

**Society for Research into Higher Education Conference 2008
Proposed for the Learning & Teaching Domain as an Individual Paper**

**Abstract – Evaluation of the SPHERE student projects model to promote
employability skills in students and knowledge transfer competencies in staff:
What are the challenges?**

A persistent challenge for HE providers is the need to develop interventions that embed student employability into the curriculum. Such activity can also facilitate academic engagement in knowledge transfer (KT) allowing HE bodies to contribute to their communities (dti, 2004). This project evaluated an existing model of Partnership working between the university and a local Constabulary (SPHERE: Shared Police and Higher Education Research and Enterprise) which includes opportunities for student engagement with 'real world' issues through in applied independent study (IS) projects in a range of subject areas.

The project sought to understand what barriers might exist to prevent this system from making optimal use of the support from a keen and productive Partner. Feedback from 13 staff interviews followed by two e-surveys reaching 45 staff and 270 students identified a number of areas of staff and student barriers to *embedding* SPHERE e.g. tutors as 'key gate-keepers' and resource issues. Data also illuminated additional concerns which need to be addressed in uptake of partnership working as part of the academic role. Some of these speak to fundamental tensions between the philosophy behind HE and whether it should be informed by industry or business.

The positive evaluation findings included widely endorsed benefits of work based learning, particularly by students including: applying learning and theory and support with focusing their topic and access to 'real world' data. As a result of this evaluation process, the existing SPHERE model has been modified for re-launch. This paper will share 10 years of experience which has gone into developing this model as an example of good practice in Partnership and KT, for fulfilment of the IS as an piece of work based learning.

References:

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