GeoSciences – Earth Sciences Professional Skills Day

This particular model provides an intensive day of activity allowing the students to focus on careers learning through a mixture of lectures delivered by a careers adviser and interactive group-work facilitated by academic staff, careers advisers and employers.

**School/Subject Area:** GeoSciences

**Target Audience:**Final year Earth Science undergraduates

**Staff Involved:** Dr Simon Jung (Lecturer), Don Murray & Susan Bird (Careers Advisers), other academic staff and employers

**Date**: Annually in early Semester 1 since 2007

Key features

The rationale for this event is to embed careers education within the curriculum as part of an ongoing Professional Skills academic module.

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The aims of this project are to provide:

* an awareness of options after graduating with an earth sciences degree;
* an introduction to making applications for jobs and postgraduate courses; and
* a practical understanding of the interview process via peer interview practice and feedback, wholly undertaken by students & facilitated by staff.

Planning

* An initial meeting between the academic and representatives of the Careers Service established the aims of the day and the input required from Careers Advisers.
* The academic arranges all interview facilitator input, application completion & submission by students and venue booking. Several venues are booked for the afternoon session as each interviewing group needs a breakout room.
* The Careers Adviser planned & developed two sessions: Options with Earth Sciences and Effective Applications, using examples and content with an earth sciences focus where appropriate and including a short video clip introducing interviews. A brief introduction to successful interviews provides a closing element to the morning sessions, the afternoon focus being on experiential learning.
* During the week prior to the event, students are asked to complete a template application form to say what type of job/course they are interested in, with which particular employer/course provider, why they are interested, what they feel they can offer, and relevant experience/skills.
* Participants are pre-allocated by the academic lead into groups of 4-6 students, each with a relevant facilitator (students indicating an academic course application are typically placed in groups facilitated by an academic member of staff).
* One or two days prior to the event, all facilitators are given copies of their group’s application forms for review.

Project

The day itself is split into four main components, along with lunch and coffee breaks.

* Initial plenary session Reviewing your Options with Earth Sciences, delivered by a Careers Adviser.
* Plenary session on Making Effective Applications, which includes a brief introduction to interviews delivered by a Careers Adviser.
* Group interviewing role-play in breakout rooms. The timescale is strictly observed and an atmosphere of professional role-play is encouraged. During role play, one student is typically interviewed by two other students, and with the others observing. The interviewers get a few minutes to agree some questions and to provide constructive feedback before changing roles and moving on to the next ‘candidate’.
  + The facilitator only intervenes to encourage good timekeeping or prompt if the interviewers or ‘candidate’ is struggling.
  + **All students provide** **constructive feedback and comment on their role as interviewer as well as interviewee**, commenting on first impressions, content, delivery & relevance of answers and body language.
* A short plenary wrap-up session facilitated by a Careers Adviser, with signposting to sources of further advice and support.

Resources

* Considerable time from the academic is required for planning and organising.
* A careers adviser invests several hours in advance to plan the sessions and then in delivery and facilitation of the various sessions.
* All facilitators (academic staff, careers advisers and employers) review the students’ applications from their group prior to the event and are involved in running the afternoon’s interactive sessions.
* Suitable space for both the plenary and the breakout sessions needs to be booked, along with refreshments throughout the day.

Evaluation

* Very positive feedback from students - for some it can be the first experience of more formal interviewing, learning from their peers’ experiences and approaches, and providing a ‘wake-up’ call to some, stimulating thoughts about their future.
* Learning from peers in a supportive environment is seen as a valuable exercise
* The session provides valuable opportunity to engage with employers, academics and careers advisers using a practical exercise that demands critical thinking, develops communication, presentation skills and confidence.
* Effective approach to offering the Careers Service Careers in the Curriculum programme in a way that works well with the School curriculum and timetable
* Allows the graduate attributes of communication and personal effectiveness to be explicitly developed.

Advice

* Finding a model that is locally suitable is important.  Working in partnership with Schools, the Careers Service can flexibly deliver their ‘tailored-to-course’ input over one day, across two half days, over several weeks as long as it’s within an appropriate module. (See also Ecology 4, delivered across three weeks of a Professional Skills course.)
* Careers learning is an intrinsic and important part of a student’s overall development while at University, not simply an add-on.
* Academic perceptions shape students’ attitudes.  If academic staff can see the relevance to students’ professional development then this helps students see it too.

**Do...**

* Do ask for participation from a variety of facilitators for the afternoon session – this adds real value to such an event.
* Do encourage students to base their application on a job/course they have an interest in and motivation for.
* Do be realistic about the time required to cover such material adequately – too short and it loses value and impact.

**Success factors**

* An academic lead who sees the benefits of supporting students in this way, makes the time to organise the day and shows commitment to effective collaboration, with good communication between the academic lead and the Careers Service in particular.
* The whole event being part of a Professional Skills course links career planning and development with undergraduate academic learning and development.
* Flexibility of provision and available resources from the Careers Service.

Key contacts

Dr Simon Jung, Lecturer, School of GeoSciences

Susan Bird, Careers Adviser for the School of GeoSciences

Don Murray, Careers Adviser

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/employability/staff-information/how-employability-addressed/good-practice/cse/professional-skills>