

Institution:	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Programme:	BSc Ecological Resource Management
Module:	Learning From Work, AES290
Activity:	Credit for discipline and non-discipline related work experience
Level/Year:	2
Learning hours:	100

Work-related learning outcome(s)

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- identify and analyse the mission, objectives and functions of the workplace organisation;
- analyse the workplace structure and identify a range of line management and other reporting arrangements;
- identify relevant workplace systems and procedures, and demonstrate their own role in implementing these in practice;
- identify relevant workplace legislation, regulations and externally and internally imposed standards, and analyse the effect of these on workplace practice;
- identify and evaluate their own interpersonal (including team work), communication, self-management and job search skills with reference to set criteria;
- develop these skills in the work situation by setting goals and targets;
- record and reflect on their learning and provide evidence of progress towards skill enhancement, and of ongoing planning for further development and enhancement;
- make a coherent oral presentation.

Description of the teaching activity which achieves the learning outcome(s)

The module requires students to be engaged in a minimum of 40 hours in a work environment. This might be paid or voluntary work but must be contemporary with the module in order that learning from the module can be applied and consolidated within their workplace experience. Any form of “work” may be used as long as it is legal and occurs within a recognised organisation; it does not need to be associated with their degree programme discipline. The organisation needs to confirm the number of hours worked and complete a Health and Safety form, otherwise no further contribution is required. However, it is helpful if the organisation can accommodate the student asking questions about its organisation.

Much learning occurs outside formal contact time. A workbook is given to students, both in hard copy and electronic format. It contains the documents that students will need; they can also add their own documents and files.

Students are introduced to various strategies for examining their workplace. Formal introductions explain the principles underlying the analysis, which students then apply during individual or group exercises. The main teaching activities are:

- an exercise to illustrate the use of different learning styles;
- completion of a Learning Styles Inventory;
- description of Learning Logs and guidance on reflective practice;
- an exercise to illustrate different roles within a team;
- Belbin analysis of roles within a team;
- an exercise to identify aims and objectives of an organisation;
- preparation for an oral presentation.

Rationale for the selection of the teaching activity

Most learning occurs through students analysing their experience of the workplace. An emphasis is consequently placed on experiential learning to familiarise students with methodically reflecting on their own knowledge and experience, and forming their own reasoned judgements. The work experience as such is not assessed, but rather the student's analysis of that experience. The "Learning Tasks" are designed to develop particular understanding as flagged under "Learning Outcomes" but underpinning this is an enhanced reflective learning ability. This is especially important as it is often weakly developed in students. Consequently strengthening this element of their learning repertoire significantly enhances their learning skills. In addition, reflective learning skills are particularly valuable for lifelong learning, when support structures for learning are variable (and generally less than when at university), and also for the continual enhancement of effectiveness in the workplace (when the "learning outcomes" may not be self-evident, but continued learning from experience is desirable).

Assessment – approach and detail

Ten "Learning Tasks" are undertaken as follows:

1. Completion of a skills audit, appraisal of present position and construction of a development plan.
2. Analysis of personal learning style.
3. Construction of at least ten "Learning Logs" involving an analysis of contribution to the workplace, effectiveness and a strategy for enhancement of performance.
4. Analysis of roles played within a work-based team.
5. Reflection on personal role within a team and analysis of how teams accommodate the differing contributions of members.
6. Identification of the skills and qualities of effective managers.
7. Analysis of the organisation's aims, objectives and strategies.
8. Analysis of personal knowledge and skills, and their relevance to current employment.
9. Writing of an essay in which employment patterns are analysed in the light of research of the literature and personal work experience.
10. Oral presentation based on an analysis of learning during the work experience accompanying the module.

Future developments

Following a successful pilot phase (concurrent with the centrally delivered module, CAS290/CAS280), the module has been offered as part of the BSc Ecological Resource Management programme. We have encouraged students to take up work experience relevant to their degree subject or long term career aspirations whenever possible, but this has not been a pre-requisite for acceptance onto the module. The successful pilot of the module has contributed to other academic departments adopting and delivering it in their own right. A restructuring of programmes in the department meant that the module ceased to be offered in its original form from 2002-2003; however, involvement in the development and delivery of the module has resulted in an awareness of the importance of reflective learning and the department will continue to use tools and techniques developed as a result of its involvement with the module to develop reflective learning skills in its students.

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