## BCU PSF Application form – Associate Fellow (D1)

BIRMINGHAM CITY University

Submit this application as one file (including referee statements and any other evidence relevant to your application), by email to psf@bcu.ac.uk

| **Name** | Daniel Fountain | **Date** | 09/02/2019 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Role/job title** | | | |
| **Faculty/School** | | | |

The application is to be within the allocated word count (2200 for D1), using a good standard of English; reviewers may return an application that does not meet these expectations. Please also ensure that you have permission to name any individual used in your application. If you have any questions or concerns around these requirements, please contact your Faculty Lead (Fellowship) before submitting your application.

### Account of Professional Practice (APP)

Use at least two Area of Activity (A1, 2, 3, or 4) and provide two examples of practice, that show engagement with at least K1 and K2 and commitment to appropriate professional values [actual word count 1365]

I strive to make my sessions relaxed and enjoyable so that learners do not feel under pressure and so that they learn 'without feeling like they are learning' (Gravells, 2014). However, when I attended induction sessions for the PGCert in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education I noticed that there was a great disparity between my teaching ethos and my teaching practice, (A4, K2) When asked to reflect on recent sessions I soon realised that many of mine actually represented more of a 'traditional' style of instructor-led teaching. It has now been expressed that there should often be a shift in focus from 'lecturer' to 'facilitator' with the onus being put on the student; the teacher's role should therefore be 'far more than just being someone who stands at the front of the class telling people things' (Wilson, 2008, p.5). At a recent session designed for Level 6 students and graduates titled *Kickstart Your Career: Interviews Made Easy* I therefore decided to try out more of a '(social) constructivist' approach in which the locus of control shifts from teacher to students. Knowles (1975, p.7) defines 'self-directed learning' as: 'The process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes' (A1, V3)

To begin this teaching session I delivered a short lecture about employability within the creative industries to provide a practical context and then outlined the session structure (K1). Rather than talking directly at students I began to use specific questioning techniques (such as direct questioning) to try and get those who were not engaged more involved, (A4, K2) After this, I decided to make students more active participants by asking them what their expectations of the session were and initiated a practical task so that learning became a process of interaction and exploration, (A2). I devised a mock interview sheet with the three common interview questions listed and also with bullet pointed tips to illustrate how the student might want to structure their answer, (A1) After handing these out I split the students into smaller groups with people who were not their peers and asked them to interview each other using the sheets provided. This scenario seemed to work well and despite the students being apprehensive at first, they soon understood the value of this task. I also made it clear to them that the learning environment was a safe space to try out responses and support each other, (A1, A2, A4) I used observation to go around the groups and check that there conversations were on track, offering constructive feedback which seemed to reassure many of them, (A3) Peer learning was a crucial part of this process as taking it in turns meant that each student could learn from the other's strengths and weaknesses, whilst also improving their 'soft skills' such as communication. As Bill Ford (1997;

in Hase and Kenyon, 2001) eloquently puts it, the focus here is on 'knowledge sharing' rather than 'knowledge hoarding' (K2, K3).

Wilson (2008) outlines that group discussion and peer feedback can 'develop deeper understanding and by encouraging social interaction with peers it provides an opportunity to value other learners' opinions. Once the tasks were complete and everyone had a chance to be both interviewer and interviewee, I therefore asked each pair to feedback to the group about how they found the situation and gave an example of one of their answers if they felt comfortable to do so (K2, V1). From this discussion the group were able to identify which elements of the answers were good and which needed improvement. In alignment with reinforcement theory (Laird, 1985; Burns, 1995), it was crucial to give positive reinforcement here to reassure the students and graduates that they were on the right track, (A3). This was especially the case here given that many of the learners felt deflated from many job rejections or unsuccessful interviews. It was therefore very reassuring to observe some of the learners took the initiative to amend their answers and add comments to their forms which could then be used as exemplars when preparing for an interview.

Several of the feedback forms from the group expressed that they thought the session was very 'chilled' and 'enjoyable'. One learner in particular commented: 'this was a really great session. It was useful and practical and I found it good to practice the techniques in a mock setting'. This is also reflected in a peer observation from a senior colleague who wrote: 'Daniel's style was to give the audience the power to review their own circumstances and to establish their own learning needs. His theoretical material was backed up with relevant and interesting real life examples which the audience could relate to' (K1, K5). Whilst this session worked particularly well with this group of students it is important to remember that as a teaching and learning practitioner you have to be pragmatic about how you approach different situations; continually adapting to suit the needs of the learner. Not every techniques work well in every session, but, as is the case here, I find using a mixed-methods approach to my teaching style to be most effective in order to encapsulate everyone's needs. (A5, K2)

Whilst I do believe that my teaching practice is good, there is always room for improvement and so I always seek evaluations of my teaching. As Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) note, feedback not only be 'provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching'. For instance, the feedback form I use after sessions was previously a paper version which students would fill in at the end. I soon realised that some learners might feel uncomfortable writing honest feedback in front of me or their peers and so have now begun encourage them to complete this digitally from home and submitting it anonymously, (A1, K5).

Aside from delivering lectures, workshops and individual guidance sessions with students/graduates another element of my role involves the development of effective learning material, including online and Moodle resources, (A1, K1) A key consideration when developing teaching and learning material is to ensure it is accessible and as a practitioner I also believe that it is incredibly important to embed equality and diversity wherever possible. Sometimes this is achieved simply in more 'subtle' ways, such as ensuring that the content and images used on Moodle pages and in handouts reflect the diversity of the student population. For example, when I was recently tasked to prepare a skills guide for students interested in freelancing or self-employment I deliberately made sure that the images I used were inclusive, (V1). Many of the images I searched for relating to self-employment simply contained white businessmen, an image which did not accurately reflect the majority of students in my caseload. Effort was thus made to ensure that there was representation of BAME figures and women, for example, (V2).

Whilst this freelancing guide was initially intended to be a handout for one of my workshops, I also decided to add this to the Careers Moodle page. This meant that commuter students (who make up a large proportion of students at BCU) or those simply unable to attend the subsequent workshop on

freelancing had equal access to these materials (V1, V2). This is increasingly important and many Higher Education institutions are developing their VLEs in order to meet the diversity of student learning needs and particularly of student's off-campus (Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall, 2009), (A1, A4). This was reflected in student feedback: 'Helpful links and clear information', '…it gave insight on things I didn't even know about', 'clear and concise'. Most touching was a direct email message from a mature commuter student who stated: ''You lot are running a great service…thanks again for the very friendly and extremely valuable advice. I'm writing up things to get done in my diary right now. You've inspired me!' Such responses seemed to indicate that there was a captive demand for such resources and so I am currently working on producing several more 'How To' guides relating to other employability topics.

**Bibliography**


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