

Learning Conference, Barcelona, 1-4 July 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**

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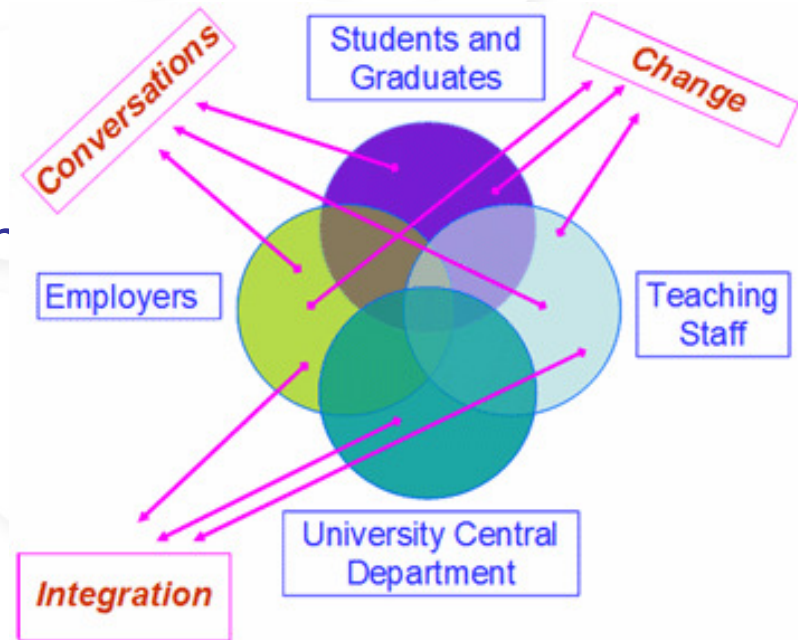
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Project Background

- ‘Creating Future-Proof Graduates’
- NTFS Project 2007 £200,000 from HEA + contribution from University
- A Partnership Approach
- Creating 8 resources addressing key skills identified by employers and graduates as potentially not addressed by courses
- 3 strand evaluation strategy



Project Objectives

- Linking the classroom with professional practice
- Bridging the gap between teaching and learning and professional demands
- The project aims:
 - To produce a suite of simulated critical incident case studies to enhance students employability skills across a range of disciplines / sectors
 - To involve employers, students and HE / FE staff in the production of the case studies
 - To evaluate the effectiveness of these critical incidents in enhancing skills for employment

Theory behind our approach

- ✓ Value added - builds on previous successful 'internal' LTA projects (games and simulations, supporting diverse student populations, etc.)
- ✓ A 'skills plus' approach - discussing and debating experiences, allowing students to discover and develop these skills through critical exploration within their own learning and professional context [\[1\]](#)
- ✓ Create models and designs to provide a series of case studies which can be adapted and adopted by academics across a wide range of disciplines [\[2\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) Palmer, 1998; Biggs, 1999 as cited in Spiller, 2005

[\[2\]](#) Cowan J, 1998, *On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher*, Buckingham, The Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press



Theory (continued)

- ✓ As students work through critical incidents, they develop decision making skills and we encourage them to examine the implications of their actions or inactions for themselves, their peers and wider society
- ✓ Testing & evaluating critical incident scenarios with staff, students and partners [3] [4] [5]

[3] Lewin's classic theory of 'unfreeze' (challenge and change practices), plan and implement to 'refreeze' (embed) (1958)

[4] Jones and Merritt's 'acculturation' theory (1999)

[5] Fox and Rowntree's linking doing and thinking (2004)



Research and evaluation

- Identifying the skills 'gap'
- Creating simulations and games to address the skills gaps identified
- Piloting the created resources
- Evaluation strategy:
 - Evaluating the usability, usefulness and value of the created resources
 - Evaluating the project team development
 - Evaluating the processes in creating the resources



The first stage – identifying key skills

- Interviews - skills and critical incidents:
 - **Employers** – exploring their perceptions and inviting them to describe specific critical incidents which exemplify the required skills or the consequences of their absence
 - Interviewing **lecturers** in the respective discipline to illuminate their perceptions of what students need to equip themselves for their chosen profession
 - Interviewing **current students** re their expectations for the skills they would need for the respective labour market
 - Interviewing **new and recent graduates** re their experiences of their preparedness for graduate employment – also analysing previous research



Findings - Employers

- **Employers** identified the following key skills as difficult to develop in their sectors:
 - Housing: organisational culture and society factors, help-seeking, good communication skills and providing relevant answers;
 - Music: networking, understanding the sector and its "unstructured" nature as a profession
 - Law: Commercial Awareness; finding practical solutions to problems



Findings - Graduates

Graduates had their own views about the most important skills that they had to develop once they reached the workplace.

- literacy: writing for diverse audiences (non-academic);
- personal attributes: develop assertiveness (say "no");
- people related skills
- networking (in particular music and marketing graduates*)
- how to deal with situations and dealing with shocking situations (what to do when a theoretical model fails)
- career related: finding out what you do not want to do; understanding the profession; knowing how to go about finding information



Second stage - Resources

Skills Gap

- Cultural awareness
- Providing relevant answers
- Professional ethics
- Networking and social confidence
- Unexpected and extreme emotions and reactions
- Social responsibility
- Research skills
- Bullying and the misuse of power

Resource Created

- No Offence Meant
- Too Much Information
- Ethical Dilemmas
- The Networking Game
- Expecting the Unexpected
- Stone Soup
- Who, What, Where
- Getting on with it





Skills

Creating future-proof graduates

Details of the individual resources can be found via the Resources button.

resources are based on research and we

[The project](#)
[Dissemination](#)



The Parents' Evening



[Stone Soup Teaching Notes](#)
[Stone Soup Lesson Plan Powerpoint presentation](#)

Evaluation

Findings from the evaluation process will be reported here

If you use the resource we would like to hear your views, both from teachers and students. Please use the evaluation forms here, and send to Future Proof Graduates, CELT, Birmingham City University, City North Campus, Perry Barr, Birmingham B42 2SU

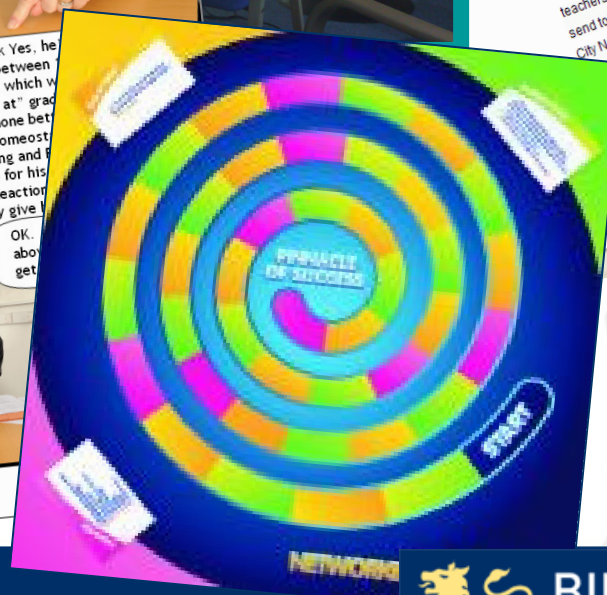
[Teacher evaluation](#)

[Student evaluation](#)

[People involved](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Celia Popovic and Julian Lamb](#)



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Third stage - Evaluation

Evaluation and reflection underpin the project, aiding the development of the Project Team and collaborators in our own understanding and development as we engage with others to evaluate how far our work:

- Provides evidence of commitment to openness, accountability and responsible management and the fitness for purpose of the materials created
- Develops and illuminates effective practice across the University and reaches a wider audience
- Helps to identify sustainable opportunities for current and future developments



Resources - fitness for purpose of the materials created

Evaluation so far



- “learnt a lot. Not something that I would usually think about until the day before the event”
- “the structure of the session enabled a progression through my understanding. I could explore my pre-conceived ideas and then experience other possibilities”
- the board game added in the element of randomness that might be experienced in a networking situation - having to think on the spot”
- “I found the video and script useful as it gave a clear example of a poor meeting”
- “very useful I saw different ways of dealing with people”
- “I feel that I have gained confidence in my own abilities but there is still need for improvement. This workshop gave me the experience and the tools and information that I needed to understand what I need to work on in my own confidence and effectiveness”



Resources - evaluation to date indicates:

- Resources **well received and valued** by the students
- All elements have been rated as **useful** by students
- **Highest value** - most active elements such as role play and discussion
- **Confidence** – biggest increase in confidence seen in full time undergraduates with limited work experience



The other strands of evaluation

The Project Team – learning from bidding, team dynamics and operation, to delivery

- Using an external evaluator to provide objectivity
- Interviews at stages in the process:
- Illuminative [6]
- RUFDATA framework [7]
- Purposes, development; understanding and accountability [8]
- Keeping personal diaries/journals as reflective jottings
- Determination of our critical success factors



[6] Miller and Parlett, 1974, problem centred; practitioner oriented; cross disciplinary; methodologically eclectic and heuristically oriented

[7] Saunders, 2000, uses of, foci, timing, range of data and evidence needed, audience, agency which evaluates

[8] Chelimsky, 1997



The other strands of evaluation

Process.....of creating resources - inputs, personal ethics

- Who would do what – allocating workloads and lead developers
- Budget management
- NTFS Annual and half yearly reports on progress
- Resource creation and problems, dilemmas, resolutions, compromises, triumphs

Honest, open reflections to provide lessons for sharing



Project Exhibition

Creating Future-Proof Graduates Exhibition

Friday 11th December 10am-3pm

Banqueting Suite, Birmingham Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham

To book your place: <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/exhibition-dec11>

www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof

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