

Title: **Connecting, engaging and stimulating academic staff to meet the challenge of building real-world learning into all curricula**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

Theme: Preparing students for work

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Reflect on the issues HEI's face in translating employability mission statements and strategies, into relevant course design and teaching & learning at module level.
- Identify how own HEI is effective in embedding employability into the curricula.
- Consider how a community of practice approach could stimulate engagement, dialogue, synergy and learning.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

The impetus for HEI's to address the challenge of graduate employability is well documented (Dearing, 1997; Leitch, 2006; Browne, 2010). Reflecting this impetus, and in common with many other HEI's, Southampton Solent University (SSU) has developed clearly defined employability strategies and policies. However, recent findings into 14 HEI's suggest that the extent to which such strategies are implemented at course level is more variable (Andrews & Russell, 2011). At SSU whilst there are some excellent examples of innovative practice at course and module level, challenges are apparent when considering how to translate and embed employer related learning into all curricula.

The community of practice (COP) approach aims to create interactive platforms (through, for example, face to face, group and virtual technologies [VCoP]) that bring relevant persons together, from across the institution, to fulfil both individual and group goals (Hildreth et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Gannon-Leary & Fountainha, 2007). Purported benefits relate to:

- Enabling of dialogue
- Sharing of best practice,

- Capturing and dissemination of existing knowledge
- Group learning
- Mentoring of newcomers
- Creation of new knowledge.

This paper discusses the design and pilot of an Employer-Related Learning Community of Practice at SSU together with the lessons learned from our initial experience. The pilot built on initial staff development intended to build capacity and capability of staff, to address a whole range of issues around engaging with employers and embedding work experience into the curriculum. A number of 'champions' were identified across Faculties to become an 'expert' group to inform the development of the CoP. The paper considers the initial key exploration tasks used with the expert group to identify the relevant audience, stakeholders, goals and vision for the Employer Related Learning COP. Discussion then considers the design of the pilot COP in terms of roles, platforms, activities and support. Lessons learned from the pilot are then summarised and areas of best practice and future plans are highlighted.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

20 minute Presentation of the key issues facing HEI's in operationalising employability strategies, and key learning points from the design and pilot of the Employer Related Learning CoP.

25 minute round table small group discussion:

- reflecting on the main issues arising from the paper for participants' own practice
- comparing and contrasting participants' experience in relation to embedding employability within the curriculum in their own HEI's
- reflecting on the relevance and efficacy of a CoP approach to assist these approaches

The presenters will identify key learning points, best practice and top tips and will circulate these to participants following the event.

References

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