

Advance HE Pedagogy for Employability- Case Study Series

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Title

Putting Historians into Work. A discipline-specific example of embedding employability at the centre of the student lifecycle in Higher Education.

Introduction

This paper will explore the development and delivery of a History discipline-specific employability module at the University of Stirling. The UofS aims to create an innovative curriculum and student experience that embeds employability practice from pre-arrival through to graduation (University of Stirling, 2016). This paper will focus on the creation and development of a specific employability focused module, ***Back to the Future – Putting History and Heritage to Work***, within the degree subject area of History and Heritage in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. This is the first occasion at Stirling when a non-vocational subject area has blended the teaching of employability skills with the academic subject area enabling students to gain academic credit. This paper will explore the institutional context and frameworks used in the development of the course, explain how it works in practice and discuss the challenges and lessons garnered from three years of successfully and effectively embedding an employability module in the student lifecycle.

Stage one: Background

The University of Stirling was the first university in Scotland to devise and deliver credit bearing employability modules to undergraduate students. The first modules, launched more than twenty years ago by the Career and Employability Service, were available to all second-year undergraduate students. These SCQF Level 8 modules, delivered by Career and Employability Service staff outside of the degree subject area, were studied by the students as an elective option. They were based on the Career Development Learning framework: DOTS model (Watts, 2006). This model remains as one of the most recognisable, robust, tried and tested frameworks within the Employability landscape. “*The value of the DOTs model lies in its simplicity, as it allows individuals to organise a great deal of the complexity of career development learning into a manageable framework.*” (Law & Watts, 1977, 1996). As the **Back to the Future** module is delivered by History and Heritage academic teaching staff and not career and employability specialists, it provides a clear structure to enable the blending of subject specific material along with employability topics in a clear and easy to navigate format to achieve the desired Learning Outcomes for the module.

While The DOTs model has in recent years has had its critics and a wide range of other models have emerged, (Career EDGE model, SOAR model to name a few) the DOTS model remains a firm foundation of much of the work that currently underpins employability pedagogy within many HEI’s across the UK and thus was the preferred model chosen to build the *Back to the Future* module upon.

Research undertaken at the University of Dundee confirms the value of such modules within the academic curriculum: “Partaking in credit bearing careers education has an encouraging effect on the likelihood of a positive graduate destination as define by HESA” (Higher Education Careers Service Unit, [HECSU] 2019). Additional benefits of employability and career learning through accredited modules points to “increased levels of confidence and a feeling among students who choose these modules of being more ready to graduate” (HECSU, 2019).

While the Career and Employability Service no longer offer employability modules centrally, an adaptation of this module has been developed and delivered by Elaine Watson (EW), the Employability and Skills Officer within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities – the **Career Launchpad** module. This module remains an elective module available to all second-year undergraduate students across the Faculty.

While elective modules such as this provide an opportunity to some students to undertake Career and Employability learning within the curriculum - for students of some subject discipline areas there can be difficulty in finding space in the ‘crowded curriculum’ (Dickinson, J. and Griffiths, T. 2015) to elect to study options outside their degree discipline in order to gain the benefits that modules such as these can bring.

Stage two: Approach

To meet this challenge, academic staff in the department of History and Heritage in 2016 developed a compulsory credit bearing module aimed at all second year undergraduate History and Heritage students. Working in partnership with the Employability and Skills Officer in the Faculty (EW) along with support from the Careers and Employability Service, and drawing upon the key features of the stand- alone model that had been tried and tested over many years, academic staff sought to blend academic learning and intellectual content from the students home discipline with career theory and practical activities.

The resultant *Back to the Future* module provides an additional and alternative avenue for employability learning that importantly may not have been available to students who are unable to accommodate the stand-alone version in their timetable. Catering for the needs of students who otherwise may miss out on the opportunity to benefit from such a module is an attractive proposition.

To achieve this discipline focus, *Back to the Future* uses the overarching theme of ‘Public History’ and a structure based on combining key employability skills (CV writing, production on online profiles, self-reflection and awareness) with a focus on the six core job sectors in which History graduates in the UK are most commonly employed-Heritage, Museums, Archives, Education, Historical Consultancy and Media (Banner, 2010). Public History, the guiding theme, refers to both the range of public forums (Museums, Heritage sites, TV and Film) and activities (Community History and Archaeology, Genealogy) in which the past plays a central role and a conscious practice or strand within the history discipline (Jordanova, 2006, pp. 126-149). The debates and theories current within Public History, particularly in regard to

the role and use of the past in the present and future, provide the module with a theoretical strand that connects all the job sectors discussed in the module. By doing so, we ensure that the module is not just practical, but has an intellectual rigour and clear connection to the student's broader History programme.

The module is structured around a pairing of academic lectures and professional talks by guest speakers. Through the lens of Public History, the academic lectures provide a focused discussion of each of the six job sectors, exploring the development of each sector and key issues for a modern professional working in that field. The lecturers also signpost key contemporary, and historical, debates on the ways in which the past is used in each area of work. The tutorials feed off this discussion, using allocated primary and secondary sources and questions to encourage the students to discuss of key contemporary issues related to each sector and to consider the range of skills required in each field of work. The academic lectures are complemented by talks by Guest Professionals given by representatives of each sector. These are intended to provide the students with direct and current insights regarding the job sector, drawing on the speakers own personal skills, values and experiences, as well as potential networking opportunities.

The student's achievement of the learning outcomes of *Back to the Future* is judged through three innovative assignments that combine practical careers skills training, with a test of their discipline-specific skill set (see Appendix 1. Learning Outcomes and Appendix 2. Assessment). These include a critical review of online materials from archives and museums, in which the learners demonstrate their engagement with the theoretical theme of the module, and practical assignments that allow them to combine self-reflection with other employability skills (CV writing, Career Development Plans etc), and aim to provide the students with experience of the career decision making, as well as the application process.

Stage three: Outcomes

Student feedback on the module so far, coordinated by Tom Turpie since 2018, has been very positive, with end of semester evaluation surveys on a par with, or better than other history modules (see Appendix 3. Module Evaluation), while the module has consistently well received by the External Examiner, who commented in 2019 that the module provides 'exactly the sort of authentic assessment that will have purchase with employers'.

Moving forward, we plan developments that respond to student feedback from 2017-2019 (expanding the discussion of non-vocational and academic careers with history in particular) and to guidance from other career practitioners (integrating alumni and industry/employers into the module). These latter developments are intended to enhance the currency, relevance and practicality of the module.

This model of delivery has been found to be workable within the curriculum for History and Heritage students providing on the whole, positive feedback from academic staff, students and external stakeholders. Building on this, the Modern Language Department at Stirling have developed a similar model – **Languages for Employability**, using the same approach blending subject learning in this case, language learning, alongside employability learning. This module has now completed its second run and is looking forward to moving forward with its ongoing

development. Additionally, we are currently exploring other subject areas within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities that may be able to adopt this approach. Likely subject areas that could adopt the framework – could be Politics and English Studies as the structure of the module could be adapted to fit these subject areas with minimum alteration.

Going forward it is of interest to find out what the impact of this module has been on the students who have studied it. Future plans to track the students via the **Careers Registration questionnaire** (Higher Education Academy, 2018) that is used by the University of Stirling to look at the career development of students at each stage of their undergraduate studies is one area of future potential focus. Additionally, the destinations of students upon graduation via the results of the national **Graduate Outcomes Survey** (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019) may be a source of information in relation to the longitudinal benefits of this embedding of employability within the curriculum in this way.

Appendix 1. Learning Outcomes and Employability Skills

LO1	Show An understanding of how history and heritage inform various aspects of economy and society
LO2	An understanding of how historical knowledge, understanding and skills inform specific professional sectors and areas of employment
LO3	An understanding of how changing politics, priorities, policies and technologies can impact on these sectors and their use of history and heritage
LO4	A knowledge of the qualifications, skills and values associated with a number of specific job sectors and the academic and practical career pathways associated with these sectors

This module offers opportunities to develop the following employability skills

Work-related Learning	Guest lecturers from business and industry (Private/public/third sector)
Reflective Practice	An opportunity for students to reflect on their skills development and how they have developed knowledge and understanding within the module. Opportunity to articulate reflections either verbally or in written format.
Career Planning Development	Career planning and job hunting CV preparation

Appendix 2. Assessment

Description	Weighting	Employability skill sets
Assignment 1: Critical review of online public-facing archive/museum material	35%	{Analysing and investigation {Critical thinking/reflection {Constructing an argument {Planning and organising {Discipline knowledge {Written communication

(max. 1,500 words, excluding footnotes and references)		
Assignment 2: CV and LinkedIn profile (CV – max 2 pages; LinkedIn profile (max. 500 words, excluding footnotes and references)	20%	{Planning and organising {Written communication {Presentation and design {Knowledge of employability and professional profiling {Self-reflection and understanding
Assignment 3: Job study and career development plan (max. 1,500 words, excluding footnotes and references)	35%	{Critical thinking/reflection {Investigating sources {Planning and organising {Time management {Written communication {Knowledge of professions {Evaluating argument/debate
Assignment 4: Oral contribution in tutorials	10%	{Spoken communication {Evaluating {Discipline knowledge {Critical thinking/reflection {Constructing argument {Responding to questions and asking questions

Appendix 3. Student Evaluation Forms

Answer to Question; Overall, I am satisfied with my experience of the module (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree)

Back to the Future; putting History and Heritage to Work	Division of History and Politics Average (other Pre-Honours modules Spring Semester)
<u>2017</u> 2 Average. 79.5% of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement	1.46 94.16% of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement
<u>2018</u> 1.6 Average. 93.1% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement	1.76 89.93 of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement
<u>2019</u> 2.1 Average. 80% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement	-

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