popovic had already been working with a lecturer, Julian Lamb, on workshops for staff designed to raise awareness of the issues surrounding sustainable development. When this was raised as an issue by employers, together with teamwork, we saw the opportunity to develop a resource. We took a different approach from that of the other resources, as we wanted to build on work by Julian concerned with storytelling, and its role in shaping attitudes and responses. We decided to develop the idea of using cartoon animation to retell the Grimm Bothers’ story ‘Stone Soup’. Details of the resource can be found in Section 7 Outputs and Findings. We liaised with the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (a BCU faculty) to locate a BCU graduate who was able to produce the animation. We created a storyboard, and then met with the animator to discuss our ideas for the resource. The animator then sent us several drawings in various styles, from which we chose the one that we both preferred. The animator worked on the story, liaising with us from time to time. The production process involved some BCU students who performed the script and a second company who produced the music. We were delighted with the finished version. The cartoon has been used with property management students, and demonstrated at several conferences.

#### Too Much Information

TMI is text speak for “that’s too much information”. Starting from our conversations with employers and graduates about how new graduates sometimes feel they have to demonstrate their learning rather than focusing on the needs of customers, the idea was to demonstrate that this is a common theme across disciplines by producing a series of client/new graduate conversations. This was followed by a short interview with the client following each interaction, explaining how the client felt after meeting the graduate employee to illustrate the barriers created by providing ‘too much information’. The first script was written from the resource ‘leaders’ disciplinary area. One employer (Deborah Walthorne, DWA Housing), on hearing about the idea, recounted a personal experience about going to a parents’ evening with her 16 year old son and being completely lost in the education jargon of making GCSE choices and how her son was doing. Once a scenario was suggested it became easier to ask Simon Spencer, a colleague in the School of Secondary and Post Compulsory Education to create a short script using as much jargon from the discipline as possible. Contacts with Nic Bartholomew (Radiography) and Mike Jackson (Business School) produced two other scenarios. To make this critical incident fun, a standing joke became the use of the same client, encountering the four new professionals, so she was also given an introduction to help explain why she would be meeting them.

The resource was envisaged as a form of simple strip cartoons, with stills photographs, speech bubbles and audio to make each script as accessible as possible. An illustrative mock up of the resource was created using software similar to PowerPoint. This involved recording the scripts and then taking photographs in context and pairing these to provide a resource which could be used as it stands or the concept could be easily copied to meet similar needs in other disciplines, for example, through creating new scenarios using PowerPoint slides with linked audio. Student actors were used to create the visual and audio elements and initially students also provided the photography and recordings. However, creating an appropriately professional look to the resource, including the photographs and audio being of a suitable quality was a problem at first and it did take several attempts to improve the materials. Eventually with the help of Rod Dungate we recorded the final scenario and produced a finished DVD containing all the materials. One compromise made was that the cartoon ‘speech bubbles’ would have been too distracting alongside the images and audio within the DVD, so Sally Jones from the Computing and Information Technology Centre designed a small booklet which has the scenarios as strip cartoons (which supports the initial concept) alongside the scripts and teaching notes.

The resource can be used in two ways – to address a specific disciplinary area where students relate to the new graduate or it can place them in the role of the client. This prompts discussion and has the potential to be used with students to debate approaches to supporting their future clients and as an example, role play has been used to address the client’s needs in a more thoughtful way.

The initial tranche of resources were completed at different times. As some resources were complete team members were able to move on to develop further resources.

The second tranche of resources comprised the following:

#### Expecting the Unexpected

Alison Turnbull, a lecturer from the Law Department attended one of the project boards, where we reported on progress to date. As a result she approached us with an idea for a resource. We had been discussing the skills gap at the board meeting and one of them – how to deal with emotional clients or unexpected behaviour, chimed with her concerns. She reported an experience she had had as a young lawyer, being faced with an aggressive client. As a result of this, Alison, together with her colleague Suzanne Cooper, agreed to develop this resource. They wanted to make use of role play, and decided to create a series of critical incidents which were then acted by professional actors, and filmed during a class with students. The end result is a resource that can be used as it stands, but can also be used as a stimulus for further role play by students.

The notes and lesson plan produced by Alison and Suzanne includes a work book for raising the self awareness and self esteem of students so that they are better equipped to deal with clients and colleagues. The students were then introduced to live actors in the classroom representing a client/colleague and offering a range of difficult situations which could be faced by graduates. Some students are chosen to deal with the difficult situation, while other students act as "coaches" to them, actively building their self esteem and self confidence. The remaining students act as rapporteurs, analysing what happened in the session and how the techniques of building self esteem and self confidence worked or did not work in any given situation.

The resource includes the work book and lesson plan and also a film of what happened when the live actors were introduced. The resource has two purposes. It can be used as a stimulus in a class with students, but it can also be used as a CPD tool for teachers who want to discover how the use of actors in the classroom can enhance learning. When the DVD is used directly with students, there are obvious stopping points where a class can be asked ‘what would you do next?’ or ‘what would you have said in that situation?’ or ‘how will you manage that client?’

#### Getting On With It

Celia Popovic and Rod Dungate produced this resource after discussing the need to address bullying behaviour, particularly in the context of the performing arts. Rod had been told about an incident where an actor was publically ridiculed by a director. The actor had been asked to ‘give his line’, and in response had answered ‘I don’t know’. The director was furious and berated the actor for being unprofessional and letting down the entire cast. The actor finally was able to say that that was his line, not his response. The director, to the surprise of the person relating the incident, did not apologise, in fact the actor apologised instead. This incident chimed with the research findings, that new graduates are not always able to respond appropriately to situations which in some contexts might be termed bullying, or in others might be interpreted as ‘real life’. We employed students from the Birmingham School of Acting and the Conservatoire (both part of the faculty of PME, Performance, Media and English, at BCU) to role play four situations where one person could be interpreted as being bullied. Celia and Rod discussed the outline for the situations, then Rod wrote a script. The students were recruited, as well as an experienced actor Ian Spiby. The BSA was booked for a weekend, film and sound technicians were employed and the resource was filmed over a two day period. Once the filming was complete the resource was edited, credits and navigation were added with the final product of a DVD and files available on the project website.

The resource has been used in BCU and with students in a Birmingham FE College.

#### Who What Where

Following another Project Board meeting, colleagues from the Library and Learning Resources (LLR) team approached the project manager with an offer to include some resources that they were in the process of developing. These were aimed at improving students’ research skills. The project team were delighted as up to this point we had not addressed one of the skills areas identified by employers – the ability of graduates to apply research skills to the work environment. The LLR then worked on producing a web based resource that could be used either as an integral part of a course or could be used independently by students to develop their research skills. When the resource was presented by the LLR team, Anne Hill identified the need to contextualise the web pages. She devised a PowerPoint presentation which provided the much needed context for students, and turned what might otherwise have been a rather dry resource into an accessible tool which enables students to understand the relevance of research skills, rather than assume that these are skills that are only needed in a learning context.

## APPENDIX 2

### Example of Interview Questions

1. Brief interviewee on our project aims and objectives. Important to explain that we might need to come back to them in the future for either more information or additional interviewing.
2. Ethics: obtain their informed consent (explain how we will use the data they provide) [spoken or written]
3. The interview is aimed at covering both generic and specific issues:
   1. What is your involvement (role) with graduate recruitment?
   2. What is your involvement (role) with graduate training/induction?
   3. Could you describe the best and worse characteristics of new graduates?
   4. What is an exceptional graduate (candidate and new recruit)? – in your view what are the characteristics?
   5. How did you arrive at these (what experiences) key characteristics of new recruits and candidates?
   6. Have you ever had a new graduate recruit that did not work out? Describe the case, the reasons
   7. What training and support is given to new graduates in order to help them bridge the gaps you have mentioned?
   8. Prompt the interviewee on further detailed description and explanation of their definition (received before the interview by email) of Commercial Awareness - how did they arrive at that definition – what went through their mind when they wrote the definition (e.g. HR descriptions, real life experiences)?
      1. How do they assess for this skill
      2. Can you give us any specific stories
      3. If ‘graduates do not have this wider awareness’ who has it?
      4. Can you give us specific stories of graduates who have or have not developed it?
      5. When you say candidates are unable to explain why an issue might affect a business do you have any specific stories?
   9. Ask the interviewee to explain from their experiences when those skills/attitudes were found to be a barrier to the new graduates’ development? How were situations were resolved?

## APPENDIX 3

### Summary of Findings from Employer Interviews

#### Music

1. Writing a letter of application and CV (very few graduates do this well)
2. Preparing for interview and the etiquette: it is a small world (live on the reputation)
3. Being aware of the differences between kinds of orchestras and type of work (free lance, contract, studio sessions)
4. Technical aspects of playing: students fail to look for help, guidance and advice that colleges provide in this area
5. In admin roles: a lack of awareness of different art forms and genres
6. Lack of awareness of the different types of roles within admin: project management, artist management, external relations, education programmes
7. Failing to understand the business of the company they are applying for (related to all the differences above)
8. Key qualities: musicianship and technical skills; work well under pressure (great ability to read music off the page), and social relationship with orchestra; and the added value (make everyone aware of your other abilities or skills – that are not on paper)
9. Challenges in adapting to the workplace: awareness of the organization (things that are not written: who is who, who does what)
10. Importance of recognizing when you need to ask or seek help (and from who)
11. Bad qualities: talking during rehearsals (attitude problem: being too casual, lack of commitment), recognising that you always have to perform at your best (no second chances).
12. Realistic expectations: it is difficult in early stages facing up to the reality that not all of them will succeed as performers and that is hard and important in early stages
13. Need to have good communication skills
14. Networking
15. Being self-motivated – often younger people seem to expect a lot to be done for them
16. The need to be able to enthuse people and act
17. Timing and prioritising tasks

#### Law

1. Good qualities at recruitment stage: well prepared at interview; communication (answering the questions with relevant information, this shows they did not understand the question; usually in a client scenario); confidence; ability to build a rapport with clients (need to identify their needs in order to do this).
2. Good qualities in first period of training: commitment and enthusiasm (shown usually by people knowing that person); being proactive in seeking information; ability to build a network and your reputation; also being quiet can be a good quality
3. Commercial Awareness: need to show awareness of current issues and how these link into the sectors of your clients (what are the implications of events); need to understand your clients very well (their needs, expectations – this might show in selecting the most practical solution to a problem and this requires knowing the industry or their business well); ability to prioritise workload according to unexpected bits of information (adapting the strategy to new bits of info received).
4. This awareness can be exercised in every day activities by thinking of the implications to all our actions in any job we do.
5. Problematic characteristics include trying to over-impress, trying too hard to get it right, taking notes badly, not knowing when you need to ask for help.

#### Housing

1. Commercial Awareness – expect this as a given in the candidates and includes awareness of commercial profits; housing policy issues and main stakeholders; innovation (predicting what might happen in policy); understanding customer trends and needs
2. Problem areas: prioritising tasks; working in a team and managing relationships; having unrealistic expectations about the real life world
3. Crucial to understand the business world; deal with many different types of people; need to understand different stakeholders and their interests for successful completion of projects (need excellent communication skills)
4. Qualities of a good housing consultant: ability to assimilate quite a lot of information and keep on top of agendas; communication skills; interpersonal skills and building relations within the organization (realising who is who, who does what, how can you exchange resources with others) interpersonal skills beyond the organization (stakeholders – need to understand how you can best link your resources to theirs and interests); working to tight deadlines.
5. Interpersonal skills: acquired through experience
6. Skills learnt on the job: writing skills: had to adapt to non-academic contexts; research skills (project); working in a team: got support and negotiate; linking to other people’s resources (knowing when you don’t know and where to go for help)
7. Some bad characteristics: not being prepared; being too prepared; not having a concept of the real world: too much commercial gloss; not understanding the organization culture
8. Need to be confident, people focused and adaptable: need to learn to be flexible when working with people or in complex environments.
9. Important to manage emotional involvement and focus: recent graduates tend to get very emotional about situations, while others get easily distracted
10. Problems include having unrealistic expectations about the real world: for example, expecting quick promotions within the year; recent graduates need to plan and understand better the long-term career plans and structure of the industry they are entering

## APPENDIX 4

Summary of Findings from a Survey with Marketing and ConservatoireMA Alumni

Marketing MA

Overview of highlighted skills that they wish they had been “taught”

-number of suggestions regarding **content-specific issues**: international marketing, sales promotion, new media (digital/ mobile); research methods and analytical tools; budgeting; finance (more depth); internet marketing [2]; SME marketing; marketing software; new trends in marketing; selling to public sectors organizations; corporate culture\*; PR[2]; language – make compulsory; Acc management; financial; ethical marketing.

**SKILLS**

-networking: developing contacts and getting involved with local industry [5]

-less teamwork

-presentation skills [2]

-people management [2]

-written language – promotional material and presenting facts

-creative thinking: creative aspects

-cold call training

-problem solve

-time management

-Job hunting: job searching (warnings about misleading info); careers advice on long term career issues [2] and interview techniques

-more work placements [10]

-build up practice experience [2]

-real life work situations : idea generation and organizational structure [2]

-relate theory to practical work environment

Music MA

**Content-specific:** research methods; rehearsals (more); chamber music; orchestral playing – score reading; ensemble coaching; guitar; music therapy; theory [2]; composition skills; music Law; Music history and links with practice; contemporary music; scoring for film; more specialised and higher standards

**SKILLS**

-mental and physical training [2]: performance anxiety (not being afraid of performing)

-networking and advice on how to get into business [10]: info about agents, career promotion, freelancing, own business management; funding, contracts, career planning in advance; finance management

-more attention to teaching and pedagogy [10]: special reference to behavioural problems

-writing skills for the “real world”

- professional development (?)

-instrument repair and maintenance

-leadership and management

-more work experience: need more support and encouragement to work outside [3]

-more real world professional focus

-opportunities to perform

-opportunities to organise concerts, arrange money, tickets