

# **The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics**

## **Placement Learning, Citizenship and Employability**

**Edited by**

**Steven Curtis and Alasdair Blair**

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For Heather and Katherine

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# **Foreword: E-Learning: Engagement and Efficacy**

This collection marks a significant moment in the development of the teaching and learning of politics in higher education (HE) in the UK.

The book is the outcome of what has been a very creative period in the development of progressive pedagogies in university teaching. This creative and experimental period has been promoted by a series of government funding programmes to support innovation in teaching and learning in HE. Projects discussed in this book have benefited from the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning and the monies provided under the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning programme.

What has been central to the development of these competitive funding programmes is that they have encouraged colleagues to collaborate within their own institutions and across the HE sector. These funding streams have persuaded even the most research-minded universities to create an institutional environment for the progressive development of teaching and learning. These institutional environments have ensured that colleagues have been rewarded for their work in the classroom at the institutional and at the national level. The activities recorded in this book provide real evidence for the effectiveness of these funding programmes.

The work contained in this volume comes out of work done by a project funded under the FDTL 5 in Politics: The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics and out of papers presented at an end-of-project conference. Key to all of the work recorded in this volume is the issue of student engagement. In this book these engagements are framed within the real world and simulated contexts of political education and employability.

If the book is about student engagement with politics and the world of work, it is also about another form of engagement: the engagement

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between research and teaching and the ways in which these core academic activities can be connected so as to add value to the student and teacher experience in HE.

The type of engagement between teaching and research recorded in this volume has come to be known in the sector as research-based learning. Key to the effective approach to research-based learning is the way in which undergraduate students can be regarded as more than the passive recipients of their lecturers' own research. Research-based learning encourages academics to see students as part of the research cultures of their own universities. In this way, and without academics losing any of their authority, the process of research in HE is democratised, by being opened up to greater forms of engagement by academics with their students.

The volume makes a link between research-based learning and the concept of the scholarship of engagement, based on the work of Ernest Boyer, the American educationalist. It is good to see a publication further developing Boyer's work within a British context. Central to the work of the scholarship of engagement is extending the student experience to engage with the world outside of the classroom, in ways that are relevant to the students' experience of their chosen subject and in a manner that will be of benefit to them when they leave university.

What is progressive about the experiences recorded in this volume is that, following Boyer's work, student experiences are defined within an academic framework, based on a research project. Boyer's approach, and the way in which it has been taken up by contributors to this volume, points beyond the narrow conceptions of work experience or internships that have been driven by the employer-led vocationalist agenda that has come to dominate aspects of teaching and learning within HE institutions.

If this book is about student engagement, it is also about how these engagements have impacted on the lives of the students who worked on these projects. Steven Curtis and Alisdair Blair, the editors of the volume, discuss the effect of these engagements through the concept of efficacy. Curtis and Blair record that students frequently came away from their

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placements with an enhanced view of the world of politics, a greater understanding of complex political issues and a sense of the role that they can play in the political process. Students were less cynical about the activities of political actors, more aware of their own abilities to affect change and to improve the well-being of others. This sense of efficacy within the teaching and learning experience moves us beyond the personalised idea of student-centred learning to consider the issue of student experience in a much wider social context: to recognise that the student experience is not simply about the learning and teaching but that students have the power to affect meaningful social change.

The collection marks a very happy time in my professional career when I was able to work with committed and talented colleagues on a range of teaching and learning projects. Through my work with the Higher Education Academy subject centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP) based in Birmingham University, and as the Director of the Reinvention Centre at the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University, a centre for excellence in teaching and learning, I was involved in various ways with work that has been written up in this volume. It is good to see that this work is now available for colleagues to engage with and learn from.

Mike Neary  
University of Lincoln

## Preface

This book grows out of the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics, a three-and-a-half-year research project exploring means of embedding research-based placement learning into the politics and international relations curricula in the United Kingdom. The project was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through Phase 5 of its Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL5) (project number FDTL 16/03). We gratefully acknowledge this financial support without which this work would not have been possible.

Most of the chapters in this volume were first presented at the eponymous end-of-project conference we organised at the University of Warwick on 10–11 June 2008, but all of the contributors are colleagues with whom we established or further developed relationships through this project. Personally we count the building of these links with colleagues engaged in similar activities as one of the most important benefits of the project, and we are very grateful to all of the contributors for their participation in this volume and for the good humour and patience with which they put up with our reminders of deadlines and requests for minor amendments to their draft chapters. While this book presents the main findings of our project, we were determined that it should also include other important models of excellence and best practice relating to placement learning, community engagement, citizenship and employability for students of politics and international relations that we discovered through our research.

The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics was entirely a team effort, so our thanks go to our colleagues with whom it was such a pleasure and intellectually stimulating experience to work: the project director Philippa Sherrington and the project manager Caroline Gibson at the University of Warwick, through whose hard work the project was more successful than we could have hoped; and Barrie Axford and Richard Huggins at Oxford Brookes University, whose experience and expertise

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gave us all more confidence in what we were doing. The project's IT officer Kim Francis, also based at Brookes, did a wonderful job of constructing the project website ([www.politicsinaction.ac.uk](http://www.politicsinaction.ac.uk)) where the documents and templates produced by the project can be found. Thanks must also go to the caterers at Brookes for the delicious crème brûlées which rounded off the excellent lunches we had there.

We are especially grateful to the thirty-six students whose experiences formed the basis for our research project and who threw themselves into the various placements we organised for them with such enthusiasm and commitment. It was a pleasure to work with them, and we learnt a lot from them, as well as being very impressed by their ability to take responsibility for their placements and control of their own learning. We are also very grateful to the eighteen placement providers who extended such wonderful opportunities for learning and personal development to our students and who dealt with us so patiently and graciously, even when we were proposing a model of placement learning that did not always best fit their organisational requirements. Building these relationships between the universities and the political actors and organisations in the surrounding communities was one of the most pleasurable dimensions of the project, as well as the central plank in the scholarship of engagement itself.

We would also like to thank the project's transferability partners, who worked with us during the transferability stage in the first six months of 2008 and whose experiences pushed our ideas about placement learning in new directions: Simon Lightfoot at the University of Leeds, Matthew Wyman and Jonathan Parker at Keele University and Andy Mycock and his students at the University of Huddersfield. We are delighted that two of the transferability partners have contributed chapters to this volume.

As relative novices to research into teaching and learning, we received much helpful advice and guidance from established authorities in the field. Mike Neary played a central role in getting us to think through the pedagogy underpinning our efforts, and we'd like to think that the model of placement learning we devised may play a small role in the

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reinvention of the university to which he aspires. Mike was very helpful in facilitating the development of our work and in helping us to disseminate our findings, and we are delighted that he has contributed a preface to this volume. Glynis Cousin and Alan Jenkins deserve many thanks for advising and encouraging us and for providing many helpful insights and suggestions. Pro-Vice Chancellor Michael Whitby at the University of Warwick was very supportive as chair of the project's steering committee, and we benefited greatly from his interest and involvement in the project. As the project's external evaluator, Murray Saunders pushed us to think through our theory of change, although we suspect not to the extent he would have wished! Given our little previous experience of using placements, it was very helpful to learn from the work of David Woodman and his colleagues in the Crucible CETL at Roehampton University, and Philip Norton (more properly, Professor The Lord Norton of Louth), who was a pioneer in the area of politics placements and who so generously shared his knowledge and expertise with us on a number of occasions.

In the UK, John Craig is the central figure in the community of scholars concerned with teaching and learning issues in the discipline of politics, and we are very grateful for his help and advice generally. His work in establishing the Political Studies Association Teaching and Learning Specialist Group and his involvement in the Higher Education Academy's subject centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP) has been a lynchpin holding this group of scholars together and forging such a friendly, supportive and welcoming community. John's contribution to teaching and learning has been properly acknowledged in 2009 with the award of both a National Teaching Fellowship and C-SAP's Recognition Award. We are very pleased that he contributed the concluding chapter to this book.

Thanks must also go to our friends and colleagues at C-SAP, not least for providing us with the opportunity to publish this work, which had been turned down by the many commercial publishers we initially approached. We think some of the examples of best practice contained within these pages will be most helpful and a source of inspiration to fellow

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educators (along with placement providers and students), and C-SAP's importance and value is demonstrated by its ability and willingness to publish and disseminate work that would otherwise not be publicly available. We are especially thankful to Darren Marsh at C-SAP for his patience and help in putting this book together. We'd also like to thank Rose Gann, who generously used the remainder of her PREPOL project budget to produce a short film, *Innovations in the Teaching and Learning of Politics* ([www.politicsatuniversity.com/innovations.html](http://www.politicsatuniversity.com/innovations.html)), promoting our project along with work of the other FDTL5 projects in politics and international relations.

Mention must also be made of the participants at the two conferences at the University of Warwick organised as part of the project: Placement Learning in Politics: Essential, Added Value or Plain Frivolous? on 19 January 2007, and the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics: Placement Learning, Citizenship and Employability on 10–11 June 2008. As with diplomatic conferences, much of the most important work was done over drinks, lunch and dinner, and colleagues shared many important ideas and experiences with us. Special note must go to Chris Goldsmith, Matthew Wyman, Sarah Cohen and Simon Philpott, but the participation of all of the contributors and participants at both conferences made them very stimulating and enjoyable experiences. We were especially pleased that representatives of all of the stakeholders involved in placement learning and other modes of engaged learning were able to attend and actively participate in the conferences, including students, university careers-service and placement officers and placement providers. We'd like to single out Elaine McGladdery for special thanks for her involvement in both conferences as well as her sterling work setting up placements at Coventry City Council for six of our students and for her contribution to this book.

Steven would like to thank Bob McKeever and Jeff Haynes for supporting his continuing work on the project – both as a consultant to the University of Warwick and in writing up the results for conference papers and articles – after joining London Metropolitan University in February

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2007. It has been wonderful to have a head of department and associate head of department for research who appreciate the importance of research into pedagogical issues and who recognise the benefits that accrue for our students. Thanks also to Peter Laugharne, Brian Tutt and Tiffany Platt at London Metropolitan University for sharing their extensive knowledge and templates of placement learning and to Maurice Glasman for his encouragement and unstinting enthusiasm for this sort of thing.

Finally, we wish to express our thanks and love to our children, Abbie, Jakob and William, and especially to our wives, who had to put up with our absence over many days as we shuttled up and down the country during the transferability phase of the project without complaining – too much! We dedicate this book to them.

Steven Curtis and Alasdair Blair

Woking and Leicester

August 2009

## Contributors

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teaching and learning field her interests are placement learning, the use of IT in teaching and curriculum development. She has received teaching grants from both the European Commission and the National Academy for the Integration of Research into Teaching and Learning and has disseminated her work widely. She has participated in teaching exchanges in Albany, NY (the College of Saint Rose) and Madrid, Spain (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos).

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**Richard Huggins** is Assistant Dean in the School of Social Sciences and Law at Oxford Brookes University. He is currently completing a book on UK approaches to drug use and control (Willam, forthcoming), and is working on the third edition of a jointly authored textbook, *Politics: An Introduction*, for Routledge.

**John Kelly** became involved in the Community-Based Research Initiative at Oxford Brookes University in 2007. Before that he worked on a research project for Tower Hamlets Summer University in London after graduating from Oxford Brookes with a BA in Sociology and Geography. Due to the extent of local community partnerships the initiative has since developed, he is currently serving as the Learning Communities Initiative Coordinator at the same time as Community-Based Research Coordinator.

**Sarah Longwell** has been a careers adviser at Keele University since 1994. Alongside her generic role she has developed workshops and resources specifically for research students, contact researchers, law undergraduates, English undergraduates and, of course, politics students.

**Elaine McGladdery** is the Organisational Development and Training Officer for Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council where she is responsible for the learning and development of all employees and the elected members of the Council. She has worked in a variety of training and development roles for over fifteen years in both the private and public sectors. She worked for Coventry City Council for seven years in their training team where she was responsible for elected member training and became involved in the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project. After leaving Coventry City Council she took a secondment with the West Midlands Local Government Association for eighteen months, working on workforce planning across the public sector for the West Midlands Region. During this time she was involved with a national project researching integrated workforce strategy, looking at improving how public-sector

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# **Part I: Introduction**



## **Chapter 1**

# **The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics**

*Steven Curtis and Alasdair Blair*

### **Introduction**

In recent years in the United Kingdom we have witnessed an increasing emphasis placed on active learning and community engagement in higher education (e.g., Annette 2009). These developments have taken a number of forms, from the use of class-based simulations and problem-based enquiries to the employment of placements and work-based learning beyond the confines of university campuses; but all of these developments mark a break with the traditional model of higher education in which students are the passive recipients of the knowledge imparted by their lecturers. The general move is towards students becoming more involved in their own intellectual and personal development and with their experiences taking a central position, whether this learning takes place within the university or out in the community.

This book develops these themes within the subject areas of politics and international relations. The book is theoretical in its exploration of the pedagogical literature on experiential learning from both sides of the Atlantic, but it also has a practical intent. In respect of the latter, the book contains concrete examples of best practice in the use of placements and other forms of active learning that we hope will be useful to colleagues who are responsible for placement learning programmes and employability modules or who have an interest in developments in teaching and learning in the social sciences more generally. To that end, module syllabi and other useful templates are appended to some of the chapters. This chapter provides an introduction to the book, but before we examine its contents we must first say something about what we mean by the scholarship of

engagement and how it relates to the teaching and learning of politics and international relations in the UK.

## **Translating the scholarship of engagement from the US into the British context**

The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics was a three-year project funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through the fifth round of its Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (the four other politics projects that were also funded in the same round are discussed in John Craig's concluding chapter to this volume). The project involved the politics departments of Oxford Brookes University, the University of Warwick and Coventry University. It explored means of embedding placement learning in the undergraduate politics and international relations curricula in an effort to harness the potential of this form of experiential learning to enhance and enrich students' understanding of these subjects. The project team successfully bid for funding for a further six months and embarked on the transferability phase of the project, working with colleagues at Keele University, London Metropolitan University, the University of Huddersfield and the University of Leeds, to assist them in developing or revising their own models of placement learning for students of politics and international relations.

In devising the project, we found much food for thought in the extensive body of literature in the area of experiential learning that has grown up on the other side of the Atlantic. Over the past three decades in the USA, service-learning has become one of the most prevalent and widely written-about means of extending experiential learning opportunities to undergraduate students, although its advocates often stress its benefits in addressing a perceived crisis in higher education in America and in developing a civic awareness in young adults (e.g., Astin 2002; Barber and Battistoni 1993; Eyler and Giles 1999; Jacoby et al. 1996, 2003; Rhoads and Howard 1998; Stanton et al. 1999; Zlotkowski 1998). In service-learning, students' service to the community is married to academic

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courses that encourage them to reflect on their service and thereby to improve and enrich their learning. This development is usually represented in terms of the US higher education system's rediscovery of its mission to address social problems and to serve national purposes (Boyer 1994, 1996; Barber 1998). Indeed, the phrase 'the scholarship of engagement' was coined by Ernest Boyer (1996) to describe this connection between institutions of higher education and their surrounding communities which he hoped to foster. In Boyer's scheme of things, universities and colleges would serve the American nation by tackling social issues such as child poverty while helping to replenish the fabric of the nation itself (see also Barker 2004; Percy et al. 2006; Stanton 2008).

From a British perspective, this emphasis on universities in the service of the nation appears a little alien, the recent concern with so-called 'third stream' money-generating activity notwithstanding, and it would be almost unseemly to go as far as Barber and Battistoni in their description of service-learning as an element of a 'pedagogy of freedom' (1993: 239).<sup>1</sup> In the British context, it seems to make more sense to appropriate the scholarship of engagement with an emphasis on capturing the experience of students learning about their degree subjects through engaging in relevant real-world research activities rather than serving the community as such. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Edward Zlotkowski, one of the most important figures in the service-learning movement in the USA, has recently used the phrase to refer to the service-learning activities of individual undergraduate students (2005: ix). Our rearticulation of this form of scholarship makes the concern with engagement more of an academic one rather than one with central civic or political values or virtues (cf. Ball 2005; Colby et al. 2003; Lempert 1996).

Despite this difference in national context, we can learn a number of important lessons from the American service-learning literature, especially the growing body of work explicitly related to the disciplines of Political Science and International Relations (e.g., Battistoni 1997; Battistoni and Hudson 1997; Beamer 1998; Cabrera and Anastasi 2008; Dicklitch 2003; Gorham 2005; Markus et al. 1993; Marlin-Bennett 2002; Millett

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McCartney 2006; Patterson 2000; Rimmerman n.d., 1997, 2005; Smith 2006; Young 1996). If we bracket for a moment the element of this pedagogy concerned with nurturing young citizens and their service to the community, which often lacks direct connections to the academic content of politics degree courses (Colby et al. 2007: 5), and which can even disturb and disrupt rather than enrich students' class-based activities (Zivi 1997: 53–5), we are left with a number of key insights which are serviceable from a British perspective. In addition to acquiring 'factual knowledge about politics' (Delli Carpini and Keeter 2000: 635), these include modes of embedding experiential learning in modules, employing often very short placements during term time (Hudson 1997: 84; Markus et al. 1993: 412), forming partnership arrangements with community organisations (Jacoby et al. 2003), encouraging student reflection (Mills 2001; Watters and Ford 1995) and devising appropriate patterns of assessment (Williams and Driscoll 1997). There are also clear affinities with the US experience of community action research or participatory action research (Reardon 1998), where students and/or faculty assist community organisations in framing and undertaking research projects in order to address specific social problems or issues. This has been described as the 'highest form of service-learning' (Porpora 1999). By extension, we contend that our research-based model of placement learning is the highest form of placement activity.

Our concern to inject an element of research-based learning into the undergraduate experience also owes much to Boyer, although this time posthumously through the work of the commission named in his honour. Our approach was inspired by the report of the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University (1998), which expressed a concern that US undergraduates were generally excluded from the research conducted by their tutors and proposed a number of means of redressing this problem, including the use of 'carefully constructed internships' which 'can provide learning that cannot be replicated in the classroom' (Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University 1998: 18–19). A similar concern about the lack of

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opportunities for students at universities to ‘get their hands dirty’ in the research process has been evident in Britain and elsewhere (e.g., Brew 2006; Jenkins et al. 2003; Zamorski 2000). The project team’s close ties to the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research, a centre for excellence in teaching and learning based at the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University, reinforced our belief in the value of a research-based approach to placements, which is outlined in more detail in Chapter 3 (see also Curtis et al. 2008, 2009a; Sherrington et al. 2008). Indeed, one of our undergraduate students conducted a C-SAP-funded research project of his own, which dovetailed nicely with our project (Smith 2007).

### **A broader interpretation of engagement: the dimensions of citizenship and employability**

As indicated above, the central aim of the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project was to develop models of placement learning in order to formally integrate an element of experiential learning into the politics and international relations curricula. However, it soon became apparent that engaged learning had more dimensions than our focus on enhancing students’ understanding of politics suggested. For example, one of the first activities we embarked on was the forging of partnerships with potential placement providers, establishing connections between the universities and individuals and organisations in the surrounding communities; some of the placements we organised even had a clear emphasis on service to the community similar to the US experience. And through reading our students’ reflective placement blogs (Curtis et al. 2009b) and discussing their placements with them in post-placement interviews, it was clear that their experiences were more rich and multifaceted than we had anticipated.

From the students’ perspective, in addition to gaining a better understanding of how politics is conducted in practice, there were two main additional and largely unexpected gains, or what Anne Colby and colleagues have called ‘collateral benefits’ (Colby et al. 2007: 235). The first

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was the development of students' political engagement. In post-placement interviews the students talked about their improved appreciation and estimation of political processes and actors, which grew out of seeing the important and non-partisan work they do on a day-to-day basis. With clear evidence that young people have become disconnected from traditional political procedures (e.g., Sloam 2007) and with the mounting public cynicism towards established political institutions following the MPs' expenses scandal in 2009, this is a matter of no small importance.

The second unexpected and related benefit was the students' discovery of their own ability to make a difference in the world. For example, through lobbying government departments on behalf of a constituent, the students found that they could act politically and get things done (Curtis and Blair 2008). In addition, most of the students came away with a clearer understanding of the political careers that were open to them along with the knowledge that they could successfully function and succeed in such environments (Curtis 2009). In short, the students experienced an increase in their sense of personal or 'internal' efficacy: 'their sense of what they think and do politically matters, that they are capable of grasping complex political issues, and that they have a role to play in the political process' (Colby et al. 2007: 229), although we would expand this definition to include a clear pay-off in terms of employability as well.

As we discovered, the scholarship of engagement for politics was broader and richer than we perhaps anticipated. We hope to capture some of that richness in this volume. In addition to the concern with using placements to improve learning and teaching, the themes of citizenship and employability have been given equal weighting.<sup>2</sup> The chapters in this volume grew out of the end-of-project conference we hosted at the University of Warwick on 10–11 June 2008, which we used as an opportunity to pull together and learn from many of the people we had met and worked with through the course of the project. In the subtitle shared by the conference and this book we have thrown open the meaning of the scholarship of engagement for politics to embrace community engagement,

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political education and employability, and the chapters include many examples of best practice in these areas which we discovered in our work on the project and its transferability phase. While the book explores the literature on active learning and employability, we also intend it to serve as a handbook for practitioners. We believe it will be of great value to fellow lecturers responsible for placements and employability modules, as well as students and placement providers seeking to get the most out of such opportunities.

### **About the chapters in this book**

The book is divided into four parts. In Chapter 2, John Annette completes the introduction with a concise but powerful *tour d'horizon* of the dimensions of employer and civic and community engagement in higher education in Britain in particular, but also in the USA and elsewhere. He examines both pedagogical developments and various government initiatives to stimulate relationships between universities and the communities in which they are situated, drawing on both his encyclopaedic knowledge of the literature and his extensive experience in advising government departments and working with community organisations.

Part II is devoted to exploring in detail two modes of engaged learning: the research-based approach to placement learning that we developed through the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project and the use of simulations in the classroom in collaboration with a non-governmental organisation (NGO). As befits student-centred pedagogies that engage with the outside community, this section of the book includes reflections from both students and the NGO and local-government officers involved in these activities so that their perspectives and insights can be heard.

In Chapter 3 we set out the new approach to placement learning for politics and international relations that we developed in the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project. By contrast to the dominant models of placement learning in politics departments, which appear to be based

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around extended periods of work experience, we devised short research-based placements as a means of more fully embedding placements in the curriculum as well as enabling students with work and family commitments to benefit from such activities. The chapter explores both the pedagogical thinking behind this approach to placement learning as well as the more practical matters of setting up placements. The experiences of two former students, Anna Walker and Andrew Wade, are set out in Chapter 4. They write in detail about their placement activities and examine the benefits to their studies, employability and sense of personal capability that grew out of their short placements. Both have now embarked on careers in politics. In Chapter 5, Elaine McGladdery presents a placement provider's perspective on this model of placement learning from her experience of arranging and supervising placements for our students at Coventry City Council. She reveals the lessons she learnt from participating in successive rounds of placements as well as the Council's motivations for becoming involved with the project.

All of the placements we organised were in safe and secure environments – indeed, we made sure of this through our health and safety procedures. But many realms of 'real world' politics and international relations are laced with violence. The question then arises of how to extend experiential learning opportunities into such areas. Simulations are an obvious alternative, and much has been written about their use as a means of enhancing students' engagement with the subject matter of their studies (e.g., Van Dyke et al. 2000; Dougherty 2003; Asal 2005; Frederking 2005; Asal and Blake 2006; Werning Rivera and Thomas Simons 2008). However, the relationship that Dave Edye and Mike Newman established with the NGO International Alert represents another, rather novel, form of university–community engagement (cf. Marlin-Bennett 2002). In this model, International Alert runs a professional on-campus simulation for Peace and Conflict Studies students at London Metropolitan University and assesses their performance as part of the degree programme's employability module. In Chapter 6, Edye describes the nature of the module and how it is assessed, while in Chapter 7 Lucy Holdaway of

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International Alert, an NGO with great experience of training peace workers, presents the organisation's side of this relationship. Appended to these chapters are the module outline and other materials that will be useful for educators wishing to adopt this model of campus-based simulation. In Chapter 8, Alvaro Mellado Domínguez, a student with many years' experience of real conflict zones through the work he has done for Médecins Sans Frontières, provides a student's perspective and describes the benefits of this model in terms of personal and career development and helping participants to discover if they have the qualities to survive and succeed in such difficult environments.

The contributions to Part III revolve around the themes of placement assessment, community engagement, citizenship education and employability. In Chapter 9, David Woodman draws on his extensive experience of running placement learning programmes to explore a problem with students' understanding of the meaning of reflection in learning journals or diaries, which tend to contain overly personalised accounts of feelings rather than working towards improved and more effective practice. As Woodman demonstrates, how we think about the assessment of placement activities is intimately related to what we understand by placement learning itself. He raises some very important and challenging questions for the way in which placement learning is currently practised in many higher education institutions.

Woodman's arguments lead us directly to the matter of employability, which is generally seen as one of the main benefits of placements but which has often posed perplexing questions for lecturers and students in seemingly non-vocational subjects such as politics and international relations. The following four chapters help us think through ways of going forward. Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight have pointed out that employability can be addressed at the level of the module or the curriculum as a whole (2006: 14). We explore both avenues. In Chapter 10, Matthew Wyman and Sarah Longwell evaluate the excellent and innovative module they have developed at Keele University, which aims to prepare students for careers in politics. Their chapter also details the novel modes

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of assessment they have devised. In line with our intention that this book should contain practical guidance, Wyman's module guide is appended to the chapter (see also Wyman 2009). The alternative approach to enhancing students' employability is set out by Fiona Buckley in Chapter 11, in which she outlines how employability is enhanced throughout the four-year BA Government curriculum at University College Cork (UCC). This approach is similar in some respects to the 'capability envelope' model of John Stephenson and Mantz Yorke (1998), but at UCC the mandatory work placement at the end of the third year is accorded central importance. Buckley describes the preparation students receive ahead of their placements, explains how their experiences are integrated into their final year studies and evaluates the benefits in terms of employability and learning.

In Chapter 12, Andrew Mycock describes the revisions he made to the mandatory work-placement module at the University of Huddersfield. This was one of the first work-placement modules to be offered to students of politics in the country, but Mycock felt that it had to be reworked to meet the needs of a changing student body, and we were delighted that he adopted some of the ideas and practices we developed in the project and that he worked with us during the transferability stage. Mycock also brings to placement learning his specialist knowledge in the area of citizenship education, thereby addressing both the citizenship and employability themes of this book. In Chapter 13, one of Mycock's students, Jordan Walmsley, reflects on his placement with Kirklees Council, which involved working on projects on community engagement and regional democracy. The theme of community engagement is picked up again in Chapter 14 by Richard Huggins and John Kelly in their discussion of the new Community-Based Research Initiative at Oxford Brookes University, which builds on Huggins' work on the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics and his work with community groups more generally. Community-based research is an important pillar of the scholarship of engagement in the USA (e.g., Strand et al. 2003), and it is good to see its adoption on this side of the Atlantic. Part III concludes with Jonathan Gorry's account of the

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development of a BA in Citizenship at Northampton University, including the many novel teaching and learning techniques the programme will incorporate, such as the central role accorded to placement learning.

In the final section, John Craig concludes the book with a deft overview of the five FDTL5 projects in the discipline of politics and draws out the central themes and developments that were common to all of the projects, such as a constructivist approach to education and a concern to foster active learning. Craig also reflects on how the projects, along with other developments in the subject area, have resulted in the creation of a vibrant and growing community of researchers and practitioners in the area of the teaching and learning of politics and international relations.

## **Conclusion**

As students of politics and lecturers of international relations for twenty years each, we have long had a sense that these disciplines have lagged behind the other social sciences somewhat in adopting innovative approaches to teaching and learning. While they have had more than their fair share of inspiring educators employing novel teaching and learning strategies, they tended to form isolated islands or pockets of excellence without the connections or platforms from which to transform communities of practice in the teaching and learning of politics and international relations. But, as Craig indicates in his chapter, this state of affairs has changed markedly in the past few years, and there are now many more collaborative projects and dissemination opportunities in which educators in these subject areas can pool and share examples of best practice and through which such efforts are awarded the attention and recognition they deserve. We hope that this book will make a modest contribution to these very heartening developments.

## Notes

1 But for an attempt to reveal or retrieve a lost tradition of civic purpose in British universities, see Annette 2005: 332.

2 Of course, there is no reason why the scholarship of engagement should not be expanded still further. One thinks, for example, of Maurice Glasman's work with religious and other community groups and associations, such as London Citizens, forging connections between London Metropolitan University and the people of east London. However, in order to maintain some coherence we have kept to the themes expressed in the subtitle of this book.

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## **Chapter 2**

# **Higher Education and Civic / Community Engagement in the UK**

*John Annette*

There is increasing interest in civic engagement and community involvement in the UK (e.g., Hart et al. 2007; McIlrath and Mac Labhrainn 2007; Watson 2007). Recently the major research councils and higher education (HE) funding councils have established the Beacons for Public Engagement Programme (for more information see [www.rcuk.ac.uk/sis/beacons.htm](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/sis/beacons.htm) and [www.publicengagement.ac.uk](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)). This challenge to HE in the UK to provide opportunities for students to develop the values of social responsibility through volunteering, to develop accredited community-based learning and research in partnership with communities and to engage in knowledge-exchange partnerships that benefit the economic and social development of local and regional communities should be seen in the context of the rethinking of HE which has followed from the Dearing Commission review of UK HE. In 1997, a major royal commission under Lord Ron Dearing was established to examine the future of British HE. One of the main aims of HE, according to the Dearing Report on 'UK Higher Education in the Learning Society' (NCIHE 1997), is to contribute to a democratic, civilised and inclusive society. The emphasis on civic and community engagement highlights the need for the curriculum in HE to prepare graduates to become active citizens and not only to participate in formal politics but also to play a leadership role in civil society. This new commitment for HE and civic or community engagement can also be found in Australia with AUCEA (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, see [www.aucea.net.au](http://www.aucea.net.au)), in Canada with the Canadian Association for Community Service Learning ([www.communityservicelearning.ca](http://www.communityservicelearning.ca)), in the Republic of Ireland with the Community Knowledge Initiative ([www.nuigalwaycki.ie](http://www.nuigalwaycki.ie)), in South Africa with the Community Higher

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Education Service Partnership (CHESP), and in many other countries internationally where community-based learning and research are developing (Annette 2002).

The Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997) follows on from an increasing range of work done since the 1970s which has emphasised the importance in HE of the development of what has been termed transferable, personal, core or key skills. The challenge for HE, according to the Dearing Report, is to provide an academic framework based on the acquisition of critical knowledge, which is mostly structured upon the present framework established by the academic disciplines and which provides students with the opportunity to develop essential key skills and capabilities. This emphasis on learning not only for academic knowledge but also for key skills and capabilities, including student leadership and civic engagement, can also be found in the USA in the work of Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation and more recently in the writings of Thomas Ehrlich (Ehrlich 2000; Colby et al. 2003). It is increasingly being recognised that an important way in which students can develop key skills through work experience and also experience an education for citizenship is through service-learning in the USA or community-based learning and research in the UK.

An important way in which students can develop key skills through work experience and acquire an education for citizenship is through volunteering as well as service-learning or community-based learning and research. Student volunteering has since the 1960s been an exciting and important part of UK HE, and today leadership is provided by Student Volunteer, England, and also by the new organisation of professionals who support student volunteering, Workers in Student Community Volunteering (WiSCV). This has been assisted by the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), which is assisting universities and colleges of HE in England to promote volunteering and community partnerships and has been rolled into Teaching and Quality Enhancement Fund (now Teaching Enhancement and Student Success).

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Community-based learning involves students working in partnership with local communities and learning through a structured programme of learning which includes reflection. While this development has resulted in the significant growth of exciting and challenging volunteer activities, there has also been an increase in the certification of volunteering and the development of an increasing number of academic programmes which accredit the learning involved. Throughout the UK we can find examples of universities recognising the challenge of establishing partnership-working with local and regional communities. Increasingly we can also find evidence of the development of community-based learning and research programmes as a response to this challenge. The Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales (HEFCE) has supported these developments through the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) programmes, the establishment of centres of excellence in teaching and learning (CETLs) in this area, and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) has encouraged this work through its subject centres.

At the core of community service-learning is the pedagogy of experiential learning which is based on the thought of John Dewey and more recently David Kolb et al.

In the USA, the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) has since 1971 been engaged in the development of and research into experiential education and more recently the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), in partnership with the Corporation for National Service, has commissioned volumes by leading academic figures to examine the importance of service-learning in HE. What is impressive about the work of the NSEE and the AAHE is that research is done not only on pedagogic practices but also, going beyond anecdotal evidence, there is research into the evaluation of the learning outcomes of service-learning. More recently there have been the International Service Learning Research Conferences which highlight the wide range of research being done internationally in this area. One of the leading research projects into the

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learning outcomes of service-learning has been published as *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* by Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles (1999).

What is important about community service-learning is that it is multidisciplinary and can be integrated into a wide variety of academic disciplines and learning experiences. These could include environmental and global study and the opportunity for students to undertake community service-learning while studying abroad. The Development Education Association is leading the way in promoting education for global citizenship and the skills to engage with global civil society. According to Chris Duke:

What needs to happen to empower the student to feel part and to be an active part of his or her society? What need you learn and must you be able to do – and feel – to contribute to societal learning? What are the skills of civic and political participation, and where do they appear in the curriculum of higher education? It will be necessary to keep asking these questions to sustain a relevant and effective lifelong learning curriculum (Duke 1997: 69).

The provision of the opportunity for students to participate in community service-learning also requires partnerships with the universities' local communities. This emphasis on partnership and working with local communities is especially true of those who advocate learning through community-based research (cf. Cruz and Giles 2000; Gelmon et al. 2001; Strand et al. 2003; Jacoby 2003). The Higher Education Innovation Fund supported by HEFCE has provided key funding and strategic direction for universities to think creatively about establishing university-wide community partnerships and to create innovative knowledge transfer partnerships with local and regional communities. Universities UK published in 2002 a series of research-based studies which examined the regional role of HE institutions, and this has been supplemented by the work of HEFCE in promoting the achievements of the Higher Education Innovation Fund rounds 1 and 2.

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In the UK, Community Service Volunteers has been promoting and facilitating education for citizenship and community-based learning and research in HE by working in partnerships and now has over 150 programmes in HE institutions. This network will relaunch itself in autumn 2009 as the Higher Education Community Partnership (HECP), and the aims of this national, multidisciplinary and community-linked network are to promote community-based learning and research and knowledge-transfer partnerships through university–community partnerships that develop students’ skills and education for active citizenship and that meet community needs. An important new area of development in the UK has been how professional education (business, engineering, medical, teaching, etc.) has begun to address not only ethical issues but also civic professionalism, by providing community-based learning and research opportunities for students in the UK and also abroad to address issues of poverty, social justice and global citizenship.

In the UK, the current New Labour government has espoused a programme of civil renewal represented by its Together We Can Programme that links the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to work for the common good. Unlike in the USA, most of the mission statements of universities and colleges of HE in the UK do not use the rhetoric of civic engagement and do not talk about promoting citizenship or corporate citizenship and social responsibility. Despite the lack of a major movement for developing the civic role of HE in the UK, there are an increasing number of academics who are now arguing for HE to participate more fully in civil renewal. According to the late Bernard Crick, ‘Universities are part of society and, in both senses of the word, a critical part which should be playing a major role in the wider objectives of creating a citizenship culture. I am now far from alone in arguing this’ (2000: 145).

One of the challenges in providing community-based learning and research that involves forms of civic engagement is the evidence that increasingly young people are still interested in involvement in their communities but are alienated from the formal political process (Annette

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2000, 2003). Colby and Ehrlich argue that we need to analyse the motivations that encourage students to take advantage of these learning opportunities for active citizenship (Colby et al. 2003; Ehrlich 2000). In a recent qualitative study in the UK, students at Anglia Polytechnic University and Cambridge University were analysed to consider how they learn both formally and informally for citizenship, to become what are called 'graduate citizens' (Ahier et al. 2003). While this study has, I believe, a somewhat limited understanding of contemporary citizenship and community, its life-course research reinforces the contradiction between students who want to become involved in their communities but who are turned off politics. It also raises the issue that students are aware of the effects of globalisation on themselves and their local communities and that an education for citizenship in HE must take into account the role of global civil society.

Finally, it should be noted that one area in UK HE where there is an increasing interest in learning for active citizenship is in departments of lifelong learning and continuing education. This is important given the fact that increasingly students in HE study part-time and are mature students. A number of universities have been part of the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme for adult learning in the community, which was supported by the Community Empowerment Unit of what is now the Department for Communities and Local Government (Mayo and Rooke 2006; Annette and Mayo 2010). The Universities Association for Lifelong Learning has now established a network to support the work in HE lifelong learning for Active Citizenship and Community Partnerships.

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## **Part II: Learning Through Engaging: Stakeholder Perspectives**



## **Chapter 3**

# **Rethinking Placement Learning for Politics and International Relations**

*Steven Curtis, Alasdair Blair, Barrie Axford, Caroline Gibson, Richard Huggins and Philippa Sherrington*

## **Introduction**

Placement learning can be a very powerful pedagogical tool. It offers students real-world examples of the subject matter of their courses; on placements they may both observe how events play out in practice as well as apply the theories and concepts of their courses to everyday situations. In short, it holds out the potential to enrich and complement classroom study. It also contributes to the personal development of students and improves their experience of university. By extension, placement learning is potentially a very effective means of addressing the employability agenda, which has become in recent years a key concern of both government and industry. Finally, many supporters of placement activity stress its potential in fostering political engagement through connecting students with the communities surrounding their universities, making graduates better and more active citizens in the process (e.g., Annette 2005). It is not surprising that placement activity has become a popular and often central component of degree courses across the UK and the world more generally, whether in the form of internships, work-based learning or service-learning.

However, placement learning also runs up against a number of constraints. With the introduction of substantial course fees, on top of general student living expenses, placements often become luxuries that many students cannot afford – the part-time jobs they take on to get by often make it difficult for them to take advantage of any placement opportunities that are on offer, and the difficulties are compounded for

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students with dependent families and those from so-called 'non-traditional' backgrounds. As a consequence, placement activities, whether curricular, co-curricular or extracurricular, often run in the summer vacation, which frequently means that placement activities lose much of their connection to and ability to inform students' studies. From discussions with colleagues in other subject areas, we discovered that they often had problems filling the number of placement opportunities available, and many noted a decline in the popularity of placement modules. A colleague responsible for placements on the BA in Graphic Design at Coventry University told us that most of her students would prefer to undertake simulated projects on campus rather than engage in real-world activities because of the latter's propensity to clash with part-time jobs and the costs of travelling to and from the placement providers. A colleague in the university's Business School told us the same story.

These financial and academic considerations are compounded when it comes to sandwich degree courses: racking up an additional year of student loans and deferring entering paid graduate employment may deter students without significant parental financial backing; and the connection between the year of work experience – and it is usually thought of in these terms on sandwich degree courses – and the students' degree courses is often reduced to how lucky students are in finding relevant placements; some will, but many won't, and the third year out in the world beyond the university is frequently reduced to work experience, with the focus predominantly on the benefits in terms of employability.

At present, the most popular practice in locating and setting up placement activities is for students to find and negotiate their own placement-learning opportunities. While they are frequently assisted in this endeavour by the placement offices and careers services at their universities, there is a danger of wide disparities in the learning opportunities afforded by the experiences. The benefit of this approach in terms of reduced staffing costs and time spent on setting up placements comes at the risk that placements may become disconnected from the academic content of courses. Once again, the benefits of placement

activity, very real and important as they no doubt are, become reduced to predominantly enhancing employability.

Finally, placement activities, which are not part of sandwich degree programmes, generally take place in the final year of degree courses, which limits the extent to which the students' experiences can inform their further studies. While students may be able to put their knowledge into practice during their placements, the possibility that placements may inform studies is significantly reduced. This is especially the case if we consider that a time lag may be necessary for students to reflect upon and assimilate the real-world knowledge gained on their placements.

### **Surveying the field: placement learning on politics courses in the British Isles**

To date there have been a number of very successful initiatives introducing placement learning into the politics and international relations curriculum. Of particular note is the University of Hull's BA in British Politics and Legislative Studies (Norton 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) and the Politics and Parliamentary Studies programme at the University of Leeds, both of which include a one-year placement, usually with an MP in the Palace of Westminster but occasionally with legislators in capital cities abroad. While such programmes offer wonderful learning and employment-enhancing experiences, they tend to be exclusive in a double sense: the courses are capped and so select the students to be admitted in terms of academic ability; and many students may be put off by the expense of adding a fourth year to their undergraduate studies, and a year in one of the most expensive cities in the world at that (see Anna Walker's reflections on this issue in Chapter 4 below). These programmes are also exclusive in the sense that they define politics purely in terms of the activities of national legislatures in capital cities, despite the great struggle to expand the undergraduate politics curriculum over the past few decades to include the study of local and regional government and non-state actors

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and to address broader issues of governance that don't comfortably sit on the traditional plane of political activity.

The University of Greenwich has attempted to address some of the limitations and constraints noted above through its 'day release' model, in which students go on placements with MPs and other political actors one day a week across the academic year, and their placements are accessed through a level-three placement module. While this approach goes a long way towards addressing the issue of exclusiveness, it also introduces an element of risk for students and course managers with the danger that placements may fail for one reason or another, making it difficult for students to acquire the necessary module credits to graduate at the end of their final year (McLean 2004: 9, 10; cf. Quality Assurance Agency 2007: 10, 11, 14).

As an early part of the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project, we conducted a survey of all of the named politics and international relations departments across the British Isles in 2006, using the Political Studies Association directory of departments. Of the ninety-four departments surveyed, twenty-eight made some formal, curricular use of placement learning in their degree courses (excluding public policy and public administration programmes), which indicated that the use of placement learning has already had a fairly substantial impact on the teaching and learning of politics at British and Irish higher education institutions. In this respect, the three partners on the project, the politics departments of the University of Warwick, Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University, were somewhat behind the curve – although the Department of International Studies and Social Science at Coventry University had recently introduced a level-two work-placement module, no student had yet elected to take it, and any institutional memory of the department's use of placements in the 1970s had effectively been erased by the cessation of such activity long before the project team members joined the department following the retirement of the members of staff involved.

Our survey of the use of politics placements in the British Isles revealed three basic models of placement learning. With the exceptions of

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the University of Northumbria (which embeds short placements in a module on applied political research) and Leeds Metropolitan University (where a thirty-hour placement forms the basis of the mandatory active politics module (Winter 2009)), where the use of placements bears some similarities to the model we developed, the remaining twenty-six placement schemes conformed to three ideal types: the Brunel sandwich, the 'Westminster model' (Norton 2007), and the stand-alone work-placement module (see Table 3.1).

Although these models of placement learning each have their strengths, they also have limitations: sandwich degrees and work-placement modules will often fail to exploit the learning potential of placements as the students negotiate their own placements with the result that they may not be fully integrated into degree programmes; the Westminster model, which does meld placement and degree course, is fairly exclusive in a double sense: there is an insufficient number of MPs to allow all politics students to go on such placements, while a great deal of political activity goes on beyond Westminster or even London; finally, most of the placement opportunities for politics students required placements of ten weeks or more, making it difficult for students with family commitments and part-time jobs to participate. Therefore, the spectre of the exclusion of students from certain backgrounds haunts the practice of placement learning in politics. This is a concern which has recently been raised in the national press regarding internships more generally (Shackle 2008). (For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Curtis and Blair 2008; Curtis 2009; and Andrew Mycock's reflections in Chapter 12 in this volume.)

To conclude, while the fact that almost a third of politics departments in the British Isles made some use of placement activities is a promising development, the more detailed results of our findings suggest that some of the problems and limitations with placement learning discussed above may not have been averted: almost half of departments using placement learning send their students on year-long placements, and a full three-quarters of departments use placements of ten weeks or longer.

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<b>Model Attributes</b>	<b>The Brunel sandwich</b>	<b>The Westminster model</b>	<b>Work-placement module</b>
<b>Description</b>	Students take the third year out of their studies for an extended period of work experience	Students spend the third year of a four-year legislative studies degree on placement with a legislator, usually an MP in Westminster	A module, usually at level 3, assessing a work placement
<b>Universities</b>	Aston, Bath, Brunel, De Montfort, Glamorgan, Kent, Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan	Hull, Leeds, Salford	Cork, East Anglia, Exeter, Greenwich, Huddersfield, Limerick, Liverpool John Moores, London Met, Middlesex, Queens Belfast, Sheffield Hallam, Surrey, Swansea, Westminster, West of England, Wolverhampton
<b>Duration</b>	One year	One year or one semester	Varies, but often at least ten weeks or more
<b>Placement usually organised by</b>	Student	Academic staff	Student
<b>Integration into course</b>	Varies – often low	High	Varies
<b>Enhancement of employability</b>	High	Very high and tailored for careers in politics	Medium
<b>Potential for use across all universities</b>	Medium	Low	High

Table 3.1 Models of placement learning on politics courses in the British Isles in 2006. (Source: adapted from Curtis 2009)

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Hence there is prima facie evidence that the general limitations and problems with sandwich courses and extended placement activities will affect the use of this pedagogical tool in the teaching and learning of politics and international relations.

### **Rethinking placement learning**

The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project developed a new approach to the pedagogy of placement learning in order to significantly redress, if not entirely overcome, the above problems and limitations. By contrast to the standard practice in politics departments and universities more generally across the British Isles, we developed an approach to placement learning around the following elements: our placements were short, embedded in modules and adopted a research-based approach to learning.

Our placements ranged from five to sixteen days in duration and were scheduled in a variety of ways, from one to three straight weeks on a full-time basis to one to two days a week across three to eight weeks; but some placements were arranged on a more ad hoc basis, with the student attending certain key events and proceedings. The common element within this variety of placement schedules was that placements took place within the academic year. The vast majority of the placements were located close to the universities, enabling students to move between their place of study and the location of their placement with ease and at little cost, and establishing the potential for placement activities to inform academic studies and vice versa.

Our placements were embedded in a number of respects. They were embedded in the curriculum in the sense that they took place within the academic year, usually in term time; they were linked to level-two modules of study (at Coventry University and the University of Warwick these were modules on British politics or the EU, with their own content, rather than 'empty' modules designed to assess a placement or project); and were assessed by the universities, with the marks awarded constituting or

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contributing toward the final module marks (see Table 3.2). Moreover, the students were embedded in the organisations of the placement providers. The placement activities were negotiated by the project team members with the placement providers and were structured in terms of intended learning outcomes. More specifically, the placements were generally constructed around specific research projects to be undertaken by the students. As the placements ran during the academic year, the vast majority were local to the universities. However, we received a small number of offers of placements in Brussels, which we felt we could not turn down (and which we financed out of the project budget and from other appropriate sources, such as EU Jean Monnet funds), and most of the students placed with MPs were invited to Westminster for at least one day of their placements.

<b>University</b>	<b>Module</b>	<b>Assessment of placement (% of module mark)</b>
University of Warwick	Politics in the United Kingdom	Report linked to placement (20%), with mandatory post-placement interview and reflective journal (0%)
Oxford Brookes University	Independent Study Module	Report on placement (100%)
Coventry University	The New European Union	Reflective journal (15%)
	Contemporary British Politics	Essay linked to placement (25%)

Table 3.2 The assessment of placements on the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics. (Source: Curtis et al. 2009b)

Finally, the placements developed a form of undergraduate research-based learning in a double sense: the students were both undertaking a research project for their placement providers while at the same time observing and participating in politics in action through involvement with the day-to-day activities of their placement providers.<sup>1</sup>

Every placement contained both of these elements of research, although

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there was some variation in the balance between the two: in some placements the research project predominated; in others, involvement in and observation of routine placement-provider activities came to the fore. But in all cases our emphasis was on research. In terms of the underlying pedagogical approach set out below, the project team were keen to make a contribution to the emergence of opportunities for undergraduates to engage in research activities, to become producers instead of more passive consumers of knowledge and to meet student demands to ‘do their own research’ (van Assendelft 2008: 94).

Our approach has a number of similarities with the ‘political science research internships’ developed by the University of Western Australia (UWA), which unfortunately we did not learn about until after the completion of the project. We share the ‘contention . . . that a political science education is enhanced by experience of the policy process’ and the emphasis on engaging students on a research project for their placement providers (Moon and Schokman 2000: 170, 171). However, UWA internships are of eight weeks duration and form part of a dedicated final-year undergraduate module rather than being embedded in the curriculum to the extent we hoped to achieve.

Regarding the research-based nature of our placements, we were very fortunate to have close links with the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research, a centre for excellence in teaching and learning based at both the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University, two of the three universities involved in the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics. Indeed, some of the project team members were closely involved with the Reinvention Centre’s activities, which were complementary to our project and informed by the same pedagogical philosophy. But whereas the Reinvention Centre aims to reinvent the university as a whole in order to fully integrate undergraduates into the research process, the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics focused more closely on one pedagogical tool to make undergraduates research active – our theory of change was narrower, but our approach obviously gelled closely with the Reinvention Centre’s concepts of ‘student as producer’ and ‘teaching in public’ (Reinvention

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Centre for Undergraduate Research 2007: 13, 15–16, 26–7, 31–2; Lambert et al. 2007; Neary and Winn 2009). The project also benefited immeasurably from its various friends, whose work influenced our approach significantly, such as Mike Neary, Glynis Cousin and Alan Jenkins (Neary 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Blackmore and Cousin 2003–4; Jenkins and Healey 2005; Jenkins et al. 2003, 2007). On a more practical level, the emphasis on undergraduate research helped to impress on placement providers that we did not think of our placements as work experience but in terms of the academic development of our students. This is significant, as one practitioner of placement learning in politics has noted his students' 'disappointment at the mundane nature of some of their work' (McLean 2004: 7).

It is important at this stage to distinguish our concept of embedded, research-based placement learning from work-based learning (WBL). While there are certainly some affinities between the two approaches, not least a concern with developing partnerships between universities and organisations in their surrounding communities and devising learning projects in the placement providers' organisations (Boud et al. 2001: 4–7; Blackwell et al. 2001; Brennan 2005; Little 2000; Portwood and Costley 2000; Reeve and Gallacher 2005), there are two key differences: with WBL 'work is the curriculum' (Boud et al. 2001: 5; Boud 2001: 45), whereas for our approach the curriculum stays with the university and is largely unchanged in terms of its content – placements enrich the traditional curriculum rather than supplant it; and for us the focus remains on learning outcomes, to be assessed in written academic coursework, whereas WBL is concerned with 'performance outcomes' in the workplace (Boud and Solomon 2001: 275).<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, and in the above noted desire to impress on placement providers our focus on learning, we expunged all mentions of that most pernicious of all four-letter words – 'work' – from our partnership agreements and project documentation more generally. And, in terms of assessment, our model indicates that we

Rethinking Placement Learning for Politics and International Relations should assess what students have learnt from their placements in the context of their academic courses, not their performance on placement.<sup>3</sup>

## **Practical issues: setting up, running and assessing placements**

On a more practical level, we started by identifying potential placement providers in the localities of the three universities. Initially we adopted a rather scattergun approach, by writing to a variety of political actors and organisations, with a postage-paid return envelope, enclosing details about the project and what we hoped to achieve. We sent just over 120 letters to MPs, MEPs, local and regional government bodies, city and county councillors, NGOs and voluntary organisations and received twelve offers of placements in return. The response was a little deflating, but many university placement and careers officers have since informed us that a 10 per cent success rate is what one should expect. Targeting thirty of the non-respondents with a follow-up letter brought us another six offers. From these eighteen offers of placements we drew most of the placement opportunities we offered our students. We staged three rounds of placements in consecutive semesters, with twelve placements in each round.

Our approach to finding suitable placement providers is not the most efficient, and we would recommend pursuing the following more productive avenues. First, contact the workforce development department of the local city council. Coventry City Council provided six placements over the three rounds of placements we organised and devised an excellent programme of activities for our students, including a full induction and debriefing process (see Elaine McGladdery's account in Chapter 5 below). Second, exploit the opportunities that are already available to you. For example, our fellow project team member Richard Huggins at Oxford Brookes University had a strong relationship with a range of community support groups through his existing research and service in those areas

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(see Chapter 14 below), so setting up placements with drug-user groups, for instance, was fairly straightforward. We also recommend talking to your postgraduate and research students. One of our part-time MA students at Coventry University worked for West Midlands in Europe, which took two students on placements; and an MA by research student was the director of a local NGO, which took four of our students. Finally, establish contact with placement and volunteering officers within your university, as placement opportunities may be available through them. Our approach of sending letters was also a little old-fashioned and formal. We found that many potential placement providers are happy to receive email requests.

We aimed to establish placement learning opportunities with a wide variety of political actors and organisations, especially with NGOs and voluntary groups, so that our students could explore a broader understanding of political activity than is usually available through placement schemes. The voluntary groups that our colleagues already had links with and the smaller NGOs seemed to be happy to accommodate the type of placements we were proposing. However, larger NGOs tended to have more of a fixed conception of what a placement should involve and usually wanted volunteers for three months or more, to take up a substantial project and to see it through to conclusion. They were less able to make the very short placements we were suggesting work to the extent that smaller organisations seemed able to do. Paradoxically, given our emphasis on NGOs and voluntary groups, MPs and other official or constitutional political actors and organisations appeared most able to provide the sort of placement opportunities we sought. They also appeared more willing to devote resources to such outreach activities than NGOs, whose resources are often stretched and who need to see a return on such investments. But that is not to say that our students did not perform useful functions for their placement providers. When we first visited them, most placement providers seemed to have one or more small research projects they had been meaning to do for some time but had never found the time. Therefore, our students were generally engaged in meaningful research

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activities that were valuable to their placement providers, which avoided the need to train the students up to do specific jobs which would not have been feasible given the short duration of the placements (cf. Tryon et al. 2008: 22).

We met each of the placement providers in person to negotiate the exact content of each placement. Although this was a little time-consuming in the period leading up to the first round of placements, we would argue that it was time very well spent. It enabled us to convey exactly what we wanted our students to be doing, and it demonstrated to the placement providers our commitment as well as establishing a relationship with them. Most of the placement providers participated in more than one round of placements, and it proved unnecessary to visit them again – the first visit was sufficient. Negotiating the placements on behalf of the students allowed us to devise placement activities and research projects that were in line with the learning aims of the modules through which the placements would be assessed. We are aware that this relieves students of the burden of identifying and applying for placements, which is central to enhancing their employability. But we were most concerned with embedding placements into the curriculum – indeed, into the subject matter of specific modules – which made taking control of this processes desirable. However, students interested in going on placements had to apply to the project team using an application form, and in a number of cases we returned the forms to the students for improvements, so there were still gains in terms of enhancing employability with our approach. In fact, we see our approach as complementary to the existing models of placement learning. The help we gave students in improving their application forms, along with the experience they were acquiring, improved their chances of winning internships and even careers down the line (see Anna Walker’s contribution to Chapter 4 below; and Curtis 2009).

We developed a briefing session for the students ahead of each round of placements. This session became more elaborate as the project developed, building on the recommendations made by returning students as well as the experience of the project team. The briefing workshop before

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the first round of placements lasted an hour and a half. By the third round, a whole day of activity was involved. Alongside requiring students to reflect on what they hoped to get out of their placements and how they would link their experiences to their modules, other activities included a question-and-answer session with former placement students, which the next round of students found especially helpful; a workshop with a member of staff from the careers service on interpersonal relationships in a working environment; and a session devoted to familiarising students with the sort of documents, such as white papers, they might come across during their placements.

We provided students and placement providers with health-and-safety documentation and required the placement providers to complete a checklist with the students on the first day of their placements. This checklist incorporated into the partnership agreement which formally set out the responsibilities of the universities, the students and the placement providers.<sup>4</sup> The agreement clearly set out the specific activities the students would be involved in. Meeting with each placement provider and setting down in the partnership agreement the precise nature of each placement proved remarkably successful. Only one out of thirty-six placements was a relative failure, when the placement provider departed from the agreed script. The remaining thirty-five placements were very successful at meeting the placement providers' requirements as well as enhancing the students' understanding of politics and their research skills.

We adopted a variety of means of assessing the students' learning from their experiences (see Table 3.2). All of the students were required to maintain a reflective blog while on placement, which had a number of tangible benefits, such as allowing the project team to remote monitor the placements and enabling us to spur the students into deeper reflection on certain issues they raised by posing further questions in our comments on their blogs (see Curtis et al. 2009b). However, not all blogs were formally assessed, and when they were, in the form of learning journals, they were not the most successful mode of assessment (see Andrew Wade's

comments on this issue in Chapter 4 below). We found that one of the best means of getting students to capitalise on their learning from their placements was the more traditional essay, which enabled them to link the concepts they explored on their modules with what they had experienced in practice. For example, in post-placement interviews a number of students explained how their experiences of politics in the real world had provoked them to be critical of the simplistic conceptual approaches they found in the literature.

As we discovered from the students' blogs, their other written work and their post-placement interviews, our approach to placement learning had a number of important benefits, both intended and unintended. The students clearly learned a lot about the nature of politics, even in very short placements, suggesting that the emphasis on duration evident in most placement learning opportunities around the country may be misplaced. Our approach had the benefits of enabling students with part-time jobs to meet their work and university commitments and to go on a placement at the same time, demonstrating that it allows some students to benefit from placement opportunities who would be excluded by models requiring more extensive attendance. But, as we have written about elsewhere, there were also clear benefits in terms of the students' political engagement (Curtis and Blair 2008) and their personal development and employability (Curtis 2009). In particular, in post-placement interviews many of the students referred to their enhanced sense of personal efficacy as they came to realise that their opinions were welcomed and valued by others, that they could make a difference to the world by assisting members of the public, and that they could successfully perform many tasks, such as writing letters and speeches for MPs or carrying out a research project for an NGO.

One big question mark hangs over all forms of placement learning: sustainability. How do we institutionalise the processes and procedures, along with the relationships with placement providers, to allow such learning opportunities to survive into the future, especially if staff involved move on to posts elsewhere. We have no knock-down answer to this question. Our model of placement learning is just as vulnerable as any

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other in this regard. But we demonstrated that once successful placement opportunities were established, they prospered into further rounds of placements with little extra work on the part of university staff. Many of the placement providers participated in all three rounds of placements and were willing to continue taking students beyond the life of the project. The time-consuming task of setting up placements is therefore a one-off payment to be made at the outset rather than an enduring burden on lecturers' time and effort. Moreover, our project showed that students are incredibly grateful for such opportunities. With the increasing attention paid to the results of the National Student Survey, we expect that placement learning will be one area that heads of departments will be devoting resources to in the future.

## Conclusion

The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics made a number of contributions, shifting the practice of placement learning in politics and international relations with important implications for the social sciences more generally. Contrary to the dominant model of long work placements, we contend that short research-based placements can generate significant benefits in terms of learning, research skills, employability and political engagement, as well as opening up placement opportunities to students who might previously have been or felt excluded.

## Notes

1 With our emphasis on student inquiry, our approach is more properly thought of as research-based learning (Jenkins and Healey 2005: 22; Jenkins et al. 2007: 29) rather than research-led as it has been previously described (Sherrington et al. 2008).

2 The Quality Assurance Agency's revised code of practice now makes a similar distinction between WBL and placement learning. Although the QAA's differentiation is more muted, it is similar to ours in that WBL usually involves 'the assessment of reflective practice', whereas placement learning is defined as

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'learning achieved . . . outside the institution at which the . . . student is enrolled' (Quality Assurance Agency 2007: 4-5). The former, less discursive, code of practice referred simply to 'placement learning' to cover all varieties of learning outside of the awarding institution (Quality Assurance Agency 2001).

3 Of course, the two things are connected. But, unlike placement learning practices elsewhere (e.g., McLean 2004: 3), where the placement provider assesses the student's performance and awards a mark that contributes to the overall module result, we determined that the universities should retain complete control of assessment, because of this key distinction between learning on and from a placement on the one hand and performing on the placement on the other. But we did canvass the views of each placement provider following every placement, to make sure that there was no disparity between what the students claimed they did on placement in their blog entries, journals, essays and reports, and what actually occurred. However, this never became an issue with any of the thirty-six placements run as part of the project.

4 The template of this document is appended to this chapter, and electronic versions of this and other documents produced by the project can be found under the 'placements' link on the project website, [www.politicsinaction.ac.uk](http://www.politicsinaction.ac.uk). These documents reproduce elements of established best practice and follow the QAA guidelines where appropriate, but also include certain innovations.

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## Appendix 3.1



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# Placement Learning Partnership Agreement

**Student:**

*[student's name,  
student's university]*

**Placement Provider:**

*[name of PP]*



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<b>Parties Involved in the Placement</b>		
<b>The Student</b>	<b>The Placement Provider</b>	<b>The Universities</b>
<i>[Student's name, student's university]</i>	<i>[PP's name and address]</i>  Placement Contact: <i>[name and contact details]</i>	Coventry University Oxford Brookes University The University of Warwick  Placement Tutor: <i>[name and contact details]</i>

**Placement Start Date and Duration:** *[insert start date and duration]*

### **About The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics**

The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics is a three-year project involving the Politics and International Relations departments of the University of Warwick, Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University. The project explores the use of placements in enabling students to deepen their understanding of politics and examines various ways of embedding placements in the formal curriculum of Politics and International Relations courses. The project is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL Phase 5).

As the central element of this project, we are placing second year undergraduate Politics students from the above universities with a variety of political actors and organizations, from MPs, MEPs, district councillors and local government offices through to NGOs, organizations in the voluntary sector and the media.

The intention is that through experiencing politics in action, students should gain a richer understanding of the nature of governance in contemporary politics. The placements should provide them with the opportunity to explore how concepts and issues they are studying play out in practice.

In contrast to most placement learning activities on Politics courses across the country, which are generally organised on a voluntary basis by students themselves, the universities will play an active and engaged role, providing the students with full pre-placement briefings, along with support - both online and in person - during the placement itself. The universities involved in this project will negotiate and establish the full details of the placements in formal partnership agreements with the placement providers and students, setting out the responsibilities and expectations of the students and placement providers respectively. The universities will appoint a placement tutor for each placement, who will assist in dealing with any problems that arise during the placement.

### The Responsibilities of the Universities

Placement Organisation	<p>The universities will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agree with the placement provider the learning opportunities that will be made available to the student on placement;</li> <li>• select a suitable student for the placement; and</li> <li>• provide a full briefing for the student and placement provider before the placement commences.</li> </ul>
Assessment	<p>The universities will assess the placement through a module of study linked to the placement.</p>
Health and Safety	<p>The universities will ensure that the placement provider satisfies the necessary health and safety requirements.</p>

### The Responsibilities of the Placement Provider

Learning Opportunities	<p>Activities to be undertaken by the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>[insert the activities negotiated with PP]</i></li> <li>• <i>etc</i></li> <li>• <i>etc</i></li> <li>• <i>etc</i></li> </ul>
Assessment	<p>Although not formally involved in the assessment of the placement, the placement provider will provide the student with sufficient learning opportunities to allow the student to complete the assessment requirements of the placement. The placement provider will inform the universities of any problems that arise that may seriously affect the student's ability to complete the assessment related to the placement.</p>
Health and Safety	<p>By the start of the placement, the placement provider should have read through the Health and Safety: Guidance for Placement Providers document and informed the placement tutor of any problems in complying with the expectations set out therein. The placement provider should also run through the induction checklist (Appendix I below) with the student on the first day of the placement.</p>

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### The Responsibilities of the Student

Placement Activity	<p>The student should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• behave in a professional and courteous manner as a representative of the universities engaged in the project, and towards the placement provider and its clients, customers, employees and other individuals related to the organisation;</li><li>• manage his/her learning and professional relationships while on the placement, and keep a record of progress and achievements; and</li><li>• alert the placement provider and the university tutor of any problems that might adversely affect the success of the placement.</li></ul>
Attendance, Punctuality and Dress Codes	<p>The students is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• observe the same standards of attendance, punctuality and dress as employees of the organisation;</li><li>• inform the placement provider and placement tutor of any absence. In the case of illness, a medical certificate will be required.</li></ul>
Health and Safety	<p>The student is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others affected by their acts or omissions;</li><li>• cooperate with the placement provider in complying with the provider's legal duties; and</li><li>• not interfere intentionally or recklessly with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety or welfare.</li></ul>

### The Student's Rights

The student has the right to a safe placement environment and to be treated in accordance with applicable legislation. Towards this end, the placement provider will help the student complete the induction checklist in Appendix I below on the first day of the placement.

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<b>Signed</b>		
Print Name Date	Signature	
For the placement provider		
For the universities		
The student		

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### Appendix I: Student Induction Checklist

The following items should be included in the student's induction on the placement, preferably on the first day.

<b>Placement Arrangements</b>	<b>Date</b>
Introduction to key members of staff and their roles	
Location of toilet, rest room, cafeteria (if relevant)	
Lunch, tea and coffee arrangements	
Place of work and work space	
Dress code	
Using the telephone	
Post arrangements	
Car parking (if applicable)	

<b>Health and Safety Issues</b>	<b>Date</b>
Informed of emergency procedures	
Safety policy received or location identified	
Location of First Aid box	
First Aid arrangements (including names of First Aiders)	
Fire procedures and location of fire extinguishers	
Accident reporting and location of accident book	
COSHH regulations	
Display screen equipment regulations/procedures	
Manual handling procedures (if applicable)	
Protective clothing arrangements (if applicable)	
Instruction on equipment participant will be using	

## **Chapter 4**

# **Learning, Capability and Employability: Student Perspectives**

*Anna Walker and Andrew Wade*

### **Anna Walker**

I studied the BA in International Relations and Politics at Coventry University and graduated in 2007. As part of my second-year European Union module, there was an opportunity to gain credit by completing a short placement. The university arranged the placements. They visited each placement provider in person and managed to secure high-profile positions with key political actors in the area. The application process consisted of a broadly themed application form assessing our motivation and areas of interest. This process added to the excitement of the scheme as there was a feeling that the best placements were a prize to be won.

Mine was the very first placement of the project. I was placed at the constituency office of a local MEP. The placement lasted a week and took place during my reading week, so I did not miss any university time. My travel expenses were covered so there was no cost to me.

Taking part in this project appealed to me for several reasons. First, as an assessed piece of coursework, it was radically different as it had such a practical element. And second, gaining practical political experience whilst at university had always been my aim, as I hoped to work in that area after graduation.

When choosing a university I was drawn to Hull and Leeds, because of their placement opportunities, where you can spend a year working for an MP in London, but they lasted a year and therefore required extra funding and living costs in London. This scheme was accessible to all students as the placements were short and mainly local.

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The scheme was extremely well organised, and we were well looked after by the project team, all practical considerations such as health and safety were covered, and we were encouraged to use an online 'blog' to record our activities and stay in touch with the team.

Aside from the practical support we received, this scheme differed from traditional 'work experience' in that we were seen as researchers; this had already been set up by the placement coordinators, so that our time on placement, whilst short, was well spent.

My placement was predominantly research-based, and my activities during the week covered many different areas. I was given casework to try to remedy, correspondence to write, press releases to research and even draft legislation to comment on.

There were clearly academic benefits: my knowledge of the European political system increased dramatically, and I felt I was learning the practical aspects of the European parliamentary system, such as the amount of time things take. I learnt about the importance of the media within European politics and gained a good understanding of what being an MEP entails. My placement influenced my decision to write my final-year dissertation on the EU, as my first-hand experience had increased not only my knowledge but also my interest in the subject.

During my one-week placement I was working to much shorter deadlines than I had experienced at university, and this improved my study skills. The environment in which I was working was also highly pressured, which improved my performance as other people were depending on my work. Once I returned to university I was much more career-focused and determined to do well in my degree in order to secure a good job. I also became much more aware of different career options open to me.

As someone who had never worked in an office environment before, I gained experience of how to work and behave in such a setting. This may sound trivial, but it was a real learning experience, filing, letter-writing, even office politics. Whilst this was clearly not an aim of the project, it is a benefit that helped prepare me for subsequent jobs.

## Learning, Capability and Employability: Student Perspectives

The most notable non-academic benefit for me was the increase in confidence I received from my placement. As the placement was so well matched with my studies, I was able to provide key knowledge and up-to-date information on European politics. This elevated me above the traditional 'work experience' role and made me feel like a researcher. The ability to provide expertise was compounded by the respect I had for my colleagues – they were all successful graduates, and through their respect my confidence grew. This placement gave me the confidence that I would be able to do a job such as theirs when I graduated.

A few weeks after the placement, I was asked by the MEP's office if I would be their intern, working on my days off from university and during holidays. I was thrilled, as it seemed a head start and as I was gaining valuable experience whilst still in my second year, without having to fund a whole placement year or having to work unpaid after graduation. The combination of studying and working gave my studies a real purpose, and I continued for the next five months, building up great contacts and experience. Whilst I enjoyed the internship, I decided that working for an MEP wasn't right for me, but I felt lucky to have been able to realise this whilst I was still only nineteen years old.

As my placement had been successful I was asked to join the project's steering committee to provide a student's perspective. I gave advice on how subsequent placements could be improved. My suggestions included providing basic training on letter-writing and how to understand the way legislation is written. I have also given talks at conferences at the University of Warwick about my experiences. This has built up my confidence and presentation skills and has provided a chance to promote the project to others.

In the summer between my second and third year I applied for a policy and public-affairs internship with health charity Asthma UK. The interview questions were competency based, for example, 'Give me an example of a time where you . . .'. I used my experience from my placement to secure the internship.

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Once I graduated, I undertook another short placement, this time with an MP, before deciding on a career in local government. Recently I was awarded a place on the National Graduate Development Programme for local government. The application process was tough – around 1,800 applicants for eighty-three places. The experience I gained from the initial placement and subsequent internships gave me the examples I needed for my interviews. The skills and confidence I built helped me through the assessment centre, and my involvement in the steering group of the project and experience of speaking at their conferences contributed to passing my final interview.

One of the most invaluable benefits of the placements is the confidence it can bring. Working with your colleagues, and those working for other politicians, and the close contact you have with politicians, often with them depending on you for information, can really bring your studies to life and focus your career efforts.

Almost all of the interviews I have been to have been competency-based, asking for work-based examples. When you have just left university it is difficult to have accrued all those experiences – for example, I was recently asked to give an example of a project I had managed, what went well, and how was I responsible. I could use an example from one of my internships.

My achievements to date were undoubtedly started by this placement, and I believe they compare favourably to those who did not undertake placements. I have only been out of university a year but already have a full CV and a prestigious graduate job, and so I would once again like to thank the project team for all their hard work.

### **Andrew Wade**

I applied for the placement scheme before my second year of study. I hoped to secure one of the European-based positions as I had developed an enthusiasm for the EU on both halves of my Law and International Relations joint-honours degree programme. I was delighted to land West

Midlands in Europe (WMiE), a cross-sectoral partnership representing and communicating the interests of the region within Brussels. My initial motivations for applying were to bolster my CV and to increase my employability once finishing university. Students from other faculties were organising their placements, and I started to question my choice of course, knowing that employers want people with experience.

The support of the project team was vital prior to the placement, although I embarked on some personal preparation, including purchasing my first suit and researching the organisation. The workshops and seminars before the placement itself were useful. One concern I did have was my rather basic grasp – at GCSE level – of the French language. However, I was assured that this was not an issue within the workplace or, as I was to discover, in the social arena of Brussels. The multilingual and less ignorant ‘Euro-district’ of Brussels allowed me to purchase my lunch and to travel freely, to my great relief.

My first day was certainly nerve-racking; not only was I alone in a foreign city but I would have to work with people I had only contacted a couple of times via email. A useful analogy here is a child’s first day at school. Once the welcome and induction was complete I was informed of my task for the two weeks. My mentor asked me to update the organisation’s research on the Lisbon Strategy, a plan to make the EU the ‘most competitive economy in the world and achieving full employment by 2010’. However, by the end of the first team meeting, my role had changed.

I was lucky enough to have been placed with WMiE during a busy period. Throughout the second week of my stay the office would play host to its partners. The Director insisted on incorporating me into the preparation and running of the events. This meant that instead of providing a broad summary report I would have a strict deadline on work that was contributing to the office’s workload. Although I was pleased to be asked, it was, of course, daunting. I had visions of me taking work back to the hotel, working through my lunch breaks and treating every night like the one before a coursework deadline. But it also meant that I could

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submerge myself within the organisation and really get to understand its mechanics. This might not have been achieved if I had been sidelined and isolated from the team's pressures. I had a job to do also.

The briefing for my policy report gave me a surprising insight into how NGOs research and construct documents. Astonishingly, they use Google, amongst other search engines of course, and Europa, an EU-specific portal. I also had a lot to learn about how to draft a policy report. In doing so I developed a great working relationship with my surrounding colleagues. I was still very much the apprentice, but people respected my questions and honoured them appropriately. At times, however, I did feel on the verge of disrupting others with constant and basic questions. The team were patient and incredibly supportive. Although I was obviously slow compared to the others, I found myself being competent and comfortable with my daily routine.

I became engrossed with my policy portfolio. My research used the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) of the West Midlands as a reference point, which was to be discussed at the events in the second week. My focus was to observe EU initiatives and developments related to the Lisbon Strategy in areas of social inclusion for the new RES. Apart from finding out the specifics and mechanics of EU strategies, I also began to understand the profile of the West Midlands. Here I was challenging many assumptions, including that the EU is an international arena for competing national interests; instead, I was a part of a much more localised political network. Bypassing government departments allowed local industries, institutions and politicians to compete and represent refined agendas. These figures were WMiE's partners and were participating in discussions that could impact on the Regional Development Agency (RDA) Advantage West Midland's RES.

The scope of my research allowed me to cover aspects of economics, social policy and institutional structuring. Although statements and targets at an EU level are riddled with rhetoric, they do provide for interesting reading. The original Lisbon Strategy of 2000 was revised in 2005 as commitments lagged behind their ambitious target dates. And, despite

having great optimism in achieving, for instance, full employment by 2010, my confidence in both the EU and regional capabilities to do so started to waver within my second week. I had discovered the internal politics that graces every working environment from Brussels to Birmingham. It was not necessarily personal-based issues but instead the priorities of the RDA which became apparent. I hoped to put to rest the claims of a businessman's Europe, but this became hard when WMiE had contact with its RDA. I must also note at this point that keeping track of the endless abbreviations and acronyms that referred to projects, organisations and policy programmes was like having to learn a new language, alongside Flemish and French.

The second week allowed me to play a logistical and hands-on role. I was certainly more settled, and, since the redrafting of my policy briefing was complete, I offered my services in an administrative capacity. This enabled me to understand the other departments of the organisation. Whilst I was on placement with WMiE so too were other students; *stagiaires* filled some of the facility-based roles. However, Jenny, a student from Leeds University, was on a one-year internship in the business and marketing department. A few of us around the same age often had lunch together and discussed the pros and cons of our placement schemes. Sophie, my adopted mentor, provided me with confidence and professional support. She explained to me her history of working for the European Commission and discussed the vast network of *stagiaires* and interns placed within the Euro-district. This junior level has become competitive, mirroring the domestic public-sector apprentice markets. A point I cannot reiterate strongly enough is that, to my knowledge and experience, the UK is not establishing itself sufficiently amongst the other twenty-six member states in this area.

The highlights of my placement certainly appeared in my second week. I was allowed to participate as a delegate in the events, which included the superb lunches. As I was paying for my meals in Belgium, I took full advantage of the 'working lunches' and 'networking buffets'. I also

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got a full tour of the EU institutions. I began to understand their structure and scale in greater depth and appreciated the vast administrative demands of running an international organisation. A Christmas party invitation to our office from the Basque region equivalent gave me the opportunity to sample some of Spain's great red wines and explore the 'out of hours' work sessions. Yet again the food was incredible.

My placement has been incredibly beneficial to both my CV and to me. I have developed a strong enthusiasm for European affairs. I really felt a part of the WMiE organisation and the European machine as a whole. In representing my placement provider at the events, on my return I found myself defending the EU against typical British pessimism. The feeling of pride gained from my placement could not be matched by any of my coursework marks, excluding my dissertation, which was inspired by my experience. The overall impact of my time with WMiE was a positive one. Most students who were also on the project agreed that practising politics can teach you what you do want to become as much as what you do not. Witnessing party politics first hand, in a seminar session at the office, ended my desire to enter electoral politics.

I perhaps have entered the market at a difficult period. This year's graduate figure stands at 300,000. No organisation, whether public or private, needs to be informed of the economic context in which they risk employing one of these graduates. I must be patient. There are things to work on in the meantime. On my last day I was delighted to have the lady who serves lunch in the local baguette shop return my order in French. A small victory for my GCSE education, but dampened by my failed *stagiaire* application to work for Glynis Kinnock MEP: a failure of my own linguistic ability but also the realisation of its necessity across various industries. I am currently trying to correct this skill deficit as well as addressing my IT weaknesses.

The greatest benefits came as a surprise to me. As I took such an interest in the policy dimension of my role, it inspired my third-year dissertation. My work improved greatly on my return. I had taken on board the advantages of redrafting and rereading and improved the efficiency of

my research abilities. My communication skills had been tested and, as a result, refined. The blog, set up to discuss our daily experiences, was a useful outlet for setting down my thoughts. I set aside the last thirty minutes of every day to document my activities and to record any observations. Although initially it felt a bit too 'dear diary', by the end of my first week I was grateful for the facility to which I relayed my qualms and queries. The blog was also used as a resource to support the writing of my reflective journal.

If I were to point to a single negative aspect of my experience, it would be to the post-placement reflective-journal assessment. I had to construct a 2,000-word reflective piece on my experience. I was given little guidance prior to my placement or before its deadline. Was I to focus on subject-specific observations or on personal development, however this be defined? I ended up writing an amalgamation of the two. My grade only reflected this confusion. I appreciate the difficulty in this project to provide a complete model, but I believe my unique and invaluable experience could have been assessed and rewarded in a more beneficial way. One way might be to provide an organisation or personal profile of the placement provider. I would have much preferred this exercise and would have benefited from its report format.

Subsequent to my placement I have been involved with a few of the project conferences and workshops and have relayed my experience to fellow students. I am a great advocate of placements within social science degree programmes, even though I have yet to reap the benefits in terms of career development. However, I fear, as do others, that higher education may be slow to establish compulsory links with the public sector leaving students lagging behind business or more vocational courses. Although a return to WMiE was discussed, my priority to complete my undergraduate study may have temporarily thwarted my employability without the armoury of a longer experience. This feeling was shared with my colleagues and delegates from Brussels. During the RES forums in my second week, the issue of increasing transferable skills within universities were

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discussed. I became an example to the group of how this is being tackled in other schools besides business.

As a whole, the placement was an extremely positive experience. I didn't have any expectations, so in some respects I wasn't disappointed. Brussels itself has a wonderful buzz, similar to that of London and no doubt every major city, of people on the commute. When I have applied for jobs since leaving university I do so with a confidence bettered only by those graduates with one-year placements. I did not expect to fit in so well or to come away feeling that I had contributed so much to the work of the team as I had. Furthermore, I did not anticipate the experience would impact on my studies and working processes – but it did. My dissertation, which I based on the social dimension of the EU, achieved a first-class mark. But working abroad in an intense environment also highlighted my weaknesses, which I am now trying to correct.

## Chapter 5

# The Value of Placement Learning: A Placement Provider's Perspective

*Elaine McGladdery*

### Introduction

When I first received the request to get involved in the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project, two things were obvious to me: one, that the letter had been around a few departments within Coventry City Council and had finally made its way onto my desk via my manager; and two, I didn't have much of an idea what on earth I was going to do with it. It did look like an interesting project, and I was in the middle of planning the induction programme for our newly elected members, so it wouldn't be too difficult to accommodate a few students, could it?

In addition, a cabinet member was keen for us to be involved, and, when we thought about it, we decided that forging links with our two local universities and encouraging an interest in local politics would be key drivers. We also agreed that if we were to do it, we wanted our students to have a positive experience. What we couldn't offer in glamour we could make up for by a breadth of experience and some interesting projects.

There is a Dilbert for every occasion, and for what we were doing it is this one:



This is what we wanted to avoid. So, we had a plan.

## **Context**

This was the first time we had participated in an undergraduate placement scheme. We had arranged work experience young people from schools and participated in the local Youth Council and democracy week (an event designed to get young people and elected members to talk to each other either face to face or virtually via the Internet) but we hadn't before had students shadowing councillors for any length of time.

For a bit of context: Coventry City Council is a metropolitan council with approximately 16,000 employees. They provide services ranging from education and social care to refuse collection and environmental health and planning. They have eighteen wards across the city, with fifty-four elected members (three per ward). They have a lord mayor and operate a leader, cabinet/scrutiny model of governance. Plenty for our students to look at – but where to start?

## **Coventry City Council's approach**

Given that there was so much to look at and to take in over a week, we decided that the best approach would be to assign the students to a team based upon the research project we had asked them to do. However, after some further thought, we realised that we risked giving our students a very one-sided look at local government. We want to get over the complex nature of Coventry City Council and that one of the many interesting things about local government is the number of stakeholders involved in any project, often with different or conflicting priorities.

So we decided that for a fully rounded picture of Coventry City Council, the students would need to meet a variety of officers and politicians so that they could get a flavour of the complex nature of politics in action.

## **Placement introduction**

We wanted to give our students a good introduction to their placements and thought that a robust induction would be time well spent. The induction involved a tour of the Council House (including the historical bits) not only to help them find their way around but also give them a sense of the history of local government in Coventry, meeting the leader of the Council and Chief Executive and an overview of the council services, how we are funded and the governance systems. We also took time to establish what the students wanted to get out of their placements and what they knew about the Council.

Over the series of placements – we took two students in each of the three rounds of placements – we learnt to build downtime and research time into their timetables so that they could (if they wanted to) find out about their next meeting or just chat to their new colleagues. We realised pretty quickly that the placements were as much about learning about work as about politics or the Council.

## **What did we learn from the project?**

As we had decided to go with a programme of events rather than matching a student to a politician or to the Democratic Services Team, it was difficult to get the right balance between meeting people and attending meetings versus work on their projects within their host team.

Meeting too many people and attending too many meetings could give a superficial view of local government, which is something we wanted to avoid. This was compounded with our first two students on the scheme in that their programme of activity ran over several weeks with them attending for one day each week. Following feedback from those first students and their host teams, it was decided that for the remaining two rounds of placements we would run the programmes over a week. That way we could provide a little more depth to the experience.

Induction was another difficult area for us. Again, it was about striking a balance between giving too much information on the first day

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and overwhelming our students and giving them enough information to spark an interest and allow them to be self-sufficient – being able to find their way around for example. After we had settled on a week-long programme, it seemed reasonable to do a half-day induction for our guests, then introduce them to their host teams and let them get on with it. This seemed to work well and allowed them to take a bit more responsibility for their own learning and experience.

It helped too in that, after some discussion with the universities and programme organiser, more work was done with the students prior to their arrival. Initially students had not given much thought as to what they wanted to get out of the project or carried out any research into Coventry City Council. After tweaking their preparation day back at the universities, students came along a lot more prepared. They had also done a little bit of preparatory work around some useful skills to bring into the work environment. The one thing most noticeably lacking, and understandably so, was some project-management skills – working to tight deadlines, scheduling in work and using time wisely. Not many of our students had these rare gifts.

One of the most valuable lessons from our experience of being a placement provider was that the learning wasn't all one way. Our students gave us a different perspective on the way that we work. Sometimes the questions came out of sheer disbelief that we still did something a certain way (file paper versions of democratic minutes rather than just electronic ones – we did both and sent out agendas and paperwork both electronically and paper versions by post). But often the challenges were genuinely useful. We had some really interesting thoughts around the scrutiny process that fed into our scrutiny review and some insightful comments about the difference between local and regional policy working.

### **What did we get out of the placement scheme?**

Originally we wanted to build better links with our local universities. I'm not sure if this was achieved, but it does appear to have worked in reverse

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in that our students were great ambassadors for their organisations. All of the host teams were impressed with their students – especially around how hard they worked and how they applied themselves.

What we wanted to do most, given the fact that local government often has difficulty recruiting into posts (we have the highest proportion of older workers in any sector and a reputation for being rather staid and boring) was to portray the public sector in general and local government in particular as an interesting place to work, a place where bright young people would choose to have a career. If just one of our six students chose to work in local government in the future then all the effort of organising the placement would have been worth it. What we hoped for was that they had such a great experience they would tell all their friends and family what a worthwhile career local government is . . . Well, one can hope!

Another ambition of ours was to promote the democratic process. With only 35 per cent of the electorate in Coventry turning out to vote, we wanted to encourage young people to have an interest in local politics. Again, it's difficult to know if we achieved this, but hopefully our students would see the benefits of voting at local elections and encourage friends and family to do so too.

Finally, I was greatly supported in the placement scheme by our then Cabinet Member for People and Customer Service, Councillor Heather Johnson. She persuaded and badgered her colleagues and senior officers to support the programme and to meet with the students. When asked what she wanted to achieve by the scheme she said, 'to give the students a positive experience – we want them to see local government as a diverse, interesting and rewarding place and to experience politics in action'. Based on the feedback we received, I'm certain we achieved this goal.

## **Chapter 6**

# **Engaging Students through Simulations: Working for Peace in Situations of Conflict**

*Dave Edye*

### **Introduction**

The employability module ‘Working for Peace in Situations of Conflict’ on our BA Peace and Conflict Studies programme at London Metropolitan University ran for the first time during the academic year 2007/8 (an abridged version of the current module guide is appended to this chapter). It was innovative in combining academic content (eight weeks of lectures and seminars) with practical training provided by the Peaceworkers section of a London-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), International Alert (two hours per week for two weeks, followed by an all-day simulation exercise).

The module was developed by Professor Mike Newman and Dave Edye in the Department of Law, Governance and International Relations at London Metropolitan University, together with Lucy Holdaway and Hannah Lewis of International Alert. The module was seen as a way of bridging the academic–vocational divide and gearing it for students seeking employment in the field. For the first eight weeks, students followed the usual academic pathway, where they examine the dynamics of conflict in the contemporary world as well as the institutions and organisations working for peace. The objectives and methods of particular organisations are looked at with an emphasis on their policies and practices. For the last three weeks of the semester, International Alert builds on this work by introducing students to the skills necessary for coping in stressful environments of conflict. The course ends with a

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simulation exercise lasting a whole day in which the students experience as directly as possible the real difficulties involved in conflict resolution.

### **Origins**

At various times, students had expressed the view that, while appreciative of the academic content of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS), they would also like a practical element to be introduced. Staff agreed that this was desirable and, as a first stage, Mike Newman invited Lucy Holdaway of Peaceworkers UK (as it then was) to speak to PCS students. This was designed as an element in an ‘employability’ theme, primarily for second-year students. The session was highly interactive, focusing on the skills necessary in peace work, and Lucy also provided the students with a great deal of advice about how to advance their own employment possibilities in this field. In a discussion after the session, Mike and Lucy agreed that it would be excellent if this kind of practical element could be implemented in the PCS curriculum. Subsequently, Lucy suggested that the best way to gain further insight into the way in which Peaceworkers carried out their training would be by a member of the PCS staff team participating in one of the weekend simulation courses that they ran. Dave Edye subsequently did this in autumn 2006 and returned with great enthusiasm about implementing this in the PCS degree, and Lucy, Dave and Mike had further discussions about this shortly afterwards.

### **Syllabus**

The academic element of the module is designed to provide students with a general background on the field. While introducing some theoretical elements, the emphasis is on the primary institutions and organisations involved in the peacekeeping and peacebuilding fields. The teaching programme for the first eight weeks is as follows:

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1. The changing dynamics of conflict.
2. Case study of a conflict area: writing a briefing paper.
3. Peacekeepers: who are they and what do they do?
4. The UN: its roles and structures in relation to peace and conflict.
5. History and development of NGOs.
6. Conflict prevention and NGOs.
7. NGOs and peacebuilding.
8. Regional organisations and peacekeeping: EU, ECOWAS, ASEAN.

Each of these lecture sections was complemented by a seminar, focusing on the dual aims of enhancing both an academic and practical understanding of the issues. In addition to this, the assessment strategy for this part of the course emphasised a more practical approach than is typical for academic modules. The students were therefore asked to write a briefing paper of between 2,000 and 2,500 words on the prevention and transformation of violent conflict in the contemporary world. The briefing paper was designed to develop their research skills in finding out about an NGO, national government department or regional body (e.g., EU, AU, ASEAN, OAS) or international organisation (e.g., the UN, IMF, World Bank) and its role in peacebuilding. The students had to choose a conflict situation then write an advisory brief for one of these organisations as to the policy options available (for example, a briefing paper for Oxfam, a large UK NGO, which may be deciding to become involved in a conflict zone managed by the UN, UN agency or UN-mandated organisation, for example ECOWAS).

### **The purpose of the briefing paper and students' performance**

When setting the briefing paper as an assessment exercise, we were aware that students might find this quite difficult, as it required them to get

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‘inside’ the thinking of a particular organisation. This differed from the normal analysis from the ‘outside’ that is typical of an academic essay. We therefore included the need for a section on the organisation itself, rather than simply asking the students to write a briefing paper on the assumption that the aims of the organisation have already been internalised by the writer, which is often the case in real-life situations.

In fact, the students were imaginative and wide-ranging in their choice of subjects. The following is a sample of the topics that were chosen:

- policy options for UN peacekeeping missions in DRC on the Kivu;
- the peacebuilding policy options for Japan’s International Cooperation Agency on the conflict in Sri Lanka;
- Ethiopia–Eritrea border conflict: policy options for global witness;
- policy options for ArmorGroup on a UN-contracted mission in Darfur’
- policy options for CAFOD on the conflict in Chechnya, with particular reference to the human-rights situation there.

Inevitably, the success of the papers was variable, but most were very competent, and the best were of a really excellent quality. In these cases, students had demonstrated skills of both a high analytical quality (more traditional academic competences) and a practical orientation, reflected in the way in which policy options were closely related to the aims of the specific organisation.

## **The sessions by International Alert and preparation for the simulation exercise**

The bridge between the more academic and the more practical aspects of the module was reinforced in the two two-hour training sessions carried out by International Alert in Weeks 9 and 10 of the module. Because the

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institutional frameworks for peacekeeping and peacebuilding had been outlined in the previous weeks, the two members of International Alert were able to concentrate on applying practical skills. The topics included handling conflict in theory and practice, the work of NGOs in the field, an overview of official peace missions and the roles played by civilians in these missions, along with a session on understanding the basic core skills expected of anyone working in conflict zones, no matter what their area of specialisation or level of responsibility. There was a final preparatory exercise on cultural and gender awareness. The students worked mainly in groups using brainstorming exercises.

At the end of the second session, the students were given some information about the simulation exercise so that they would have some idea of what to expect. In the following week we had a further session with the students. This mainly involved announcing the teams in which they would work on the day and then allowing the teams to meet and prepare themselves. The membership of the teams was not arbitrary but was designed to include a balance of students in terms of personality and the skills and commitment that they had demonstrated in previous weeks. It was left open to the teams to decide whether they wished to have further discussions before the event itself.

The skills assessed in the simulation were: teamwork, observation, verbal communication, cultural sensitivity, conflict management and self-management.

### **The simulation exercise**

The participants in the exercise were as follows:

1. Twenty-five students, divided into teams of five.
2. Four actors, each of whom was playing a role and had been given briefing material in advance on both the overall situation and their role in it.

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3. Five observers, each with professional experience of working in conflict situations or training for such situations. Each observer was also given briefing material in advance on the overall situation and the skills that they should be assessing. They were also given evaluation sheets on which these skills could be assessed at various levels. Their task would involve both providing a team debriefing and a debriefing to each member of the team.
4. The two tutors who delivered the first part of the course.

## **Evaluation of the input by International Alert by the module tutors**

### *1. The training sessions*

We discussed the input in the training sessions with the staff from International Alert and sent them material from our own lectures and seminars so that they would have a good idea of the level of knowledge and understanding that they should expect from our students. After introducing the International Alert staff to the students, we did not observe the training sessions, as we believed that it would be better for them to establish their own relationship with the students. However, from immediate student feedback it was evident that these two sessions were very successful and this was confirmed in the module questionnaires.

### *2. The simulation exercise*

International Alert gave us material for the simulation exercise in advance, but we were not involved in devising the exercise. We liaised with them about the practical arrangements for the day, including the assessment system. We observed all activities involved on the day, including the work of the student teams and the debriefings by International Alert to both teams and individuals.

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The first point in our evaluation is our admiration for the professionalism of the International Alert team (including the organiser, observers and actors). The material that was prepared and distributed, the organisation of the day, the ways in which all roles were carried out, including assessment and debriefing, were of the highest possible standard. We were convinced that this level of professional experience was absolutely necessary for such a simulation to achieve its goals.

Second, we were impressed with the way in which the students entered into the simulation. They took it very seriously, working throughout an extremely demanding day, showing initiative, adaptability and teamwork. We were very pleased to see them combining insights from the more academic parts of the degree with initiative when faced with complex practical situations. For example, the simulation was based on inter-ethnic conflict in a post-war situation, and the students learned how important it was that their project, even though it was not specifically about inter-ethnic conflict, could lead to positive spin-offs in terms of inter-community relations.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, our observation of the simulation exercise demonstrated in a new way the differences between traditional academic skills and practical ones. In general, students who do well academically also demonstrated a good understanding of the simulated conflict situation in which they were working. But it was not always the case that those who do the best academically operated the most effectively. This discrepancy between academic and practical skills was not simply a matter of our own observations, for it was confirmed in the results of the simulation exercise. It is therefore worth reflecting on the significance of this from the perspective of academic staff members.

One conclusion that we would *not* draw from it would be to suggest that the traditional academic emphasis is inappropriate. We are absolutely committed to enhancing the analytical and research capacities of our graduates and continue to design our curriculum and teaching to this end. However, we also believe that the introduction of this simulation exercise in this module (with 50 per cent of the marks derived from it) and a more

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practical orientation overall has been extremely important. We believe that it demonstrates to students the different skills that are necessary – in addition to academic ones – for employability. We are also confident that the input by International Alert is useful for a whole range of working situations in addition to those directly related to peace and conflict.

There is, however, one area that presented us with difficulties, which stems from translating the score the students gained on the simulation into an academic grade. Two students were very concerned about their grade and accepted very reluctantly that they had not done ‘well’ on the simulation. The nature of the simulation gives rise to an emotional involvement beyond the usual parameters of rational academic practice. The simulation assesses how competent a person as a human being copes in a variety of difficult situations, and if the mark is low then somehow this touches them in, perhaps, a deeper way than a bad mark for coursework or an exam. This aspect is recognised in the literature as the following quote reveals:

The emotional element in role play contributes to later analysis. The student, who becomes completely wrapped up in a role, learns to appreciate that people’s actions have an emotional as well as a rational content. It is important to realise that in issues that are influenced by attitudes, values and perceptions, the emotional and rational content are often closely intertwined and have to be untangled if students are to evaluate effectively (Wales and Clarke 2005: 68).

We recognise that in future this aspect needs to be considered very sensitively in light of this experience.

## **Evaluation of the module by the students**

Many of the students’ comments on the module evaluation form supported the conclusions of the academic tutors. Almost all the positive comments referred specifically to the International Alert sessions. The following are a representative selection of their comments:

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‘Very interesting, especially the workshops organised by the International Alert team. Good balance between theoretical and practical approaches.’

‘Of course the theoretical part was very helpful in terms of gaining understanding and knowledge of the subject area. However, the practical part, I think, has helped us develop practical skills which will be useful for us in the future.’

‘I’m very happy that we are doing this practical part in the module with International Alert. It adds a portion of something extra, such as verbal and communication skills.’

‘I very much enjoyed International Alert coming in and giving some practical advice . . . [it] was interesting and [I] got some idea of what to expect if I would work in the field of peacekeeping and conflict resolution.’

‘I’ve found [it] very interesting and useful to mix theoretical knowledge with practical situations. The contribution of an NGO was a very nice experience and allows a better understanding of the issues faced in situations of conflict. The combination of lectures and small-group works was very educational. Great way to teach how to work for peace in situations of conflict!’

## Conclusion

The module is now in its second year, and, as tutors, we have learnt a great deal more about how to prepare students for this simulation. The groups for the actual simulation day are selected after Week 3 and work together for the rest of the semester in those groups. They are also given a list of those skills that will be assessed on the simulation day, and, as tutors, we

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directed the students to be aware of using those skills in their seminars. This change was introduced in light of student feedback from the first year of running the simulation. It is also noticeable, as in the initial year of the module, that academic ability does not necessarily translate into high proficiency in using interpersonal and practical skills. Overall, the students in both years we have run the simulation have praised the module highly and have expressed a desire to see more of these kinds of courses in their degree programmes.

## References

Wales, J. and P. Clarke (2005) *Learning Citizenship: Practical Teaching Strategies for Secondary Schools*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

## Appendix 6.1

Department of Law, Governance and International Relations  
London Metropolitan University

GI2E70C: Working for Peace – Module Booklet (abridged)  
Spring Semester 2008/09

Staff: David Edge  
Mike Newman  
International Alert [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org)

### Prerequisites:

Successful completion of certificate level in Peace and Conflict Studies (single or combined).

### Module Summary:

The module examines the dynamics of conflict in the contemporary world and the institutions and organisations working for peace. It analyses the objectives and methods of particular organisations, with an emphasis on their policies and practices. In association with International Alert, the module also provides an introduction to the core practical skills considered essential for anyone working in the fields of conflict prevention, crisis management or peacebuilding.

### Module Aims:

The module aims to:

1. provide an understanding of some of the institutions and organisations (governmental and non-governmental) that work in conflict situations;
2. analyse the varied objectives and methods of such organisations;
3. introduce the core practical skills for work in relevant fields, thus enhancing employability.

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the module, students should:

1. understand the differing objectives of various institutions and organisations working for peace;

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2. appreciate the range of methods used in the attempt to realise these objectives;
3. have a basic appreciation of the key practical skills for work in the fields of conflict prevention, crisis management or peacebuilding;
4. demonstrate the capacity for both individual and team-work in a relevant area.

### Syllabus:

Violent conflict in the contemporary world and the forces that generate it; international institutions with responsibilities to counteract or reduce conflict; peacekeeping, conflict prevention, crisis management, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding; the range and varied roles of the NGO sector in working for peace; practical skills.

### Assessment Strategy:

The assessment strategy emphasises research and practical skills both for working in peace organisations and in other forms of employment.

1. Individual contribution to collective practical exercise on conflict testing the following: verbal communication skills, self-management, conflict management, observation skills, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, and gender awareness. **Week 12: Thursday May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 (All Day)**
2. An individual briefing paper of 2000-2500 words for someone about to be sent to work in an area of conflict, providing necessary background to the dynamics of the situation and the particular concerns for the organisation involved. **Deadline: Friday May 1st 2009**

### Learning and teaching:

Lectures, seminars, and practical work

### Lecture Programme

Week 1            The changing dynamics of conflict

Reading: Mary Kaldor, 'Old Wars, Cold Wars, New Wars and the War on Terror'

[http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Publications/PublicLectures/PL\\_Old%20Wars%20Cold%20War%20New%20Wars%20and%20War%20on%20Terror1.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Publications/PublicLectures/PL_Old%20Wars%20Cold%20War%20New%20Wars%20and%20War%20on%20Terror1.pdf).

Think about whether Kaldor's distinctions are useful and, if so, what implications this might have for peacekeeping.

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- Week 2
1. Case Study of Conflict area: Polisario and Western Sahara
  2. Writing a Briefing paper
  3. Preparation for weeks 10 -12
- Week 3
- Peacekeepers: who are they and what do they do?
- Reading: UN Introduction to peacekeeping at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/intro>
- A.Bellamy et al, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, Ch 2
- Come to the seminar ready discuss the issues of how peacekeeping has changed and what implications this has for the role of peacekeepers.
- Week 4
- The UN: its roles and structures in relation to peace and conflict
- Go to the UN website to find out what the UN Peacebuilding Commission is supposed to do and read any documents you find there assessing its prospects of success.
- Come to the seminar ready to explain and evaluate the Commission.
- Week 5
- History and Development of NGOs
- Seminar Topic: Assess the current role and influence of NGOs in the contemporary world.
- Reading:
- <http://www.ngos.net/>
- Michael Edwards, *NGO Rights and Responsibilities. A New Deal for Global Governance*, Foreign Policy Centre 2000
- J. Goodhand, *Aiding peace? : the role of NGOs in armed conflict* (ITP.2006)
- Dr. Sam Vaknin *The Self-Appointed Altruists*  
<http://samvak.tripod.com/ngos.html>

## Engaging Students through Simulations

- Week 6      Conflict Prevention and NGOs
- Go to the *International Alert* website and find the section entitled 'Peacebuilding Issues'. Take *one* of these issues and explain the approach of International Alert in relation to it. Think about it critically and see if you can also identify any possible problems. (You may co-operate with other students in doing this work and more than one of the issues may be discussed).
- Week 7      NGOs and Development
- Seminar Topic: How effective are NGOs in promoting development?
- Seminar Reading:
- L. Gordeker and T.G. Weiss, Devolving responsibilities: a framework for analysing NGOs and Services. *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 18, No. 3 pp. 443 –455, 1997
- Third World Quarterly*. Special Issue: NGO Futures: Beyond Aid Vol. 21, No. 4, 2000
- Week 8      Regional Organisations and Peacekeeping  
EU, ECOWAS, ASEAN
- Seminar Topic: Select one of these organisations and outline the role they have played and continue to play in peacebuilding.
- Week 9      Briefing Paper Tutorials
- Week 10     International Alert
- Week 11     International Alert
- Week 12     International Alert – Whole Day Training

### **Bibliography:**

Anderson, M. & Olson, L. (2003) Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners, do no harm? Available at [www.cdainc.com](http://www.cdainc.com).

David Last 'From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding' in *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution* (5:1) Summer 1-8 (2003)

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Reychler, L. & Paffenholz, T (ed's) (2001) *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*, London & Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers

Tongeren, P.V. Brenk, M. Hellema, M. Verhoeven, J. (ed's), (2005) *People Building Peace II: Successful Stories Of Civil Society*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Some stories also available on [www.peoplebuildingpeace.org](http://www.peoplebuildingpeace.org).

Zelizer, C. & Johnston, L. (2005) Skills, Networks and Knowledge: Developing a Career in International Peace and Conflict Resolution ACT, Alliance for Conflict Transformation. Available at [www.conflicttransformation.org](http://www.conflicttransformation.org).

Barash, D and C. Webel, *Peace and Conflict Studies* (Sage, 2002).

Duffield. M. *Global Governance and the New Wars* (Zed Books. 2001)

M.Edwards, M. NGOs on the World Stage. *World Economics* Vol.2 No. 3 July- September 2001

Pouligny, P, *Peace operations seen from below: UN missions and local people* (Hurst 2006)

Richmond, O & H.F.Carey (eds.) *Subcontracting peace: the challenges of NGO peacebuilding* (Ashgate 2005)

Oliver P. Richmond 'Post-Westphalian' Peace-Building: The role of NGOs. [http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:rmhG0PAV67AJ:www.class.uidaho.edu/martin\\_archives/conflict\\_journal/ngo.htm+ngos+and+peacebuilding&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=17&gl=uk](http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:rmhG0PAV67AJ:www.class.uidaho.edu/martin_archives/conflict_journal/ngo.htm+ngos+and+peacebuilding&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=17&gl=uk).

'The UN Peacebuilding Commission: Benefits and Challenges' prepared by the Friedrich-Eberg-Stiftung, 6 June 2006 on [www.peacewomen.org/un/women\\_reform/PBC/FES\\_background\\_paper\\_PBC.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/un/women_reform/PBC/FES_background_paper_PBC.pdf).

### Reading List for Weeks 10 - 12

Anderson, M. & Olson, L. (2003) *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners, do no harm?* Available at [www.cdainc.com](http://www.cdainc.com)

Reychler, L. & Paffenholz, T (ed's) (2001) *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*, London & Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers

Tongeren, P.V. Brenk, M. Hellema, M. Verhoeven, J. (ed's), (2005) *People*

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*Building Peace II: Successful Stories Of Civil Society*, London & Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publisher. Some stories also available on [www.peoplebuildingpeace.org](http://www.peoplebuildingpeace.org)

Zelizer, C. & Johnston, L. (2005) *Skills, Networks and Knowledge: Developing a Career in International Peace and Conflict Resolution* ACT, Alliance for Conflict Transformation  
Available at [www.conflicttransformation.org](http://www.conflicttransformation.org)

### ***Briefing Paper on the prevention and transformation of violent conflict in the contemporary world.***

This briefing paper is designed to develop your research skills in finding out about an NGO, national government department, or regional (e.g. EU, AU, ASEAN, OAS) or international organisation (e.g. UN, IMF, World Bank) and its role in peacebuilding.

You have to choose a conflict situation, then you will have to write an advisory brief for one of these organisations, as to the policy options available to the organisation. (For example a briefing paper for *Oxfam*, which is a large UK NGO, which may be deciding to become involved in a conflict zone managed by the UN, UN agency or UN mandated organisation, for example ECOWAS).

The organisation can either be about to go to a conflict situation for the first time or already be involved in that situation.

#### *The Briefing Paper's Format*

Briefing papers are designed to help organisations understand **the essentials** of a policy issue. The essence of a briefing paper is that it must be short, must focus on the key issues at stake for the given organisation on the question raised. It must contain only the most essential analysis and evidence to buttress its conclusions.

In format it must include the following:

1. A title in the form of Policy Options for X (organisation) on Y (policy issue).
2. A description of the organisation, its aims and objectives in general and its position in relation to the conflict. If you choose a national or international organisation, then you must specify to which particular department of government or regional or international organisation the briefing paper is addressed.
3. A contextualisation of the issue in terms of a brief history of the conflict, then current developments and issues, and the problems it raises for the given organisation and any relevant past stances

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of the organisation on the issue. You should also refer to other major actors in the area.

4. A statement of the options available to the organisation, including possible 'costs' and 'benefits', including your own recommendations.

The main text of your briefing paper **must be between 2000 and 2500 words**. But you may attach footnotes not only giving references but also indicating assumptions or background details on the issue. Such footnotes and bibliography do not form part of the 2000 - 2500 word total

*What we are looking for in your Briefing Paper.*

- \*Your ability to choose a current policy issue facing an organisation.
- \*Your ability to make reasonable assumptions about the interests and concerns of the organisation.
- \*Your ability to identify the key policy issues and their implications for your organisation.
- \*Your ability to generate and evaluate options for your organisation in a convincing way

**Deadline: Friday May 1<sup>st</sup> 2009**

## **Chapter 7**

# **Preparing to Work in Conflict: An NGO Perspective**

*Lucy Holdaway*

Consider, if you will, the following questions:

- How do you know you have the skills needed to work in conflict?
- How do you know whether you can cope with the challenges you may face?
- How do you know if this is something you really want to do?

With the growth in the number of students taking academic courses in areas related to conflict there is a correlated increase in the supply of graduates eager to work for an organisation engaged in conflict prevention, crisis management or peacebuilding. However, preparing students for a career in conflict is not an easy task. Understanding issues theoretically is very different from coping with the day-to-day realities of conflict environments. Whilst an academic course can assess knowledge readiness for conflict work, it does not necessarily build practical skills or provide for an assessment of attitudes and preparedness. Furthermore, resources and materials for career guidance as a civilian entering this work are scarce, leaving students with few means to learn about the careers open to them.

How then can students be supported to discover more about the realities of this type of work and the skills they will need without the associated risks of taking them on a placement visit to a country in conflict?

International Alert<sup>1</sup> has been delivering seminars and skills training for a number of years to students, graduates and career changers in order to improve the quality and quantity of civilians ready and able to work in

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the areas of conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding. An important aspect of this approach is providing the participants with an opportunity to ‘taste’ what this work involves so that they can experience for themselves whether this type of work is right for them *before* they arrive in a conflict-affected area.

This chapter will explore the training that International Alert designs for students to prepare them for working as civilians in conflict situations. It will examine the theory and practice of simulation as a learning and assessment tool as a key part of this preparation – offering an opportunity to ‘work in conflict’ without actually working in conflict.

### **The training**

Preparing civilians to work in conflict is a threefold process involving the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Individuals need the appropriate knowledge for the type of job and region they are working in and an understanding of conflict and approaches to peacebuilding. They need to be equipped with both the core and specialised practical skills that will enable them to carry out their work effectively. They need the right attitudes to work with people and situations in ways that achieve the most sustainable impact for peace.

The training that International Alert puts together with universities is designed to be distinctive from and complementary to the academic aspects of a degree. As such, it focuses on building skills and attitudes, working from the platform of knowledge gained through the academic course. The cornerstone of the training is in the practical experience of International Alert’s direct work in conflict. The methodological focus is an experiential one. Each participant brings to a training session relevant experiences and skills which others can learn from. Through the use of case studies, role plays, discussions and practical exercises, participants draw on their existing knowledge and skills, adapt and develop these to different circumstances and learn new ones relevant for conflict situations.

## Preparing to Work in Conflict: An NGO Perspective

Different types of training have been designed for different universities depending on the stage and needs of the students. The approach developed with London Metropolitan University for their undergraduate degree in Peace and Conflict Studies came from the identification that there is little information available for students to explore the field of peacebuilding as a career option. The course therefore focuses on civilian peacebuilding from the perspective of what individuals starting out in their career need to know. The curriculum develops students' knowledge of conflicts, explains how they are handled and provides an overview of various routes in to working in conflict for civilians. Students explore official peace missions and the roles played by civilians in these missions alongside the type of work done by NGOs. The course looks at the core skills expected of anyone working in conflict and how these skills build a foundation for different areas of specialisation (see Appendix 7.1).

An alternative approach was developed with the MA in International Peace and Security at King's College London. Their students have already established that this is a career they wish to pursue. The focus here is instead on practical skills development for conflict work rather than on exploring routes into working in conflict. The training therefore develops students' abilities in the core skills needed for conflict work through practical exercises and case studies that explore different scenarios, environments and predicaments in conflict.

The link that is common to all training programmes is the use of simulation as both a learning and assessment tool. Considered an essential component for building skills and checking suitability for conflict work, simulation provides a unique form of immersion learning.

### **Simulation as 'experiencing' conflict work**

A simulation, designed as realistically as possible to mimic a conflict context, provides a tangible and vibrant learning experience. It offers

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insights into the types of work already being done on the ground and the ways in which internationals can contribute. It highlights the sensitivities of working in a conflict-affected area and helps develop creative thinking around tackling serious subjects. In this way students are able to get a 'taste' of what they could be facing when working in conflict before finding themselves in real-life situations.

Placed in small teams, participants are given a fictional country brief and an assignment for the simulation:

An unsteady peace agreement has been in place for the past three years in Hala. Many atrocities were committed during the war leaving the province divided along ethnic lines. International aid has been pouring into the region, and rebuilding efforts are under way. Although the situation in Hala is slowly improving, there is still a long way to go, and much work is to be done between the different communities before any kind of sustainable peace can develop. You have recently been recruited to work for a youth charity, Kids International. You have arrived in Hala and have a series of meetings with key people to develop ideas around youth activities that will help build bridges between the people of Hala and to ease local tensions. You will need to report back at the end of the day outlining what the key issues are facing young people in Hala and proposing activities that could address this.

Each team completes their assignment by travelling to different locations in the 'conflict region' to visit 'local stakeholders' (for example, the Mayor, a UN representative or an NGO worker) in order to unearth some of the key issues underlying the conflict and the avenues available for the team to contribute to the peacebuilding process. 'Actors' (drawn from professionals who have all been in the role, or similar, in real life) play these stakeholders, working from a brief provided for them. They challenge students by examining their perceptions of different cultural norms,

testing their knowledge, providing information and guidance and/or deliberately withholding or providing biased information.

The simulation demands that participants think through the complexity of the context in which they are working. Their assumptions about conflict are challenged. How they think about conflict, how they analyse and interpret information they receive, and how they interact with and react to individuals from different cultures, viewpoints and life experiences are put to the test. In addition, participants are thrown into an intense teamwork situation, the type of which they do not have many opportunities to experience during university. The role that individuals adopt within the team, the way in which the team plans and organises its work and the manner in which the team responds to situations provide critical learning opportunities for professional life.

Through simulation, participants experience *how* to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. The adaptability of their skills and experience is tested against a range of situations, and a mirror is held up reflecting how conscious and subconscious attitudes influence relationships, approaches and interactions.

### **Assessing skills: the role of observation**

In many cases, the simulation is used not only to provide an experience for participants but also to assess each participant on the core skills considered essential for anyone working in the fields of conflict prevention, crisis management or peacebuilding. Such is the case with tutors at London Metropolitan University, who use performance in the simulation as a contributing factor in the students' overall assessment of that particular module. Students are assessed along the same performance scale as field practitioners attending an International Alert course. The outcome of the assessment demonstrates not only their existing level of skill but also how their skills need to develop to be in line for employment. Taking such

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an approach emphasises to students the importance within the programme of balancing academic with practical skills.

The skills assessed through the simulation are drawn from the lists of criteria used by a number of inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations in their recruitment and selection of personnel for work in the field. These skills are considered the foundation for the majority of professional posts in this area; while not every post requires the same degree of skill, all will require some demonstration.

The skills themselves are common to many careers. However, what marks them as different is the way in which a conflict environment affects the importance and demonstration of the skill and as such the impact that poor or good use of these skills can have on relationships and understanding and therefore on the work carried out in a conflict-affected area.

Each of the different simulations is designed to be able to provide opportunities for participants to demonstrate all the core skills, either through their interactions within a team or with the various actors and scenarios they encounter. During a simulation, each team of participants is shadowed by an experienced observer, who is a peacebuilding practitioner. The observer is watching both the interactions of the team and the actions of the individuals in order to assess their skills against a competency matrix (see Appendix 7.2). This enables the observer to assess the level of competency demonstrated in each skill area in order to ascertain each student's strengths and weaknesses in relation to conflict work.

Assessment through a simulation is approached as a supportive development tool that provides a space in which the participant can reflect on and receive feedback on their experience of, and performance in, the simulation. The assessment is fed back through team and individual debriefs between students and their assessing observer. The team debrief explores the dynamics at play within the team, the roles individuals adopt and the success and challenges of the team in working to their assignment. The individual debrief looks at the participant's individual assessment and provides an opportunity to discuss the participant's self- and peer

assessment, comparing these observations with those of the observer. The individual debrief results in an action plan outlining areas for further development (see Appendix 7.3). In this way, not only do the participants have a concrete assessment of skills but they have also developed steps forward to improve their weaker areas.

Simulation exercises have an intrinsic value in and of themselves. The participant becomes the object of their own study. A rare opportunity is provided in which individuals are challenged in new ways and then given the space for self-reflection on how they performed. Someone who thought they would remain calm in all situations becomes flustered when presented with something unexpected. Someone who thought they weren't a team player becomes the one who holds the team together when under pressure. These personal insights, guided by highly skilled observers, are as valuable for personal development as for gauging suitability for conflict work. Simulation sets individuals on paths that take them beyond the borders of their academic study into thinking about not just what they know but what they can do.

## **Conclusion**

Including a practical aspect to an academic course bridges the gap between success in the classroom and effectiveness in the field. The training enables students to think through whether conflict work is for them and, if it is, the types of work to which they might be suited. It provides the opportunity to work with and receive advice from peacebuilding practitioners who bring to the course the day-to-day challenges of peacebuilding. The use of simulation in conjunction with practical training sessions provides an effective and personalised way for students to gain practical insights into the realities and challenges of conflict work.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This work was first initiated by Peaceworkers UK, an independent charity which became part of International Alert in 2006.

## Appendix 7.1

### Core Skills for Working in Conflict

**Communication skills:** in a conflict setting communication may need to occur with a diverse array of people including local dignitaries, journalists, academics, those living in conflict environments, etc. Often crossing cultural and at times linguistic barriers, communication needs to be clear, accurate, understood and appropriate to the audience and circumstance. Effectively listening and understanding as well as verbal communication are important skills in this area of work.

**Self-management:** including facets such as body language, the ability to give and receive feedback, awareness of personal stress levels, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, ability to learn from experiences, to plan, to organise, can all strongly affect an individual's ability to function and perform well within conflict environments.

**Conflict management:** a day to day occurrence in many roles. Working and living in potentially high stress, intense and pressurised environments can result in swift escalation of issues if not handled swiftly and effectively. Individuals will be observed in the way they handle elements of conflict within their team and in the dealings with other people they have.

**Observation skills:** in order to monitor, assess and evaluate programming or the need for it; sound observation skills are essential. Using clues to enhance your understanding of different situations, demonstrating an awareness of the environment, unspoken 'words', changes in relationship dynamics, are examples of the need to practice, and enhance observation skills.

**Teamwork:** a critical area as the vast majority of work in conflict situations revolves around working within teams. Understanding team objectives, being motivated to achieve them, appreciating a specific role within the team all aid the effectiveness of a team, and the enjoyment of being part of it.

**Cultural sensitivity:** cultural insensitivity or lack of understanding is a huge obstacle to making any sort of positive contribution to a conflict situation. It is possible to do far more harm than good if this is poorly handled. More often than not teams working in conflict environments overseas are made up of individuals from a global background. Demonstrating an appreciation and sensitivity towards other cultures as well as using culturally appropriate responses to a range of situations is an essential skill to have.

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**Gender awareness:** it is important that gender issues, both within your own working environment as well as in the situations you are working in, are recognised and considered. This is a skill that is about understanding the different roles and relationships played by men and women in conflict situations as well as being aware of gender difference and discrimination. It is necessary to behave appropriately and with sensitivity whilst also ensuring that discrimination is addressed where and when it is appropriate.

**Research skills:** the ability to accumulate information and select what is relevant and important to the job at hand. A valuable skill that once acquired can be transferred across a wide array of professional roles.

**Written communication skills:** the ability to write clear and concise reports that are appropriate in length, style, format and content for the intended reader is a basic requirement in many working environments. Due to the need to remotely report to and from the field, this is particularly so in conflict environments.

## Appendix 7.2

### Sample: Observer's Checklist

Name of observer:		Name of individual:		Team:	
Assessment area	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Tick	Comments
Research skills Systematically finding & utilising relevant information for the task	Correctly identify information source	Extract key points in a passage / conversation	Recall, record, discuss & present findings clearly & accurately	Tick	
Teamwork Working productively within & contributing positively to a team	Actively contribute towards achievement of objectives & decision making within team	Support other team members in achieving their sub-tasks & actively promote a positive team environment	Identify gaps in the team & suggest solutions Discuss any difficulties with team-mates positively & constructively Assist team mates with tasks if more urgent than their own Recording observations well	Tick	
Observation Use clues to enhance understanding of the situation & respond well to situational dynamics	Pick up on important signals from people involved Be aware of what is going on around them	Identifying unusual activity around them Identifying patterns of activity & changes to them		Tick	
Verbal communication Effectively interacting (speaking, listening & body language) in dialogue with individuals	Clearly & concisely speak with others Demonstrate use of considered body language	Actively & attentively listen Show emotion & empathy appropriate to the conversation	Develop positive rapport through humour & small talk Receive a positive response during discussions Put forward convincing case when trying to persuade	Tick	
Written communication Presenting evidence based findings & recommendations accurately & succinctly	Produce coherent & legible report	Avoid major grammar, syntax & spelling errors Report to be logical, structured, concise & clear	Report written in accordance with agreed format Report conclusions & recommendations accurately based on findings Intervene to challenge racist remarks if they occur	Tick	
Cultural sensitivity Speaking & behaving in a respectful manner appropriate to the culture of the environment	Take cultural differences seriously & try to understand them Avoid making racist remarks	Adapt behaviour appropriately to new culture Use appropriate body language to new culture	Intervene to challenge racist remarks if they occur Identify culturally sensitive aspects that may relate to programming	Tick	
Gender awareness Considering gender issues & discrimination & identifying ways to address / cope with these if necessary	Avoid making sexist comments Demonstrate ability to comfortably work with both genders Respond equally to both genders in positions of authority	Identify & seek to address any gender issues as / if they surface Report any sexual discrimination to appropriate authorities	Understand & explain how gender relations are affected by the conflict Intervene to challenge sexist remarks if they occur	Tick	
Conflict management Identifying & appropriately addressing conflict in order to reach resolution	Respond with timeliness & proportionality to conflicts & tensions Consider possible options for seeking to resolve conflict Be aware of own triggers & conflict coping mechanisms	Deal effectively & swiftly with any personal conflicts Negotiate solutions for conflicts / tensions with relevant people involved Withdraw when impulse actions may be detrimental	Intervene as a mediator in a conflict that parties cannot self-resolve Calm tense situations	Tick	
Self-management Self-motivating, managing time well, maintaining a positive attitude, showing an active interest in self-improvement, & adhering to the task	Maintain focus on task throughout situation Demonstrate positive control of temper & emotion as necessary to complete task Understanding team task	Develop & maintain self-motivation throughout task Play a clear & necessary role in achieving the group task Maintain a balance between 'big picture' & elements of detail Prioritise tasks well	Accept constructive criticism graciously Demonstrate willingness to learn from any mistakes Be aware of & articulate own attitudes & areas of strength & weakness	Tick	

Appendix 7.3

Sample: Action Plan

Area of action	Specific task	This will be useful because	How much of a priority is this?	When will I achieve this?	Who can assist me in achieving this?	The first step is to ...
Cultural understanding	Contact x agency, and ask to talk through the differences needed to plan similar projects in different locations due to issues of culture with an experienced professional	I currently have limited understanding of how differing cultures practically effect the planning of programmes at a field level	Medium	By December 2007	My lecturer who has contacts in x agency.	Find out which agencies work in a diverse range of cultural environments
1,						
2,						
3,						
4,						

## **Chapter 8**

# **Learning through Simulations: A Student's Perspective**

*Alvaro Mellado Domínguez*

I would like to reflect on the learning experience based on the Working for Peace in Conflict simulation as a source of practical learning for Peace and Conflict Studies students. The abilities which were acquired and developed went beyond the usual writing and analysis skills that are part of any other module. I had to analyse and put into practice topics and questions and to overcome difficulties as if they happened in the field. This spurred me to evaluate my own personal abilities, attitudes and adaptability in a post-conflict scenario, a situation different from my normal life. The aim of this chapter is to explain briefly the simulation, group dynamics and my personal reflections developed from this experience.

The experience started by making groups of five members each from the students on the module. The members of my team had different backgrounds, coming from different continents and life experiences. We represented the international NGO Kids International. The project we had been set was to compile a field report from a post-conflict situation in order to create summer activities for the children. These activities aimed at the reconciliation of children from different ethnic groups. The team had to meet different actors, such as the local mayor, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) representative, the Kids International representative, local users of the youth centre and the local youth leader. The actors in the meetings were people with much experience from International Alert, and I have to say that the meetings were very realistic, just like in the field.

The scenario was a post-conflict situation after years of war between different ethnic groups fighting for regional independence or unity. The city to which we simulated a visit was divided between two ethnic groups

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involved in the conflict. The mayor of the city was part of the ethnic group that defended the unity of the territory, and he was in favour of reconciliation and integration of the different ethnic groups. The OSCE representative was keen to support local efforts for integration and was under pressure to deliver projects successfully, to budget and on time. This was the brief context that was given to the team two weeks before the assessed simulation. Then, a week before the event, the team met during class time in order to prepare how we were going to approach the different meetings. During this session, we prepared possible questions for each meeting, discussed which sort of information we could expect from the meetings and decided how we were going to introduce ourselves to the different actors. At the end, in order to make every member of the team participate fully, we decided that each of us should take turns in introducing the rest of the team in the meetings; therefore successive meetings would be initiated by a different member of the team.

The day of the assessed exercise, we had one member of the team who came late, and this started to make the team nervous, and in fact we conducted the first meeting with one member absent, although this incident did not affect the meeting. The first person we met was the OSCE officer. As mentioned before, the officer was a supporter of our project, but he was under pressure. During the meeting, the officer was keen to provide a bus to transport the children. However, the OSCE representative did not look very confident with our proposition due to the fact that we did not have a plan of the project ready. Then we started to ask about human-rights abuses in the area. He made some comments on it although he emphasised the need to develop respect for human rights and democracy in the region without going into depth about the important problems of the region, such as inter-ethnic conflict among children or insecurity in certain parts of the region. My personal reflection was that we produced a certain lack of confidence in the officer because our project was not as developed as he had expected. Even though the officer seemed very supportive of our project, he was under pressure to produce something positive to present to the OSCE. For this reason, it seemed that he might provide us with short-

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term support; however, in the long run, I was not so sure we had leverage. For the next time, I learnt the lesson that we had to have more structured meetings, not just throwing around questions, and we should make very clear the objectives and impact that our project aimed to deliver. These objectives had to represent common interests between the different parties in order to achieve an agreement.

Following the first meeting, the absent member of our team arrived. This member looked confused and asked what was going on. I was a bit upset due to the fact that this person was late and asking us for explanations. The rest of the team looked a bit surprised about what was happening. However, the team explained to this person what was occurring, and the tension declined. On reflection, even though this sort of incident can create instability within a team, not to mention anger, it is more practical to have dispassionate, rational thinking and not to allow emotions to influence the activities because it may influence negatively the team dynamics. The appropriate approach to such incidents should be solution-orientated rather than fixated with the problem itself.

The second meeting was with local users of the youth centre. The team expected to meet some young people, although when we arrived at the centre there was no one there. We tried to get in contact with some of the simulation organisers by phone, but there was no answer. Then the team realised that we had to start to observe the children's paintings on the walls. In the paintings we could observe what sort of activities the children liked and what they were currently doing in the centre. Among the activities we observed were theatre, playing music, cooking traditional food and writing. This made me think that dialogue is not the only way of gathering information in such a project; observation is also one of the skills to be aware of. I reflected on the amount of detail that can be gathered by only inspecting a centre used by children.

The next meeting was with the mayor of the city. In terms of cultural awareness, when we had to talk to a local man we had to use his full name and title. On our arrival at the meeting, the mayor was very kind with a particular way of greeting us with his right hand to his chest. During the

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meeting, he was very positive about the project and with our presence. He promised us that he would take care of our security and there would not be any problems. Then he commented that he was a Manchester United fan, invited us to eat at his house and said that he had a daughter who worked for an NGO. Then he indicated which community leader we should contact for our project and asked us if we would bring any money for the region. We told him that we would bring activities for the community but not money as such. From this experience, we can analyse several points that affect the role of an NGO. The first point is independence, because the mayor was telling us that we should contact specific community leaders. This raised the question of the need to meet other actors from the other side of the conflict. This can be seen as a limitation on our free will to contact any community leader from any side. The second point is that the invitation to his house can be seen by the opposition as being partial because we may take the side of the mayor in the post-conflict situation. Finally, there is the suspicion or judgement that if someone is offering something, this person will get something back. The lesson here is that relationships and engagement with local authorities are important in this kind of situation; however, a certain distance is important as well because close relationships may jeopardise NGO principles and how the NGO is perceived by the different actors.

Our next meeting was with the Kids International representative who was a woman with extensive experience in youth projects in other countries, although she had limited knowledge in the area because she had only been a few months in this region. She explained to us her perceptions about the mayor of the city and the OSCE officer. She was keen to create certain activities to provide the young people with basic skills for leadership rather than create activities to pass the time. Apart from this, she explained to us not to be worried about justifying the activities because she had the paperwork to make our case to the OSCE. This meeting posed no worries for us because this person knew what to do and she would carry on the necessary activities and paperwork. However, we had to contrast her information with that provided by the local youth leader in order to

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evaluate if there was space for activities which give leadership skills to the children in the region. We also needed to realise that this person was the Kids International representative in the region and that she might try to give us the impression that everything was under control. This did not necessarily mean that she did not have everything under control, but we had to keep this point in consideration.

The last meeting we had on our agenda was with the local youth leader who was running the centre where we were going to stage the activities. However, he was not in the office so we had to meet another local person who was also involved in the youth centre. This person was surprised by our visit and I would even say he looked a bit intimidated with the presence of five strange foreigners in the office. This person explained to us the activities the youth were doing as playing football, making music or cooking. We were concerned about competitive games such as football because it might create tensions, but he told us not to be worried. He explained to us that there was no problem in general, that the children were very committed to the centre and that the older children helped in the centre as mentors for the younger children. This meeting was a bit of a surprise for everyone because we were expecting the leader of the centre. This meeting made me realise that we should be cautious when we approach people as a group because it can be intimidating and some people may not feel comfortable talking to us. Despite this concern, this sort of meeting was important because it gave us good information of conditions on the ground and contrasted with the information we already had.

After the final meeting we had one hour and ten minutes to prepare a proposal for the summer activities. Among the activities the team developed were writing workshops in order to publish a weekly newspaper, theatre workshops, collecting musical instruments from the United Kingdom and sending them to the region for music sessions, cooking workshops and a final party where everyone could put in practice what they had learnt in the workshops. After the presentations, we had a general meeting where the observers who were with us during the simulation gave

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us their general impressions of the groups. One of the points that the observers raised was that we did not divide the activities for different age groups. Another interesting point was that none of the groups realised that their projects were not as impartial as we thought they were, because we were planning activities that focused on integration and reconciliation. This represented part of the agenda of the people who were defending unity against the ones who were in favour of separation and independence. This last point made me think how naive we were in thinking about the project, when in fact the project had an indirect impact that benefited the mayor and the pro-unity side of the conflict. After the general meeting we had a team meeting and then individual meetings with the observers in order for them to give us individual feedback.

Overall, the intention of the simulation was not to explain in detail the course of the different meetings but rather to highlight the reflections and outcomes gained from the experience. This has made me realise the different interests and agendas that each party has in this sort of context. Furthermore, these different interests can jeopardise the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence that underpin the work of an NGO. As a member of a team in this scenario, I had to have clear principles and personal positions because they will be questioned by donors before they donate funds, the local authorities in order to enable us to gain acceptance and work in the region and the staff of our own NGO, because they might have different approaches and priorities.

At a personal level, it has questioned the limits of my patience and open-mindedness because team working requires flexibility and adaptability with the other members of the team who have different backgrounds and perspectives. For this activity, the team was supportive and cooperative, and this is necessary in real-life situations. Another personal aspect I have evaluated is the need to enhance my analytical skills in real-world situations in order to be perceived as impartial and neutral from all sides in a conflict situation. However, I personally think NGOs should be neutral and impartial until the point when impartiality and neutrality harm the civilian population.

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It is also important to contrast information received from different sources and how we present our ideas or interests. This might require listening more to people, developing active listening and to be assertive in order to reach an agreement and achieve engagement and leverage. It is not always easy to notice the different agenda that the other side in a meeting may have, but we need to be aware that in post-conflict situations there may be common or opposite interests. So the issue is not one of one interest prevailing over another but is about adjusting to different interests in order to continue the work smoothly.

Finally, this simulation has made me think and learn lessons that I found not just practical for my past experience in post-conflict situations in Africa but for my future experience in the field. This mode of education by simulation has taught me lessons and skills beyond the skills learnt in the normal essay or lecture approach. These lessons are considerably practical and useful for the development and undertaking of work the real world. This connection between academy and real life is basic for the professional career development of a graduate and provides more sense and understanding of peace and conflict studies. Definitely, as a student, a method like this is highly recommended in order to prepare professionals with better understandings of real-life situations.



## **Part III: Assessment, Citizenship and Employability**



## **Chapter 9**

# **Up Close and Personal: Reflection and Introspection in the Assessment of Placement Learning**

*David Woodman*

### **Introduction**

Within the social sciences in higher education, placement learning occupies a liminal space. It lacks the clarity and definition of learning that takes place within the institution or that which is seen as part of the development of professional practice, for example in medicine or teaching. The edginess of its status is both problematic and productive. In this brief essay I will outline what I see as the paradox of placement learning derived, in part, from my work at Roehampton University in London. In addition, I will argue that there has been a further undermining of the credibility of placement learning through the use of dubious forms of personal reflection that often constitute the core of its assessment. Forms of assessment which are dependent upon personal reflection and narrative contribute to the ambiguous status of placement learning.

The university, which was only granted its title in 2004, has had a long history in teacher education. Each of its constituent colleges had been independent colleges of education or teacher-training colleges. Integral to its professional work in the training of teachers has been what was once called teaching practice and what is now termed school experience. This change of nomenclature is significant and resonates with some of the arguments in this chapter. However, this form of placement learning as professional practice is quite different from the more ‘open-ended’ and less ‘professionally purposeful’ learning in social sciences. Nevertheless, it does provide an important context at the university for other forms of placement learning.

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The university has been running placement learning programmes in the social sciences at both undergraduate and postgraduate level for almost twenty years. As is the case in most institutions, placement learning is assessed, at least in part, by some type of diary, personal narrative, log book or personal reflection. It was during the course of moderating the grades of some of these pieces of writing that I was stung by what I considered an excessive personalisation of the students' experience. Of particular concern was the way in which even reflection on practice became framed by personal biography. For example, a student's writing about their difficulties and troubles faced on a placement within a diary or log is treated both as 'reflection' and therapy. The analysis of difficulties swiftly slips into an expression of the experience of those difficulties.

As I struggled to locate the quality of the student writing within conventional grading criteria I noticed that the range of grades used by the first marker was very narrow, with ten students falling within a 5 per cent range. Was it the case that these students were all of a uniform standard? My suspicion was that the narrowness of the range reflected the problematic nature of assessing these pieces of work.

The following extracts are illustrative of the writing:

*Living in England has been a different type of experience for me. While Jamaica was about being confronted with sights and sounds that were new and different, this semester has been about many internal struggles. This was after all, the semester in which I turned thirty. This is the semester in which I began to really confront some of the ways in which negative feelings can 'sabotage' me. I suppose, in many ways, this was the semester I grew up. To say that I was worried about turning thirty is a bit of an understatement. To say that I was obsessing about may also be a bit of an understatement. Why was I so worried? I just think that with thirty comes expectations, both on the part of others and the part of me and that is how I felt on the eve of my birthday. And, for the most part I still feel that way.*

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*I was beginning a new phase in my life: leaving my lover of seven years, repairing my relationship with my family and preparing to continue with my education on my own terms as an autonomous entity with my own goals and agenda. Although I had an idea of what I hoped to gain from this experience – increased knowledge of my professional field, personal confidence and an expanded world view – I was not prepared for what I received . . . I was challenged academically, personally, spiritually and socially, and I am grateful for that. This experience was an exercise in becoming more fully what I already am, and the academic, service and personal components of the programme all contribute to that outcome.*

*Not only was I learning a lot academically but I was also learning a lot about myself. I realised the conflicting issues that I had inside and how I had spent many years during my studies for my bachelor's degree holding myself back from pursuing anything volunteer-related because of the way that I felt my family would react to my decision to pursue such a career. It turned out that I was partially right about how my family reacted upon hearing of my decision to pursue a master's degree for a career in the third sector. The initial reaction of each person I talked to was always, 'you know they do not get paid much, right?' After a while I began to ask myself about what kind of person my family members must think I am . . .*

These extracts are taken from longer pieces of writing reflecting on both placement and personal issues. However, as social scientists, the assessment of this type of work becomes inscrutable and enigmatic. What are we judging? Is it the revelation, the composition, the narrative, the insight or what? What are the accepted standards for this writing from within the social sciences? As much as I might admire the writing for its

apparent 'honesty', 'integrity' and 'forthrightness', the judgement of its quality is more elusive. I will return to this argument following a broader historical and cultural review of status of placement learning in UK higher education.

## **The status of placement learning**

The radical student politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s informed and was informed by the discipline of sociology. Demonstrations, sit-ins, teach-ins and occupations were part of the lifeblood of sociology at the time. There is an apocryphal story of a university vice-chancellor reassuring his governing body, who were witnessing a student demonstration on campus, by claiming that there was no need to worry – it was only the sociology department 'doing their practicals'. The manifest comic feature of this story is a confirmation of the stereotype of the radical sociology student. However, the latent quality is the idea that sociology has its uses. Its students can practically engage with the world in an 'acquisition of life skills'.

Since that time, and in keeping with the predominant values of UK higher education, sociology has resisted attempts to brand it 'useful'. An education in sociology was to be precisely that, i.e. not training. A university education for much of the second half of the twentieth century was still ensconced in the liberal tradition informed by the writings of Newman. According to Newman, education should promote its chief aim, 'knowledge its own end'. Education might be useful in terms of the formation of character, but this was not to be its prime purpose. In other words, so-called 'transferable skills' should be allowed to develop in an emergent and passive fashion. They should not be taught directly for fear of encouraging instrumentality, the most heinous of sins: 'Knowledge . . . is valuable for what its very presence in us does for us after the manner of a habit, even though it be turned to no further account, nor subserve any direct end' (Newman 1999: 95).

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Placement learning in the social sciences, as elsewhere in the Academy, remains tarnished, I would argue, by standing outside of the predominant values of a liberal education, hence, its liminal status both spatially and intellectually.

I noted above, albeit in passing, that the student movements of late 1960s and early 1970s provided specific sets of conditions for the development of sociology. There emerged a reflexive turn in sociology at this time with the arrival of a number of critical engagements with the discipline, each trying to reconstitute its subject matter and approach (e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1966; Friedrichs 1970; Gouldner 1970; Colfax and Roach 1971). Central to these texts, particularly Berger and Luckmann, were new directions in the sociology of knowledge and knowing. UK sociology took up the challenge with the publication in 1971 of M. F. D. Young's collection of essays entitled *Knowledge and Control*. Although the 'knowledge' referred to was, more often than not, school knowledge, the lessons for higher education were not lost. Basil Bernstein's theoretical work on the curriculum, informed as it was by both Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu, was significant in the impact it had on later generations of sociologists and their understanding of knowledge and power, long before many had an inkling about Foucault.

Revealing the socially and culturally constructed nature of institutional knowledge exposed the values implicit in the orderings of knowledge. University knowledge, it was claimed, valorised the 'pure', 'theoretical', unpractical, abstract and irrelevant much in the same manner as Newman's characterisation of it a century before. Knowledge produced, reproduced and taught within institutions was more highly regarded than extramural knowledge. If this argument is accepted, then the ambiguous liminal status of placement learning becomes apparent. Placement learning is 'practical', 'relevant', 'impure', 'concrete', and it takes place beyond the walls.

I am not claiming that the various trends and initiatives in higher education in the intervening period have had no impact on these values. The Enterprise in Higher Education initiative, which ran between 1987 and

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1996, was one of those explicit attempts to make universities more economically purposeful and their graduates more employable. Nevertheless, and in spite of the growth of schemes of placement learning across most disciplines, the status of this learning is still an issue.

The value of placement learning across the academy is now justified almost entirely upon its link to employability. Those disciplines which have more closely conformed to the predominant university values, like those in the humanities, are now keen to establish work experience and placement learning courses. However, these courses are isolated pockets of relevance and purposefulness cut off from the 'real world' of academic life.

### **Assessment in placement learning**

The current proselytisers of placement learning have frequently drifted into a discursive rationale that emphasises the transformative qualities of the experience. In some cases the placement experience is seen as an epiphanic moment, a quasi-religious conversion or an immersive experience. This sort of language helps no one, least of all students. The force of this conceptualisation of the placement 'experience' is such that it pushes assessment in the direction of personal testimony, unless there is some other way these conversions and transformations can be captured.

The importance of critical reflection, particularly in professional practice, is undeniable. Nevertheless, the significant differences between this reflection on practice and personal introspection should not be elided. In reflecting on professional practice, whether it is in medicine, education or the law, the purpose is the improvement of practice. The argument is that thoughtful and critical reflection is an essential feature of a continuous improvement in practice.

What becomes problematic is where 'reflection' *becomes* the practice. This would be acceptable if a student was being judged on their abilities to write creatively. Hence the practice is not so much the 'reflection' but the quality of the expression of that reflection.

## Up Close and Personal

The use of reflection as a feature of student assessment has been growing over the past decade across many disciplines in higher education and is not restricted to placement learning. The form that reflection takes is manifold, ranging from personal commentaries on work placements through assignments that encourage reports of some features of personal experience linked to particular topics. Work-related or professional reflection is frequently guided and structured, whereas more experiential narratives are less constrained. The former were given academic legitimacy through the publication of Donald Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). He argues, in a critical account of the modern university, for the importance of reflection-in-action in professional education claiming that, 'I have become convinced that universities are not devoted to the production and distribution of fundamental knowledge in general. They are institutions committed, for the most part, to a particular epistemology, a view of knowledge that fosters selective inattention to practical competence and professional artistry' (Schön 1983: vii).

Since that time, 'reflection' has leached out of the rather narrow confines of professional education into all manner of student activity. 'Reflection' now seems to cover all forms of personal expression derived from experience. Where higher education once abhorred the subjective, it is now embraced as part of attempts to improve the student experience. The encouragement of institutions to adopt 'personal development planning' (PDP) for their students is symptomatic of this subjectivising of the curriculum and assessment. It will be claimed that PDP takes place outside of the formal curriculum, but boundary maintenance is often weak. This reflection on learning and the personal narrative that accompanies it has become more of a feature of the academic programmes themselves. For example, some subjects integrate PDP into mainstream academic study. What matters, then, is not only what students know, what they learn, what they can do but what they know they know, learn and do.

At the heart of the assessment of professional placements is the students' practice. Do they meet the threshold to be considered competent to practice? This judgement depends fundamentally on the work that

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students do on the placement. There will always be some element of critical reflection, but the core assessment will require some sort of observation of practice.

Finally, there remains one further condition that appears to ‘force’ us into more personalised reporting of experience in placement learning. Unlike placements and internships in professional practice, it is not possible to control for equivalence or standardisation between placements in the social sciences. When arranging programmes of school experience for students, the qualities of that experience are defined in advance, and, moreover, the students are observed internally and externally. The diversity of placements within the social sciences makes this impossible. In many cases, the placement providers are not visited, so one placement is very different from another. The constant then is the student. If we have no control over the varieties of experience that our students encounter, we can, at least, have some control over their reporting of those experiences. The issue in this chapter is with the way in which these reports become personalised and the consequences of this for the status and value of placement learning.

It is precisely because we have to rely upon these personal accounts of placement learning that students are encouraged, indeed urged, to be frank, about ‘how it was for them’. It is understandable that our students are swift to learn the language of personal expression and individual change. They know we are looking for evidence in their reports of personal engagement and transformation. It would be too simple to view these personal narratives as having resonance with the broader cultural urge to self-disclosure and self-publicity. However, there is some truth in the simplicity. Are we complicit in this? Do we supervise and grade assignments as members of an audience expecting personal revelation and transformation?

## Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the liminal and uncertain status of placement learning in the social sciences is a function of two sets of circumstances. The first, the status of the knowledge produced, which is less within our control as teachers and supervisors, and the second, the personalising features of the assessment of placement learning, over which we do have some control.

It is my view that we need to restate a conviction of the academic value of placement learning. One of the corollary aspects of this should be eschewing the direct link with employability and careers. In the course of their placements, students do acquire a range of abilities and competences that might be considered useful in their future employment. I would argue that this should not, however, be the prime purpose of their learning. The placement should be conceptualised as a resource for their academic work.

This should not prove to be at all problematic for the social sciences. The context of the placement, regardless of which sector of the economy it is in, is what matters for academic study. It is about work and organisations and this should be the focus of their research. Work and organisations can be the subject of multidisciplinary analyses in the social sciences, and it would be relatively simple to construct assignments that draw upon and extend their knowledge of the work and organisational context in sociology, anthropology or politics.

The placement should be a source of discovery and not the locus of self-discovery. Rather, if self-discovery does take occur on a placement, it becomes an indirect consequence. What we are interested in is how placement learning can advance their knowledge and understanding of the discipline not themselves. This approach would emphasise a more 'objective' analysis and critique of the context.

Some might claim that this merely instrumentalises their experience. It does and should, in the same way that when our course booklets direct students to a text in the library we don't require them to write about their library experience. Hence, placement learning in the

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social sciences should be integrated into the social-sciences curricula and not become an adjunct to it, designed to fit with the broader urge to increase our students' employability. What can students learn about work and organisations on their placements? What assignments can we design that might capture this knowledge and understanding? How does this knowledge and understanding fit with the rest of their studies? Adopting this approach will lift the status of the assessment and the status of placement learning as a whole.

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## Chapter 10

# Teaching the Practice of Politics

*Matthew Wyman and Sarah Longwell*

### Background

The intellectual heritage of the European enlightenment was an approach to knowledge that emphasised the ‘objective’ – experiences which could be shared and measured, consensus reality. Experiences which were subjective and personal were regarded with profound suspicion. In the physical sciences this gave rise to what Erwin Schrodinger referred to as the ‘ghastly silence’ whereby physics had nothing at all to say about the questions that were most important to human beings (Schroedinger 1992). The unintended consequences affect just about every other field of academic study. In politics, they have given rise to the bizarre reality that, while library bookshelves are filled with studies of the abstract and diligent studies of the objective and measurable, curricula have little if anything to say about actual political practice. To ask direct questions – how to campaign, how to communicate effectively, how to influence people – this is forbidden by the tribal rules. These issues are only allowed by the consensus reality to be asked indirectly, not ‘How can I do this better?’ but ‘What does the objective evidence tell us about which approaches work?’ Current dominant paradigms ban the individual from the conversation. Educationalist Parker Palmer memorably refers to this ‘objectivism’ and false detachment as ‘our fearful way of knowing’, since it ducks introspection which can lead to discomfort (Palmer 1998: 50–6).

This state of affairs has led to something of a chasm between politics teachers and politics students in our universities. Young people who come to study politics are, pretty much universally, motivated by their political commitments. They want to understand the issues, but they also want to learn how to act on their beliefs, in political life or in public-service employment. University study delivers an understanding of issues but

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hardly ever has anything to say about what to do with it. Agonised navel-gazing about why political practitioners don't have much to do with political researchers misses the obvious point.

For the last couple of years, responding to the ongoing collapse of enlightenment paradigms, we've been on a mission to try to begin to bridge this gap at Keele. We are aware that other institutions are doing a range of interesting things: in particular, the recent growth in placement opportunities detailed elsewhere in this publication is a welcome development. But for us, the priorities were slightly different: we wanted to focus on the skills that people needed to practise politics: effective public speaking and people skills.

A second part of our focus was student employability. This is not a fashionable topic among the UK political science community. The consensus reality seems to be that introducing this into curricula somehow represents the 'commodification' of higher education: linking education with a country's economic needs in some way devalues higher education. We do not accept this consensus, which in our view is mostly a rationalisation for the lack of experience and capability among academic staff in the area of education for employability and also for a reluctance to take time out of curricula to consider generic issues (Lees 2002). We believe that such widespread resistance to engaging with employability issues in any depth represents an abdication of the subject community's responsibilities to its students in assisting them in the transition from higher education to their working life. Additionally, we believe that the changing nature of today's labour market means that it is increasingly higher education institutions' responsibility to prepare students for a much wider range of possible futures than was once the case.

As a result, for the past two academic years, the authors have taught a Level-2 module on the practice of politics, offered as an option to all politics students at Keele University. Our aims are twofold: to try to integrate career development education into a traditional academic politics curriculum and to try to enhance students' skills, particularly in areas which will be of potential use to them in future politics-related careers,

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such as effective communication, people skills and political leadership. We have also developed a considerable amount of electronic resources to support this activity, which are to be made available via the politics subject centre at [www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject\\_areas/politics/career\\_education.htm](http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject_areas/politics/career_education.htm).

We do not believe that a single module is the cure for this problem. Indeed, we subscribe to the views of Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke (e.g., Knight and Yorke 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) that because a full understanding of the nature of employability encompasses personal qualities such as views of self and understanding about how one learns, as well as knowledge and measurable skills, developing employability is both a slow and a fuzzy process and needs to be embedded in an entire curriculum, with repeated opportunities to practise the relevant skills (see also Mentkowski 2000; Claxton 1998). However, we have had to start somewhere in demonstrating that this is change worth pursuing and worth investing resources into.

### **Curriculum development**

We can set out what we have been trying to create under three broad headings, although clearly a single-semester module cannot hope to do much more than introduce these. These are, first, the interface between theory and practice; second, career development education; and third the development of politically relevant skills.

The relevant question regarding the interface of theory and practice is to what extent do the ideas developed through the academic study of politics provide useful guidance for political practice? There are a number of obvious starting points for this. Clearly, it is not possible to explore all of these in a single module, and so up to now we've largely focused on the first, but we mention them here as suggestions for others who are asking the same questions as us.

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- **Political leadership:** what do studies in this area have to tell aspiring leaders?
- **Community development:** how can scholarly debates inform those who are seeking to create vibrant and effective communities?
- **Political cognition:** what does an understanding of how people think about politics have to tell the practitioner?
- **Political participation:** does an understanding of non-engagement in politics help find solutions to the problem?
- **Solving tough problems:** there are many remarkable studies of seemingly intractable political conflicts that have been resolved creatively. What can we learn from these experiences?

While each of these can be approached from the viewpoint of the discipline, we have found it useful to include material written by people who do not consider themselves writers about politics at all, and, indeed, the interaction between specialist and non-specialist provides a lot of the excitement of this activity. The published work of Margaret Wheatley (1996, 2002, 2005), Peter Block (2002, 2008), Peter Senge et al. (2005) and Adam Kahane (2004) have all been inspirational.

Our approach to career development education is somewhat more conventional, influenced by work such as that of Parsons (1909). We attempt to help students to articulate the skills they have developed over their lives, to reflect on personal values and motivations, to research the graduate labour market and to make some kind of match between these. We also focus on the development of transition skills to do with self-presentation, such as completing effective application forms and CVs, performing well at interview, dealing with assessment centres and psychometric testing. We also strive to inculcate a realistic understanding of the nature of work, and the serendipitous way careers often develop (Betsworth and Hansen 1996; Bright et al. 2005), as well as dipping our toes into some of the growing literature on the psychology of happiness

and fulfilment to inform choice (e.g., Zander and Zander 2002; Ben-Shahar 2007).

Political skills development has been just as challenging a theme as the other two, and we've set out along some much-less-well-trodden paths. In the area of public speaking, the clear message we got from undergraduate students who we talked to in advance of putting our module together was that they were acutely disappointed with the amount of opportunities they had got to develop these abilities during their degree. While they agreed that their studies had considerably advanced their ability to research issues, to appreciate academic debate and to understand the complexities of issues, they strongly believed that higher-level learning in politics should also include much more opportunity to improve their ability to articulate their own positions and principles in front of an audience. While extra-curricular opportunities for these activities did exist, many students were repelled by the cliquish and frequently arcane nature of student union and other student politics and preferred the more neutral venue of the classroom. We therefore include sessions on the political speech, the formal debate and the question-and-answer format ('Question Time') which combine an exploration of how these activities are successfully carried out, including video and audio of effective speakers, with a practical opportunity to participate in the activities. We investigate in detail issues such as dealing with nerves, effective preparation, knowing your audience, use of body language and so forth (for a handy reference to these issues designed for students, see McCarthy and Hatcher 2002, and for speakers' nerves, Palmer and Puri 2006, especially Chapter 13).

The development of people skills has been an even greater challenge. The module tutors were aware of the potential for activities in this area which are at best superficial and at worst the toe-curlingly inappropriate and the confessional without a purpose (see Chapter 9 in this volume). However, we found the approaches embodied in much of the literature on personal-development planning were suitable for us (Cottrell 2003, especially Chapter 5). In summary, these involve students in a self-evaluation of their current level of people skills, and active reflection on

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areas such as developing rapport, finding constructive approaches to dealing with people they find difficult, listening effectively and developing trust, assertiveness and negotiation. While these are among the absolute core skills of the democratic politician, they are, as far as we know, largely neglected by UK politics curricula. Space prevents us from detailing the series of reflective activities we engage in to achieve this, but anyone who wants to see our detailed lesson plans will find them on the project website [www.csap.bham.ac.uk/resources/project\\_reports/findings/ShowFinding.htm?id=05/P/06](http://www.csap.bham.ac.uk/resources/project_reports/findings/ShowFinding.htm?id=05/P/06).

### **Assessment**

It scarcely needs stating that an appropriate assessment strategy is vital in order to achieve one's intended goals in any educational setting. We'd describe this as a work in progress at the moment, but the current state of our thinking follows.

The task we set on political leadership has been informed much more by approaches from outside the academic study of politics than within. In general, we found that the political science literature on leadership concentrated far too hard on the construction of predictive models which, predictably, always failed to be generalisable beyond particular contexts. In any case, we were more interested in the particular than the general, in the unique qualities of individual political leaders, and in what was inside people and its influence on what was outside, rather than the other way around. The exercise we designed therefore asked students to analyse the personal values, motivations and nature of the political appeal of a leader of their choice, and workshops seek to identify out of this not biographical characteristics but personal qualities possessed by the iconic political leaders of our times.

Assessment of the career development section of the module is via a portfolio of compulsory activities, such as a skills audit and action plan, a CV, application-form exercise and so forth. Some of these elements are mark-bearing because it is possible to articulate clear marking criteria

## Teaching the Practice of Politics

which do distinguish better from worse work, and these are appended with our module guide below (see Appendix 10.1). But it would clearly be ridiculous to judge and grade, for example, a statement of personal values, so we simply require other elements to be completed.

Given the widely differing levels of opportunity students have had to develop public-speaking skills, we decided that, at least at the beginning of this initiative, rather than assessing the quality of the public-speaking directly, we would instead assess engagement with how to improve the skill via a reflection on public-speaking skills informed by tutor and peer feedback. The reflective diary, which is routinely used as assessment for professional training in, for example, degree programmes in health or social work, is also an effective way of assessing development of the people skills we address (see, e.g., Moon 1999). As well as a reflective diary, we also asked students to analyse a famous speech of their choice for effectiveness, and we made available a number of tools which they could use to do this – probably the most useful being an explanation of the differing places of ethos, pathos and logos in public communication, although we mentioned several other tools of the rhetorical trade also.

## Learning resources

As well as module development, we also spent a lot of time developing electronic resources to support our work. These have included the following:

- template for statement of personal values
- template for statement of personal priorities
- resources for identifying internships
- occupational profiles for public-service-related work: Sally Gillman, author of *Politico's Guide to Careers in Politics and Government* (2001), has updated parts of her work for us, and we have created detailed profiles for the following: politician, politician's staff, working in parliament, local councillor, civil

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service, local government, think tanks, political journalism, working for political parties, public affairs, citizenship teaching, working in non-governmental organisations, charity work, diplomatic service, international organisations and citizenship teaching

- information on developing ethical careers
- alumni case studies: we contacted Keele graduates who have worked or who are working in a variety of political or public-service roles and asked them to provide us with a variety of information. We have worked this up into case studies which are designed to help students to get a sense of what particular kinds of work are actually like
- podcasts of interviews with practitioners. These play a similar role to the case studies, but in a different medium
- guidance on occupational choice. We provide resources identifying a range of ways in which different people have thought about career decision-making, in order to stimulate ideas in students. We also link to Prospects Planner and other career decision-making resources.
- huge range of links to resources for identifying graduate opportunities across the range of political and public-service careers
- advice on preparation of CVs, covering letters and application forms
- guidance on assessment centres and psychometric testing
- advice and guidance on effective interview techniques
- resources to support action planning for skills development
- advice on effective public-speaking plus examples for analysis, guidance on giving effective feedback and links to a range of web resources
- detailed reflective exercises aiming to help students to develop their people skills and emotional intelligence generally

They are to be made available via the politics subject centre at [www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject\\_areas/politics/career\\_education.htm](http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject_areas/politics/career_education.htm).

## Teaching and learning

We taught the module in weekly two-hour workshops, the content of most of which are detailed in the sample module handbook we append to this chapter (see Appendix 10.1). The core principles underlying these activities were familiar ones:

- Learning is something which for most people happens more easily when it is active rather than passive.
- An environment of mutual respect encourages engagement.
- A variety of different kinds of activities which suit different sorts of learning styles is helpful.
- Workloads need to be reasonable to encourage ongoing engagement but not so great as to discourage reflection on subject matter.
- Clarity about exactly what sessions are designed to do is essential.
- Learning is primarily a social activity and therefore intensive use of large and small group discussion rather than excessive reliance on a didactic approach is almost always appropriate.

We have also made some use of visiting speakers. We found that, as well as being happy to help us with resource development, alumni who had developed public-service roles of various kinds were more than willing to give up their time to come and talk to groups of current students. The clarity with which they were able to explain to our students both the nature of entry routes and career development and also the reality of what it is like working in public life was indispensable. Indeed, a talk from two reasonably recent graduates who had worked in a variety of parliamentary and lobbying roles moved one student to comment that the workshop had

been the best two hours he had spent in a lecture room in his entire degree: an effective antidote to anyone's delusions of lecturing grandeur!

## **Module outcomes**

We evaluated the project in three ways. In addition to routine module evaluation processes, we also carried out a number of focus groups of students before and after the module had taken place, and we also employed the services of an experienced educational developer for an independent view and to carry out a further student focus group.

Although, as with any new initiative, we were aware of a number of approaches that failed to work exactly as planned and implemented a number of important changes for the second year of operation, we were encouraged by the start we made on this.

Overall, student achievement in the first year of operation was pretty much exactly at the level that we expect of Level-2 teaching at Keele. The report on leadership was completed to a much higher standard than the reflective portfolio and career-development exercises, with averages respectively of 63 per cent and 57 per cent in the first year we taught the module and 60 per cent and 53 per cent second time round. This lessened any anxieties about whether our approach in any way compromised standards, in the sense that we thought the reflective and career-related exercises were not especially challenging, but students clearly found them harder than we thought. It was unexpected evidence for our view that there is a real need to help students to develop precisely the set of skills embodied in the portfolio, i.e. the ability to articulate and reflect on their skills and to self-promote and to develop awareness of the labour market and graduate opportunities. Hardly surprisingly, given previous educational experiences, students were much better at the conventional, detached analytical viewpoint than personal and reflective writing. It was shocking to see some students' inability to articulate personal values and priorities. It was clear also that skills such as action planning were hardly developed. While we did not assess public-speaking directly, our

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experiences of the process of training also showed far too heavy a reliance on the detached and analytical and a suspicion of the personal and the appeal to emotions that reflected the unbalanced emphases of previous educational experiences. We also noted a difficulty in producing clear, well-presented CVs and in articulating skills and achievements in interview situations.

What did participants themselves think? The following are a representative range of comments about whether the overall goals had been achieved:

‘The practical knowledge offered by this course is invaluable.’

‘The topics discussed and covered are relevant for the stage we are at in our lives.’

‘By far the most practical and useful course I take. The real-life aspect is something generally ignored by other modules.’

‘It has given the skills that a degree should give . . . I feel better equipped and engaged than any other course.’

‘Because I was forced to evaluate myself and my potential career I now know what I would like to pursue as a career.’

‘Enabled me to get a full understanding of what it would mean to work in the political field and how to get involved.’

‘It was a fantastic opportunity to participate on this module . . . It has certainly helped me to plan for the future, and combining the politics with careers was invaluable. I hope many more students are given the chance to experience such a well-taught module, the most productive in my two years.’

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‘I gained tremendously from this module, not in content but more as a catalyst.’

This was, of course, encouraging, although the last comment reinforced the need to articulate and reinforce our intended outcomes in terms of skills development and make them much more central to our in-class activities, a conclusion reinforced by our external evaluator.

### **Conclusions**

Is this an approach we would recommend to others? Unambiguously, yes. The fact that we were able to combine generic career-development education with a subject-specific component created a level of engagement with the activities which most people who have tried this as a generic activity have found elusive. To hear that the activities have helped many participants to choose a next step after the degree is hugely rewarding for us; readers will be aware of the all-pervasive anxiety about where next that haunts so many finalists in the lead-up to the end of their time at university. We were also delighted to hear the numbers who have set their face towards developing a politics-related career and who are prepared to give this time to come about, rather than stumbling into the first post that is offered out of a sense of resignation. Clearly we don't have any direct evidence that this is aspiration-raising. Maybe these students would have set their personal targets at this level anyway? However, it can't make the situation worse.

What about skills development? Again, there are some good individual stories. Any teacher who has experimented with reflective writing exercises will confirm how diverse student responses to this are but will also confirm that when it works it is extraordinarily powerful. The individual who reflected on an exercise on listening and came to the realisation that rather than being the good listener she thought she was she actually had the same range of issues as everybody else about not listening now has a choice as to whether to listen or not which did not previously

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exist. Likewise, the student who acknowledged in a reflection on working in a team the range of behaviours that they used which actually damaged group effectiveness now has a choice about whether to continue to behave in those ways. We could give many more such examples. However, it is difficult in the environment in which we operate to take this insight anything like as far as we believe it could and should go. External examiners are highly sceptical about forms of writing which are not 'objectively' better or worse, and to learn effective self-reflection is a soft skill that needs frequent practice over a whole programme, not just a module.

Have we helped our classes to become more effective speakers? Well, clearly opportunities to practise in a safe environment with tutor and peer feedback can't make things worse. We found that the political-speech analysis mostly worked well. Students took on board the meaning of the rhetorical devices we'd talked about, and mostly wrote thoughtful and incisive commentaries, and no doubt this will lead to some more experimentation with these in future. However, the quality of the actual public-speaking was not, by and large, all that impressive: in Aristotelian terms it was dominated by *logos* (arguments based on evidence). Students were not comfortable with *ethos* in the sense of making themselves visible, or *pathos*, since emotions are censored in most of their other degree work. We didn't assess speaking directly, so the incentive structure was not conducive to really good performance. In our classes on the topic we made much material about effective preparation and dealing with public-speaking nerves available, but the reflections showed less evidence that this had been understood or acted on than we had hoped. Our overall conclusion on this is that it is such a specialist skill that it really needs a module of its own, as well as, once again, repeated opportunities to put into practice what we taught in this module throughout the degree programme. So we fervently hope that our arguments here, rather than just being taken up by the occasional enthusiast, can prompt whole programmes to consider whether they can integrate the kinds of activities we have tried out into several places at all levels. The first programmes

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which succeed in doing this will, we are convinced, achieve a considerable competitive advantage over others through their attempt to address what students actually want, as opposed to what academics think they should want.

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## Appendix 10.1

Practice of Politics Module Guide 2007-08 (edited version)  
KEELE UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

SPIRE: School of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy

SPRING SEMESTER 2007 - 2008

### **PIR 20057: The Practice of Politics**

Level Two

Credits 15

#### **Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes**

This module involves exploration of a number of interrelated personal and political questions. Our aim is that, through engaging with the module fully, you will, by the end of it, have clearer answers to at least some of the following questions:

##### *Personal Development*

- What am I good at?
- What do I enjoy doing?
- What are my motivations?
- What are my priorities?
- How can I become more effective?

##### *Future Careers*

- What is it like to work in various different kinds of political career?
- How do careers develop?
- What kind of work do I want?
- What do I need to do in order to get the kind of work I want?

##### *Political Action*

- How can I communicate about politics more effectively?
- How can I influence others?

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- How can I improve my 'people' skills?
- How can I be an effective leader?

### *Political Communication and Leadership*

- When are political leaders effective?
- What are the features of effective public speaking in a variety of contexts?

We want to make it clear that this module does not focus primarily on the intellectual analysis of current politics, but rather on career development education and activity relevant to developing political skills. It will be challenging, and require a high degree of ability for personal reflection.

### **Teaching Format and Attendance**

There will be 12 x 2-hour workshops, which will be a combination of instruction, small and large discussion and practical exercises. We intend that this module will be rather different to most of the others you are taking. While we do occasionally indicate required readings and set analytical exercises, the focus of your work will be on practical activities in the workshops and afterwards, and on writing about these activities. In other words, there is likely to be a rather greater variety of activity, practical as well as intellectual, than you will have encountered in your degree so far.

You must attend all workshops. If you are unable to attend, please inform the module coordinator as soon as possible, and preferably before the session in question.

### **Assessment**

Assessment consists of a portfolio of activities to be completed at various points during the module. These are as follows, with the proportion of the module mark for each component indicated in the final column:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>%</b>
Analysis of individual political leader	1500-2000 words	40
Analysis of political speech	500-750 words	10
Personal values statement	Unspecified	0*

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Summary of personal priorities	Unspecified	0*
Self-reflection on public speaking	See instructions for task	10
Final self-audit of skills and action plan	See instructions for task	20
Prospects planner printout and comments	Unspecified	0*
Analysis of potential career	750-1000 words	10
CV	2 sides maximum	10
Application form	See instructions for task	0*

\* indicates that there is no mark awarded for this assessment task, although up to 10% will be deducted for non-submission of any required item. Detailed marking criteria for each task will be given when it is assigned.

### **Workshop Timetable**

#### Week

1. Introduction to module; skills analysis and the identification of personal priorities
2. Career decision making and the art of completing application forms
3. The craft of politics: what is admirable about leaders we admire?
4. Public Speaking I: the political speech
5. The graduate labour market and politics related opportunities
6. People Skills I: developing rapport and trust, skilful listening and building successful teams and organisations
7. Writing effective CVs and succeeding in interviews
8. Public Speaking II: formal debating
9. Rationale and expectations for assessment centres and psychometric testing
10. People Skills II: negotiation, persuasiveness and leadership
11. Enhancing employability and the nature of work
12. Public Speaking III: 'Question Time'; module review and evaluation

**Week One: Introduction and Self-Analysis**

**Main themes for this week's class**

Introduction to module aims and intended learning outcomes

Assessment requirements

Self auditing: skills, personal values and priorities

Finding out about internship opportunities

Organisation of public speaking activities

***After the Class***

1. Complete the following worksheets and submit via web ct before the next class:

- a. Skills audit
- b. Personal Values statement
- c. Personal Priorities summary

2. In preparation for week 2, look at the case studies that we have made available via the module's WebCT pages. Take note of the skills and personal motivators emphasised by the participants and how these might inform their personal development and occupational choice.

**Week Two: Career decision making and the art of completing application forms**

**Main themes**

Theories of occupational choice

Methods for identifying career options

Exercises in career decision making

The use of Prospects Planner

Good practice and common mistakes in job applications

***After the Class***

Complete specified Prospects Planner and application form exercises and bring to next class

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Complete within three weeks a 1000 word analysis of a possible career, using the template provided, and with reference to resources available via the module web ct space as appropriate

Consider one or two political leaders who you particularly admire. Please note: do NOT choose a leader such as Hitler, Stalin or Mao Tse-Tung or another who is notorious primarily for the murderous regime they created. The exercise is about *positive* leadership characteristics. In preparation for the next class, produce some notes on the question of what exactly makes/made them such an admirable leader. Consider what political and personal challenges they faced in their career, the values they stood for, and also personal qualities, way of doing politics, what about their character or achievements inspires you, and anything else relevant to the issue at hand. Come prepared to talk briefly about the leader you've chosen.

You may also like to browse the rich resource that is the Leader Values web site ([www.leader-values.com/default.asp](http://www.leader-values.com/default.asp)) or listen (MP3 format) to Margaret Wheatley's ideas about 21st century leadership at:

[http://www.shiftinaction.com/discover/luminaries/margaret\\_wheatley/leadership\\_for\\_an\\_uncertain\\_time](http://www.shiftinaction.com/discover/luminaries/margaret_wheatley/leadership_for_an_uncertain_time)

<http://www.scottlondon.com/interviews/wheatley.html>

[http://www.berkana.org/articles/core\\_practices.htm](http://www.berkana.org/articles/core_practices.htm)

### **Week Three: The craft of politics: what is admirable about leaders we admire?**

#### **Main themes**

The aim of this week's class is to clarify expectations for the task of analysis of an individual leader and begin to plan your assignment. Consequently we will consider a range of possible approaches to this exercise, as well as reviewing some of the academic and non-academic literature on the what constitutes effective leadership.

#### ***After the class***

Begin to draft your leadership analysis. The deadline for submission is week 9, and you have until Wednesday of week 7 (5<sup>th</sup> March) to submit drafts for comment.

## **Week Four: Public Speaking I – the Political Speech**

### **Main themes**

This will be an opportunity to practice, with feedback. Speakers will talk to us about their political principles, or about a cause they care about. In between speakers, we'll try to draw out as much as possible of the following:

- What makes an effective speech?
- Planning of structure and content
- Effective preparation and rehearsal
- Techniques for adding variety and vitality
- Principles of persuasion
- Dealing with nerves
- Coping with disasters
- The use and abuse of visual aids

### ***After the class***

1. Read the Appendix to Richard Heller, *High Impact Speeches*, and then choose a famous or not so famous speech and carry out an analysis along the same lines. Deadline Week 9 – deadline for drafts Wednesday of week 7.
2. Look at the occupational profiles section on WebCT. Are there specific questions you would like to ask about any of these roles? Please post questions for next week in advance via the module discussion board.

## **Week Five: The Graduate Labour Market and Politics-Related Opportunities**

### **Main themes**

An insight into opportunities for Politics and IR students in degree related areas from a career as an M.P. to political journalism. Aspects of the session will include exploration of roles, routes in and skills sets required.

External Speaker(s) from politically related careers

***After the class***

No assigned tasks today – continue to work on your leadership profile, analysis of speech, and analysis of political career

**Week Six: People Skills I - developing rapport and trust, skilful listening and building successful teams and organisations**

**Main themes**

- Self-evaluation of people skills
- Making connections and taking interest
- Skilful listening
- Developing mutual trust
- What makes groups work well?

***After the Class***

Record what you have learned from this workshop in a personal reflection according to the guidelines supplied. Treat this as a draft for the contents of your final reflection and action plan.

**Week Seven: Effective CVs and Interview Success**

- CV writing conventions and good practice
- Common CV mistakes
- Effective covering letters
- Preparing for job interviews and dealing with nerves
- Performing well at interview

***After the Class***

Draft your CV as an application for one of the jobs specified in the class. Deadline for submitting drafts - week 9.

Complete reflection on interview skills. Treat this as a draft for the contents of your final reflection and action plan.

**Week Eight: Public Speaking II – the formal debate**

This will be a second opportunity to practice public speaking, with feedback. Speakers will argue for and against motions put forward by the group. In between debates, we will consider the following:

- Effective preparation for debates
- Debating skills and techniques
- Effective chairing of debates
- Coping with interruption

***After the class:*** no assigned work this week

**Week Nine: Assessment Centres and Psychometric Testing**

- Nature and rationale of assessment centres
- Techniques for psychometric testing

***After the class:*** no assigned work this week – deadline for leadership report and speech analysis

**Week Ten: People Skills II – negotiation, persuasiveness and leadership**

- Decision making
- Reading the situation and the ‘opposition’
- Persuasiveness and good communication skills
- You as effective leader

***After the class:*** no assigned work this week

**Week Eleven: Enhancing Employability and the Nature of Work**

- Enhancing employability: work experience, networking, extracurricular activities, and postgraduate study
- The nature of work and career development
- Lifelong reflection and progression
- Lessons from the psychology of happiness

***After the class:*** no assigned work this week

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### **Week Twelve: Public Speaking III – ‘Question Time’; Module Review and Evaluation**

The final opportunity to practice public speaking. Participants will answer topical questions provided by the audience, and get feedback

***After the class:*** complete final skills audit and action plan

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### Appendix: Assessment Criteria

#### 1. Action Plan Mark Sheet

	Excellent	Good	Mixed	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Skill definition - skills clearly defined and understood					
Clear rationale - reasons for needing to develop each skill made clear					
Method of development clearly expressed and achievable					
Clear articulation of personal targets – specific and measurable					
Method for achieving targets - appropriate and feasible					

Strengths:

Possible improvements:

#### 2. Skills Audit Mark Sheet

	Excellent	Good	Mixed	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Breadth of skills selected - skills reflect both the academic experience and experiences outside of academia					
Skill definition - skills clearly defined and understood					
Use of Evidence - examples given make clear the way in which the skills have been developed and applied					
Reflective – detailed appraisal of current strengths <i>and</i> weaknesses					

Strengths:

Possible improvements:

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### 3. Career Profile Mark Sheet

	Excellent	Good	Mixed	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Clarity of the description of the selected role – description clearly describes the day to day and purpose of the career chosen.					
Breadth of the nature of the role presented – the potential range of activities within this role are articulated					
Potential routes into the selected career are given – alternative routes are outlined incorporating both experience and postgraduate study if appropriate					
Competencies are drawn out – skills and personal qualities critical and relevant to the role should be clearly described					

Strengths:

Possible improvements:

### 4. CV Mark Sheet

	Excellent	Good	Mixed	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Appropriate Presentation and Layout - accessible, clear and professional in appearance					
Relevant study/experience highlighted - the CV author has been appropriately selective with this information					
Relevant Skills Articulated and Evidenced - selective					

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in the skills presented and clear how these skills have been developed					
Use of appropriate language for a professional context					
Correct spelling and grammar					

Strengths:

Possible improvements:

### 5. Self Reflection on Public Speaking Mark Sheet

	Excellent	Good	Mixed	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Reflective – detailed account of current strengths and weaknesses, drawing on experience of peer assessment					
Method of development clearly expressed and achievable					
Clear articulation of personal targets – specific and measurable					
Method for achieving targets - appropriate and feasible					

Strengths:

Possible improvements:

### 6. Leadership Analysis Mark Sheet

	Excellent	Good	Mixed	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Addresses the exact task set					
Use of evidence: supported by appropriate evidence					
Structure: material organised into a					

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coherent whole					
Critical Awareness: shows understanding of a range of views about the leader in question					
Research: based on a wide range of relevant sources					
Expression: written clearly in good English					
Referencing: sources acknowledged fully and systematically					

## **Chapter 11**

# **Work Placement in Political Science: Justification, Preparation, Implementation and Evaluation**

*Fiona Buckley*

### **Introduction**

Sorokos (2005) argues that the role of political science teachers is to help students develop critical minds. To achieve this, the discipline has relied on those teaching methods traditionally associated with the humanities and social science – lectures and tutorials. Despite much criticism of these methods in the teaching and learning literature, they remain the signature pedagogy of the discipline of political science. Such environments are not conducive to student participation and are very definitely teacher centred. Murphy and Reidy (2007: 2) argue that with critical thinking as a central tenet of political science education, the dominant disciplinary teaching approach is surely a limitation. However, change is occurring. Murphy and Reidy (2007: 6) note that the ‘discipline has witnessed greater diversity in relation to forms of assessment’ and ‘many of these developments have been as a consequence of engagement with other disciplines.’ One such development is the use of work placement or as Shulman (2005: 6) terms ‘the pedagogies of practice and performance’. Placement has long been used in the professions, but its usage in political science is a relatively recent phenomenon. This chapter will reflect upon the use of placement learning in the discipline. A case study of University College Cork’s BSc in Government work-placement programme will be presented. This will consider the preparation involved; the types of work placement on offer; assessment criteria; the benefits of work placement for students, employers and university. Finally, it will evaluate the programme to

examine the link, if any, between work placement and post-degree employment.

## **Placement: meeting the demands of a changing environment?**

Garrett (1999: 312) suggests that social science subjects are often seen ‘as academic rather than vocational or professional’. The study of political science has traditionally been ‘about learning for the sake of learning and knowledge’ (Murphy and Reidy, 2007: 5). However, Goldsmith and Berndtson (2002: 70) suggest that ‘as labour markets and students demand more specialised knowledge, old traditional disciplines, such as political science and sociology, may not be as attractive to students as they used to be’. The emerging challenge for programme directors and lecturers in the discipline of political science is to develop courses and modules that meet the demands of an increasingly career-orientated student. One way political science can meet this challenge is to embrace what Shulman (2005: 6) terms ‘the pedagogies of practice and performance’.

### **‘The pedagogies of practice and performance’**

Placement learning is frequently used in the professions. Shulman (2005: 2) states that professionals ‘must come to understand in order to act, and they must act in order to serve’. Up to recently, placement learning was not frequently used in the discipline of political science in the UK and Ireland (though the use of political internships was and still is frequently used in the USA). This is because political science is not primarily geared towards training for a specific occupation. Graduates enjoy many career opportunities in a variety of sectors. However, the graduate employment market has become increasingly competitive, and, as Rawlings et al. (2006: 2) observe, the ‘occupational future of university graduates will be characterised by both uncertainty and variety of work and employment experiences in what are becoming increasingly flexible but frequently

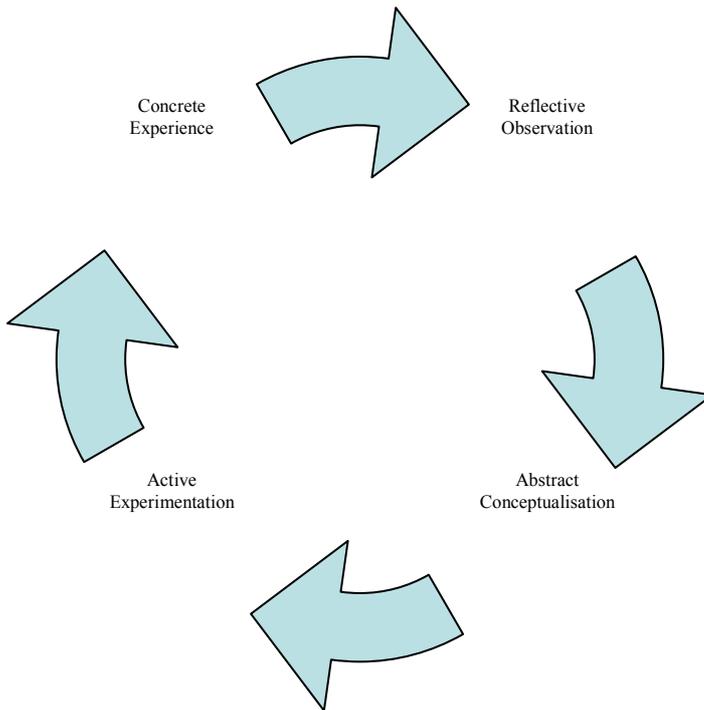
interrupted careers'. They suggest that employers will need employees 'with good interpersonal skills who are able to engage in "rule-making" rather than "rule-following" behaviour' or what Brown and Scase (1997) (paraphrased in Rawlings et al. 2006) describe as a shift from a 'bureaucratic' to a 'charismatic' personality. Rawlings et al. (2006) believe that an appropriate university support (facilitating placement learning) can nurture these competences. Dimbleby and Cooke (2000) suggest that the main purpose of higher education should be to enable students to learn. 'The "enabling" has seen a progressive shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred style' (Rawlings et al. 2006: 2). Much debate surrounds how best to facilitate student learning. Experiential learning, through the use of work placement, is generally accepted as one key methodology.

### **Defining placement**

A placement is a period of supervised work experience undertaken by a student. It is usually undertaken as part of a programme of study. Fanthome, in her book *Work Placements: A Survival Guide for Students* (2004), advises readers that work placement is an opportunity to learn new skills and to reinforce those already possessed. The placement also acts 'as a useful bridge between theory and practice in that it provides an arena in which you may observe and test out what you have learnt at university' (Fanthome 2004: 3). Work placement embraces the theory of experiential learning. David Kolb developed the 'Experiential Learning Cycle' in 1984. The 'Kolb Cycle' (see Figure 11.1) as it is commonly termed, advocates learning through experience, reflection, review and repeat action. It is a method through which 'effective, progressive and eventually self-directed learning' (Davies 2003: 9) can occur.

Work placement can also incorporate the concepts of service learning (recognised as a powerful vehicle for advancing civic engagement, students have the opportunity to integrate and relate theory to practice);

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### **Concrete Experience**

What did you do?

### **Reflective Observation**

What was good and/or bad about experience?

### **Abstract Conceptualisation**

If you had to do the same thing again, how would you do it differently next time?

Would you change anything?

### **Active Experimentation**

How did it go the next time?

Figure 11.1 The Kolb Cycle.

work-based learning (students build up practical skills and education in the workplace); practice-based learning (learning which arises out of practice in a chosen job, voluntary work, career, or profession and requires the application of course ideas in a work setting); and research-based learning (students take responsibility for what happens in a research

investigation and usually forms part of continuous assessment for a particular module or programme of study).

### **Is placement useful?**

Work placement can be beneficial for students, employers and higher education institutions alike. The employer gains an intelligent, motivated, cost-effective labour resource with valuable skills, knowledge and fresh ideas. The work placement also fosters closer links between the organisation and university, providing an increased awareness of current academic developments and research. For the university, contacts with employers are useful in developing collaborative income from research projects, custom-built training courses and consultancy. Close contact with employers helps academics to keep up to date with new technologies and work practices. This can be used to review and refresh the curriculum and to bring it in line with the needs of the economy and student demand. Work placement gives students the chance to see what it is like to work in an area related to their degree. There are multiple layers to the benefits that may be derived from work placement for students. Work placement helps students make more informed decisions about their careers. Skills may be learned or developed from the actual experience of work. A student's own personality may develop as a direct result of the experience.

The Dearing Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education in the UK (1997) recommended that all undergraduate students should have a structured period of work experience outside the institution, with clear learning objectives. To date, feedback on work placement is very positive. Successive *Graduate Surveys* in the UK and Ireland reveal significant evidence about the efficacy of work placement. Employers and graduates regard placement as an important element in the undergraduate experience. Blackwell et al. (2001: 284) found that 'work experience is repeatedly related to higher graduate employment rates and possibly to higher subsequent incomes' and 'is also regularly related to a more positive view of the learning experience of the programme in general and the

placement in particular'. Rawlings et al. (2006) found some evidence to show that placement leads to higher academic achievement amongst students who undertake work placement.

## **Embracing change: work placement in the BSc in Government, UCC**

The BSc in Government is a four-year programme anchored in the Department of Government, University College Cork. It combines political science with opportunities to pursue a range of modules in business, law, modern languages, the social sciences and information technology (IT). The degree is both intellectually stimulating and practically oriented. Strong emphasis is placed on practice as well as theory throughout the degree. Students undertake a considerable amount of project work that requires them to use their initiative in searching for data and information and in conducting research and analysis. Consequently, students are equipped to contribute in a real work environment.

Work placement (GV3102) is an integral and accredited element of the programme. Each year, approximately fifty-five students undertake work placement at the end of the third year of their degree. Students gain 10 credits for successful completion of work placement. Government students undertake work placements at home and abroad. Recent student placements have included the Irish Civil Service, government agencies in Ireland, the New York State Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, the European Parliament, banks, insurance companies, media organisations, PR companies, humanitarian groups, non-profit agencies, health boards and local government. The majority of work placements are paid. Where a placement is unpaid, students work on a part-time basis.

Work placement is a three-way partnership between the student, the employer and the university. It provides students with the opportunity to further their learning in work-based settings. The work experience on offer allows students to demonstrate their ability to take part in the everyday

## Work Placement in Political Science

work of the placement organisation and to put into practice the theories and methodologies studied as part of the BSc in Government.

Students are formally assessed on their work-placement experience through the use of learning journals, self-assessment essays, three-way meetings (between student, employer and college tutor), student performance appraisal and student oral presentations. To date, student and employer feedback has been very positive, and anecdotal evidence suggests that students have a greater enthusiasm for their studies and political science in general, on return to college following the completion of work placement.

### **Course design**

Work placement consists of much more than simply getting *stuck into* the real world of work at the end of third year. There are three distinct stages to the design of the work placement module: preparation, placement and post-placement (see Table 11.1).

Each stage entails a hybrid structure of both teaching and learning and management concerns. The academic director (an academic) and the work-placement manager (an administrator) work closely together to ensure high-quality work placements are secured and students are placement-ready.

The first stage consists of three years of preparation. A careers education programme is devised for work-placement students. In first and second year, students attend information sessions on the work-placement process and post-degree career options. These sessions encourage students to think about the type of work they would like to do on work placement and, indeed, on completion of their degrees. Each student completes a 'placement preference form', a document outlining what they would like to do on work placement and where (organisation, county, country) they would like to go. The learning outcomes of work placement are also outlined in the course of these sessions (see Box 11.1). At the end of second year, students attend one-to-one work placement and CV clinics. At these

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	<b>Teaching and Learning</b>	<b>Management</b>
<b>Preparation Stage</b>	<p><b>Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers Education Programme               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is work placement?</li> <li>○ Why do it?</li> <li>○ Learning objectives and outcomes</li> <li>○ CV preparation</li> <li>○ Interview skills</li> <li>○ Learning from observation</li> <li>○ Learning from doing</li> <li>○ Reflection and Self-Assessment</li> <li>○ Work-based skills</li> <li>○ IT training</li> <li>○ Legal and statutory responsibilities</li> <li>○ Personal well being and safety</li> <li>○ Health and Safety</li> <li>○ Communication skills for placement</li> <li>○ Cultural awareness and sensitivity</li> <li>○ Making the most of work placement – from undergraduate placement to graduate employment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Work placement assessment</li> </ul> <p><b>Employers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare work placement organisations to host students</li> <li>• Outline learning objectives and outcomes</li> <li>• Induction of placement employers for supporting, teaching and assessing students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify suitable work placement organisations</li> <li>• Draw up work placement documentation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Placement Handbook for students and employers</li> <li>○ Advertising Material</li> <li>○ Placement Contracts</li> <li>○ Health and Safety Checklists</li> <li>○ Student Evaluation</li> <li>○ Employer Evaluation</li> <li>○ Placement Visit Forms</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Establish organisational and legal agreements between the university and work placement organisations</li> <li>• Establish recruitment, interviewing and selection criteria</li> <li>• Establish communication and reporting systems</li> <li>• Staff development and induction for academic supervisors</li> <li>• Develop policy for dealing with unsuccessful work placement</li> </ul>
<b>Placement Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal work placement               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing innovative, interesting and authentic learning experiences</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Induction               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Integrate students into organisation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Facilitate placement learning               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comparison between theory and practice</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Student complete formal assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular contact between university, work placement organisation and student to monitor the success of the placement               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 3way meetings</li> <li>○ Regular phone calls and email</li> <li>○ Blackboard discussion board</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Adequate risk management and reporting</li> </ul>

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<b>Post Placement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student debriefing</li><li>• Making the most of work placement – from undergraduate placement to graduate employment</li><li>• Correct placement assessment and formal feedback</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact all placement employers to thank them for their support</li><li>• Review work placements</li><li>• Renew agreements for upcoming year</li><li>• Review placement management – confirm/change</li></ul>
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Table 11.1 Course design.

meetings, students speak with qualified career advisers about their career ambitions and receive advice on the completion of CVs. Throughout the first two years of their degree programme, government students update their IT skills by completing the ECDL (European Computer Driving License). This is a European-wide recognised IT skills course. Training is provided free of charge in UCC.

When students enter third year, they attend work-placement classes which cover topics such as:

- goal setting for placement
- learning objectives
- learning to learn from the experience
- learning from doing and observation
- reflective thinking and practice
- CV preparation and feedback
- interview skills
- transferable skills:
  - presentation
  - interpersonal
  - communication
  - problem-solving
- teamwork
- time management

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- industry speaker(s) (placement employers provide advice on the dos and don'ts of work placement)
- workplace culture
- communication skills for the workplace
- cultural awareness and sensitivity
- personal development and life coaching
- personal well-being and safety
- legal and statutory requirements
- health and safety on work placement
- academic requirements of work placement

- Demonstrate their ability to take part in the everyday work of the placement organisation.
- Show an ability to make and sustain effective working relationships with the clientele of the organisation.
- Show the development of satisfactory working relationships with staff and, where appropriate, demonstrate an ability to work in a team.
- Apply interpersonal skills effectively in their work.
- Examine ways of reconciling personal goals with professional demands and organisational realities.
- Use theory from the various disciplines included in the B.Sc. in Government course.
- Become practised in the use of various skills and fully to understand the implications of the use of such skills in differing circumstances.
- Develop an adequate level of competence in the different methods and work practices being utilised in the work-placement organisation and the ability to choose a particular method or range of practices on the basis of appropriateness rather than expediency.
- Administer their own work and carry out essential organisational responsibilities.
- Satisfactorily complete college-required written work for the placement file and any other written work required by the College or agreed with the work-placement organisation.
- Show that they have been able to negotiate, implement and evaluate programmes of work.

Box 11.1 Learning outcomes of GV3102 work placement.

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These classes are pivotal to a student's preparation for work placement. They are designed to optimise placement learning. The aim is to help students to think carefully about the type of job they will be doing on work placement and the type of learning goals they aim to achieve. The classes endeavour to guide students through the achievement of their learning goals and to demonstrate how such successes can be evidenced. Students must attend at least 80 per cent of classes before their participation in work placement is sanctioned. Classes can be quite energetic. They require a great deal of student participation as they involve group discussion, games, role plays and student presentations. Classes are tailor-made for the BSc Government degree programme and are taught by staff from UCC's Department of Government, Careers Service and Student Development and Counselling Service.

Concurrently, work-placement management structures are put in place to identify and establish links with relevant workplace organisations. A dedicated work-placement manager works with students in liaising with organisations and setting up placements. The manager is responsible for the provision of training and support to work-placement supervisors and establishing organisational and legal agreements between the university and work-placement organisation. Communication and reporting systems are created. Interviews for work-placement positions take place from October to February in the third year of the degree. The work-placement manager is responsible for arranging and coordinating interviews. Students must accept their first offer of placement. Students begin work placement in mid-April of their third year and must complete fourteen weeks of work placement.

The second stage of the work-placement course concerns the period of work placement. While on placement, each student, in conjunction with their work-placement supervisor, must complete a placement contract. This contract sets out each student's individual goals for work placement. Students must keep a daily learning journal outlining what they did, how they did it, was the experience good or bad, comparisons between theory and practice, reflections and personal action plans. Students must also

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complete a self-assessment essay which recounts each student's personal development while on work placement. At the midway point of each work placement, staff of the Department of Government, known as academic supervisors for the purpose of work placement, meet with students and their work-placement supervisors to assess how the placement is proceeding (each staff member is assigned six students to visit). This is called a three-way meeting. The positives are celebrated and praised. The negatives are addressed. At the end of the work placement, each work-placement supervisor completes a 'student performance appraisal' of their student. The supervisor and student meet to discuss this document. Students are assessed on a number of competences: attendance, dependability, punctuality, job knowledge, quality of work, quantity of work, versatility, initiative, application, cooperation, attitude and independent judgement.

While students are on work placement, the work-placement manager maintains regular contact with workplace organisations to assess the progress of placements. The manager will also stay in contact with students and their academic supervisors to monitor the overall well-being of students.

The third and final stage begins with the students' return to university (at the beginning of their final year). Each student must make a fifteen-minute presentation about their work-placement experience, themed 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' of work placement. Following this, students are debriefed on their work-placement experience. Students are asked to give their views on the following questions:

1. How did you envision your work-placement experience?
2. Were your expectations met?
3. What was the highlight of your work placement experience?
4. What insight into the organisation/sector did you gain from the work placement?
5. Is there anything you would have changed about your work placement?

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6. Were there any problems that you encountered during your work placement?
7. Would you recommend this work placement to another student? Why/Why not?

Throughout fourth year, students attend a number of departmental-arranged career-guidance sessions which concentrate on the topics such as 'Making the most of my work placement', 'post-degree options', 'CV preparation', 'creative job-hunting', and 'completing application forms for employment and postgraduate courses'.

During this stage, the work-placement manager writes to all workplace organisations to acknowledge their support and contributions. The placement is reviewed. Problems, if any, are identified and hopefully rectified. The placement process is also reviewed internally.

### **Assessment**

The three-way meeting, learning journal, self-assessment essay and student performance appraisal along with the end of placement presentation all form part of the assessment of work placement (see Box 11.2).

Work placements are assessed using the following criterion and grading structure:

- Work Placement Coursework (Learning Journal and Self Assessment Essay): 35%
- Student Performance Appraisal: 35%
- Presentation: 10%
- Placement Overview: 20%

Box 11.2 GV3102 work-placement assessment criteria.

Students are awarded a 'pass' or 'fail' judgement. There are different categories of passes:

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- **70 per cent and over: Pass with *exceptional performance*.** The student's performance significantly exceeded expectations for a competent incumbent with comparable job responsibilities and under similar conditions. Performance represents a highly significant contribution to the organisation.
- **60–9 per cent: Pass with *excellent performance*.** The student's performance exceeded expectations for a competent incumbent with comparable job responsibilities and under similar conditions. Performance represents a significant contribution to the organisation.
- **50–9 per cent: Pass with *successful performance*.** The student's performance is consistent with performance expectations for a competent incumbent with comparable job responsibilities and under similar conditions. Performance represents an effective contribution to the organisation.
- **40–9 per cent: Pass with *satisfactory performance*.** The student's performance is somewhat less than performance expectations for a competent incumbent with comparable job responsibilities and under similar conditions. Performance represents a deficient contribution to the organisation.
- **0–39 per cent: Fail.** The student's performance is significantly less than performance expectations for a competent incumbent with comparable job responsibilities and under similar conditions. Performance is clearly sub-standard and represents little contribution to the organisation.

Students are issued with *certificates of performance* on completion of work placement. Should the recommendation be 'Fail', the UCC Examinations Board will consider, on the basis on the documentation provided, whether to offer the opportunity to undertake a further period of placement. A student cannot pass their degree without successfully completing work placement.

## **Types of work placements**

The work placements on offer provide students with the opportunity to further their learning in a practice-based setting. Students demonstrate their ability to take part in the everyday work of the placement organisation and to put into practice the theories and methodologies studied as part of the BSc in Government. Emphasis is upon research-based learning rather than simply work experience. Students are usually assigned to a project(s) and carry out the required research over a fourteen-week period. As well as developing research skills, students also enhance their administrative, organisational and interpersonal skills. Partnerships have been developed with local, regional, national and supranational government, civil service, political actors, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and the voluntary sector. The following is a flavour of the projects assigned to students:

- DNA sampling and profiling (parliamentary committee)
- environmental taxes (civil service department)
- constituency profiling (politician)
- immigration policy (government agency)
- security agenda (international relations think tank)
- prisoner rights, health and well-being (government agency)
- economic forecasting (international economic think tank)

## **Evaluation**

Work placement is a practical but important component of the higher education curriculum. It gives students an introduction to the world of work. It also provides them with an understanding of what is it that employers want from university graduates. The learning journey is a very personal one. Each student will enjoy a different work-placement experience. The success or failure of work-placement learning is often dependent on a student's own personal learning and career goals. Some

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students are very focused. Others tend to just muddle on through. Ideally, a work placement will give students the opportunity to learn new skills and to improve those already possessed. Students should be afforded the chance to apply theoretical learning to a practical situation. It should also represent the prospect of learning about oneself through the process of reflection. Work placement should provoke greater self-knowledge and self-awareness. So does it? In the BSc in Government, we ask students and employers to provide feedback on the work-placement programme. Students are asked to evaluate their work-placement classes and work placements, while employers are required to evaluate their student and the placement process. The following is a compilation of some of the feedback.

### **Student views on work-placement classes**

The introduction of work-placement classes and the outlining of the objectives, learning outcomes and benefits of work placement allow students to ascertain from the outset what work placement is about. Students are encouraged to develop their own personal career goals and to use the work-placement module to achieve those goals. The course design provides students with a greater understanding of what is expected of them. They become familiar with the tools and vocabulary of self-assessment and reflection.

Work-placement classes have contributed to student learning and understanding of the workplace. Students feel they are better equipped to deal with various workplace scenarios as a result of taking classes, for example:

Making telephone calls on behalf of the organisation was daunting at first. I took the advice from class – if nervous, write a brief transcript of what to say and follow this until comfortable with making calls.

I was asked to write a memo but wasn't given guidance from my boss on how to structure it. Luckily, we covered memo-writing in

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class so I dug out my classnotes and wrote. The boss didn't complain and used the memo, so I must have done a good job.

One of the men in the office is very set in his ways and has very conservative views, the complete opposite to me. To be honest, it gets on my nerves. However, I've learned to understand that he is coming to the issue from a very different outlook on life than I have. I think the work-placement classes in which we learned to understand that people have different sets of experiences and values and approach problem-solving in a different ways has helped me to deal with this man.

The section on reflection and self-assessment is very useful for students when compiling their learning journals. Not all students are comfortable with the type of teaching involved in these classes. The work-placement classes incorporate presentations, individual brain-storming sessions, group work, role plays, games and group discussion. The classes emphasise the importance of practical skills. The classes can be very energetic, and a lot is expected of the students in terms of group work, class discussions, role plays and individual presentations. Some students are reluctant to get involved in these activities. However, the majority of students embrace the ethos of the classes and admit to becoming much more involved as they get comfortable with (1) the practical nature of the class, (2) the style of teaching and (3) with one another. As a result of the classes, some students feel a greater sense of confidence in their own abilities and are more assured about what they want to achieve from work placement. They are well able to negotiate their own personal learning outcomes and feel confident enough to express misgivings about their work placement if they feel their negotiated outcomes are not allowed to develop.

## **Student views on work placement**

In over 85 per cent of cases, student work-placement expectations are met and surpassed. Students are genuinely surprised and delighted at the level of work assigned to them and the responsibility involved. They enjoy the work, and they offer high praise to their work-placement supervisors for the kindness and assistance shown. Students learn a lot about themselves as employees and as people. They see the relevance of their degree to the work environment, and there's a renewed sense of excitement about the study of politics on their return to university. The placement also offers students the opportunity to network with people who can advise on how to achieve career goals and ambitions. Overall, the feedback is excellent, and students view the work-placement module not as just another 10-credit module to do and get out of the way but as an opportunity for them to personally develop and achieve their own particular career goals.

## **Employer views on students**

Each employer completes a student performance appraisal of their student providing the student with feedback on their work performance. This is a chance to highlight the skills the student has learned and to identify those that will benefit from further development. Feedback is very positive. Employers regularly compliment students' research and writing abilities, their maturity and confidence in handling various work situations, their excellent interpersonal skills, focused career plans and reliable nature. Areas of development usually identified are IT and time-management skills. As well as acting as an excellent feedback mechanism for students, the student performance appraisals also inform the work-placement course. IT training was introduced into the degree as a direct result of employer feedback.

## **Employer views on the work placement process**

Employers are greatly impressed by the breadth of student preparation, students' knowledge of their subject area and students' poise and self-assurance. Some of the skills, attributes and qualities noted by work-placement employers in government students are:

- a strong motivation to work
- a willingness to learn
- oral and written communication skills
- interpersonal skills
- ability to find and assess information
- ability to define and solve problems
- teamwork skills
- independent judgement

While the Department of Government cannot claim all the credit for instilling these qualities in its students, work-placement providers do note that the dedicated careers education programme and student support offered by the Department does contribute to students' self-confidence and positive attitude about their degree and employment prospects. Much praise is also offered to the work-placement management structure. The manager was noted as being very supportive, proactive, dedicated and accommodating.

## **Work placement and the impact on post-degree employability**

Something all political science students ask themselves (and have been asked by others) is 'What can I do with a degree in political science?' Political science graduates are not qualified to do any one particular job in the same sense as is a dentist or a vet. They enjoy a variety of career

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opportunities. Simon (2006) summarises these opportunities into three categories:

1. observative roles (for example, researcher);
2. participative roles (for example, politician, political adviser, civil servant, EU official and lobbyist);
3. intermediate roles (for example, independent consultant and media worker).

Simon's work tends to concentrate on jobs in a 'political' setting. It is important to note that political science graduates also enjoy many opportunities of the non-political variety – for example in banking, insurance and sales.

BSc Government graduates have secured employment in a number of sectors and organisations. Examining First Destination Reports (FDR)<sup>1</sup> of government graduates since 2003, we see that 38 per cent have secured employment in the public sector (for example, civil service, local government, government agencies, health executives, parliamentary assistants, education); 53 per cent have secured employment in the private sector (for example, banking, insurance, accountancy, consultancy, IT, public relations, sales, marketing, hotel management, human resource management, law); 3 per cent in media (print and broadcast media) and 6 per cent in the so-called third sector (for example with advocacy groups, think tanks, non-government and non-profit organisations). The results are noteworthy when compared with the sectoral categories of work-placement providers. Over 90 per cent of these are in the public sector. The figures raise some interesting questions:

- Why don't more government graduates work in the public sector?
- Were they turned off a career in the public service as a result of their work-placement experience?

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- Should more work placements be sourced in the private sector to reflect graduate-recruitment trends?

Provisionally, the majority of government graduates were very positive in their feedback about the public service. The likely explanation for the lower than expected employment rates in the public sector lies in the recruitment structures employed by the public service. Oftentimes these can be rigid and protracted, meaning people are placed on panels until such a time as a relevant opening comes up. The waiting time can run into months, meaning graduates are ‘snapped up’ elsewhere in the meantime. Another explanation may simply be that there are more openings in the private sector. An examination of the employment profiles of political science graduates from other third-level institutions in the Republic of Ireland (Trinity College Dublin, University of Limerick, University College Dublin, Dublin City University) and the United Kingdom (see <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/>) reveal similar trends to Cork. The majority of political science graduates tend to find employment in non-public-sector jobs. The Department of Government is presently reviewing its work-placement organisational profile to develop greater links with the private sector. In particular, management-consultancy firms who regularly work with government are being targeted.

So, what of the impact of work placement on post-degree employment prospects? Is there a relationship between work placement and post-degree employability? Studies show that the most common purpose for employers in offering work placement is the recruitment of graduates into full-time roles. The University of Manchester’s Careers Service (2004) found that former work-experience students represented 40 per cent of all their graduates who were recruited by companies in that year. The study also found that work placement is fast becoming the main strategy used by organisations to recruit graduates replacing traditional methods such as the ‘milk round’.<sup>2</sup> There is some evidence of this activity in the BSc in Government degree. An average of three graduates are recruited by their work-placement provider each year. Depending on class

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size, this represents a figure of between 5.5 and 6.67 per cent of yearly graduates. When analysed further, the figure accounts for 17.85 per cent of all those government students who secure employment on graduation. When comparing BSc in Government graduate-destination reports from 2004 to 2007 against those of other political science degrees in Ireland where placement is unavailable, we observe higher employment rates amongst the UCC graduates (see Figure 11.2). 38 per cent of BSc Government graduates are in full-time employment six months after graduation (3 per cent are unemployed), while the corresponding figure for graduates from non-placement political science degrees is 34 per cent (10 per cent are unemployed). Many of the positions secured by BSc in Government graduates are at the trainee middle-management rank, and the average starting salary is €26,667.

Whether we can accredit the higher employment rates of the BSc in Government to the integrated work-placement programme is difficult to say, but, when asked if they found the work-placement programme useful in securing employment, a majority of students agreed that it was.

Students often comment that employers are very interested to hear about the work-placement experience at interviews. Many believe that work placement and the skills gained provide 'an edge' over other interview candidates, especially those who did not have the opportunity to undertake work placement as part of their undergraduate studies. Placement provides students with a narrative, a story to tell.

Ancillary to the benefits students derive from undertaking work placement, the Department of Government has also gained from its relationship with work-placement providers. Direct contact with employers allows the Department to keep abreast of emerging employment trends. Feedback from employers has resulted in new modules being offered on the degree programme, for example 'Business Communication and Writing Skills' and 'Business Information Systems'.

Employers have also advised that research methodology be offered in the early years of the degree rather than the latter part. The work placement has resulted in exposure of the degree programme amongst

## Work Placement in Political Science

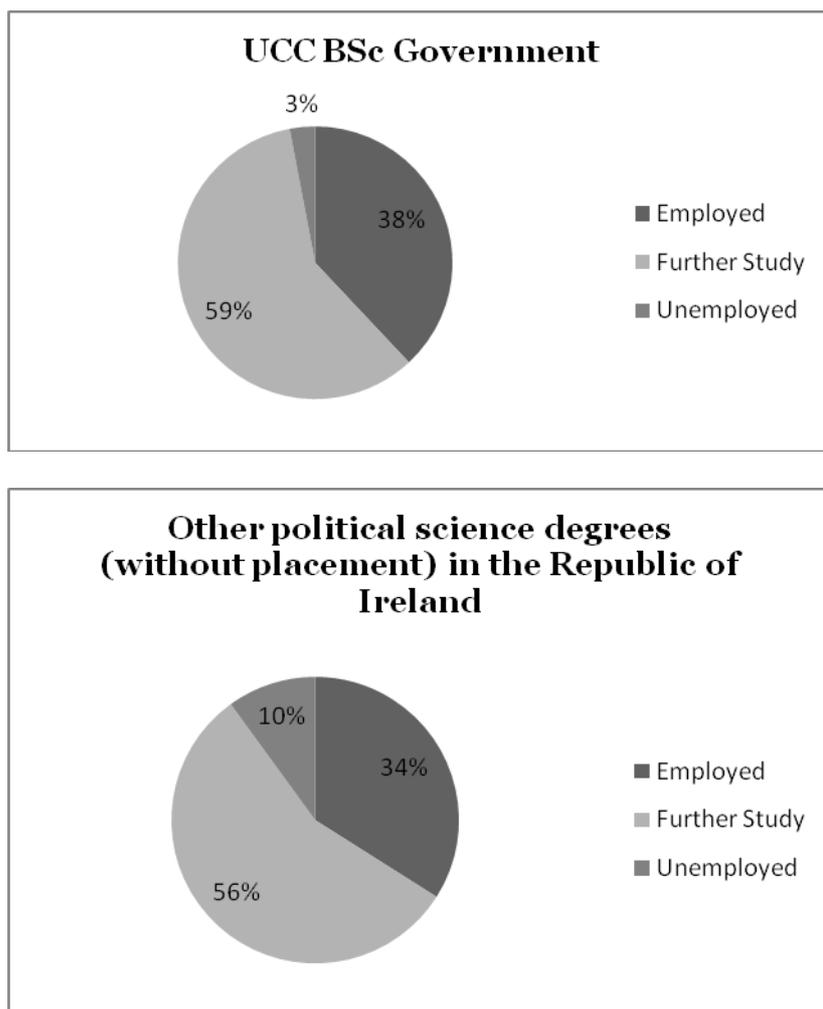


Figure 11.2 Average first destination results (FDR) of the BSc in Government and other Irish political science degrees, 2004–7.

employers. Recognition levels are increasing every year. This is important as the degree is a relatively new offering in UCC (the degree was launched in 1999 and its first cohort of students graduated in 2003).

### Conclusion

The use of placement learning in the BSc in Government is one of many teaching approaches used in the teaching and learning of political science

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at UCC. Its introduction is an attempt to meet the challenges put forward by an increasingly demanding and career-orientated student body. The emphasis within the BSc in Government degree is (still) about the development of independent learners and critical thinkers, and traditional teaching methods such as lectures and tutorials are widely used. However, as educators place more emphasis on the student experience, the dominance of teaching-centred approaches is moderating. Modern-day universities are centres of 'learner activity' (Gibbs 1995), 'a highly social enterprise that requires the constant development of human relationships and communication' (University of Westminster 2004: 3). Placement learning certainly facilitates this type of learning. As can be seen from this chapter, the Department of Government's experience of placement learning has been very positive. It has resulted in positive feedback from students and employers, and there is some evidence that shows placement is beneficial to students when searching for post-degree employment. It is likely that placement learning will continue to be used as a teaching method to promote student learning and understanding of political science in UCC for many years to come.

## Notes

1 The UCC First Destination Report is compiled by the Careers Service in UCC. It is based on an annual survey of graduates six months after graduation. The results are available for public view through its website ([http://www.ucc.ie/careers/students/What\\_UCC\\_Graduates\\_Do.php](http://www.ucc.ie/careers/students/What_UCC_Graduates_Do.php)).

2 This is where graduate recruiters visit third-level campuses to advertise their jobs and interview and select graduates into their companies.

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## **Chapter 12**

# **Linking Theory and Practice on Politics Work Placement Modules**

*Andrew Mycock*

### **Citizenship and politics in higher education**

The renewed interest in the importance of active citizenship and volunteering in higher education is reflective of concerns about democratic participation, declining social capital and community cohesion (Power Inquiry 2006; Sloam 2007). Citizenship education (particularly in secondary schools) has been viewed by some as a panacea for declining levels of political participation, social delinquency and the dilution of a common civic identity (see Blunkett 2001: 41–2). The topicality of embedding citizenship across universities and their course curricula is also tied to a range of pedagogic and functional issues, most notably teaching quality assurance, student personal development, community participation and employability. This noted, the explicit education for (rather than about) citizenship continues to have a relatively weak status within higher education generally, and on many politics degree programmes. However, a number of recent reports have highlighted the importance of active citizenship and volunteering in the community (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997; Further Education Funding Council 2000) and the need to create a volunteering ethos in universities (Russell 2005). The key role higher education plays in developing active citizens and sustaining a civilised, more tolerant and inclusive society has been acknowledged by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE 2006). The HEFCE report urged universities to encourage active explorations and ownership of citizenship through the facilitation of an educational environment where students become more effective, responsible and engaged citizens. Student learning should therefore be

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enhanced both in and outside the classroom, on campus and within local communities, to strengthen 'civic values' and to intensify participation for life-long citizenship.

Many of the motivations and themes informing the contemporary focus on active citizenship and volunteering emanate from the decision to introduce statutory citizenship education in English secondary schools in September 2002. Building on the recommendations of the so-called 'Crick Report' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1998) (which promoted citizenship themes encompassing social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy), the introduction of citizenship into the National Curriculum has proven problematic, both in pedagogic and structural contexts (see National Foundation for Educational Research 2007), and politically contentious (both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats opposed the introduction of the subject in their respective 2005 general election manifestos). However, its introduction has raised the profile of the study of politics as a key dimension of learning *about* and *for* citizenship, and it is unlikely (certainly under the current government) that citizenship will lose its statutory status within the National Curriculum in England in the near future. Indeed, most undergraduates now entering university from the English secondary system have experienced some form of compulsory citizenship education, and students from other national systems in the UK also have some formal provision (see Andrews and Mycock 2008). This is significant in at least two ways. First, although provision of citizenship in English schools remains patchy – with good practice only identified in a quarter of schools by Ofsted (2006) – the situation is improving rapidly, and most students are also familiar with programmes of work experience and volunteering. Second, evidence would suggest that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of students since 2002 studying politics at A-level and applying to read politics at university (Prest 2008). This would suggest both that citizenship has stimulated interest in politics and that students applying to study politics and cognate disciplines will be

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familiar with learning strategies that link theory with practice within a range of learning environments.

There has been a range of responses by higher education institutions to calls to embed active citizenship into their politics curricula. Some institutions have chosen to continue to teach politics through established practices based around classroom learning and traditional assessment techniques. These departments, predominantly located in older, more established institutions, can view interest in citizenship as vogueish and a potential threat to conventional academic practice. Although some aspects of active citizenship may be promoted as extracurricular, the content and delivery of modules remains largely unchanged. Other institutions have, however, adopted themes of citizenship explicitly within differing patterns of teaching and programmes of study, encouraging the interlinking of theory and practice across some or all modules. The pattern emerging in higher education institutions is therefore in many ways similar to those in English secondary schools; there are pockets of good practice but for some institutions the explicit promotion of citizenship education is viewed as unnecessary or intrusive – with concerns regarding overcrowded curricula, established patterns of lecturer autonomy and disciplinary protectionism limiting the scope for its embedding.

However, studies clearly demonstrate that many higher education institutions are providing a range of work-based learning solutions that encourage students to link theory and practice across a diverse disciplinary framework (Nixon et al. 2006). Those institutions encouraging experiential work-based learning, particularly work placements, have developed pedagogical approaches that are distinctive in that they promote experiential learning which encourages students to draw on and apply classroom-based knowledge in a range of vocational environments. The learning outcomes tend to emphasise the need for the learners to broaden their underpinning knowledge and understanding, to apply theories and constructs in a workplace setting in order to make sense of complex situations and to enhance their skills development through practical experiences. As such, the workplace provides an opportunity for the

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practical application of knowledge and skills through action or problem-based learning. For politics students, such placements offer an opportunity to develop the skills deemed necessary for active citizenship whilst also encouraging political literacy outside the classroom.

The following chapter provides an overview of the development of work-based learning through the Politics Work Placement (PWP) module at the University of Huddersfield. It focuses on my experiences in revising the module after I joined the university in August 2007, which, although still a central component of politics degrees delivered, faced a number of pressing challenges. When joining the university, I was asked to undertake a review of the module, and this chapter provides an overview of provision prior to this review and the changes introduced. It draws on discussions with students, assessment of student logs, reports and placement-provider feedback, and also considers ongoing research emanating from the FDTL5 Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project (see Sherrington et al. 2008 and Chapter 3 in this volume). It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the module and how it interlinks with other academic learning provision. It concludes by outlining the impact of work-based learning and work placements in developing the political literacy, active citizenship and employability of politics students.

### **Overview**

Politics undergraduate students at the University of Huddersfield have been required to complete a compulsory six-week work placement at the end of their second year of undergraduate studies since 1989. The work placement was introduced to provide students with a formative work-based experience that enhanced practical skills and employability. The module remained popular with students and was instrumental in the ongoing success of politics courses offered at Huddersfield. Elements of personal development planning (PDP) were incorporated from 2003/4, encouraging students to review, analyse and write about their work-placement experiences (and how they relate to academic and career

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progression). One of the main reasons cited for the existence of the work-placement module was ‘to provide a link between academic studies and the “real” world of work’ (PWP and Year 2 PDP Handbook 2006/7). The PWP module encouraged recognition of the diverse range of career paths that politics degrees prepare students for and the applied key transferable skills learnt and utilised within differing workplace contexts.

The PWP module sought to emphasise distinctions between *work experience* and *work-based learning*, with the emphasis on the latter being tied to the acquisition and development of new skills and reflection on personal development. The potential for work-based learning was founded on the provision of opportunities in which students could apply academic knowledge to real-world situations. Students were encouraged to develop self-knowledge through learning in new situations and through developing key skills such as communication, analytical problem-solving, IT skills, individual and group work and developing strategies for improving learning and performance. The work-placement module sought to improve academic performance, encouraging, amongst other attributes, greater self-confidence, motivation and time management. Moreover, students were encouraged to gain a greater understanding of the language and culture of organisations and corporate entities beyond the university. Work placements therefore contributed to career planning by enabling students to network, explore career options and acquire up-to-date information about employment opportunities. On a personal level, the work placement sought to enhance self-esteem and interpersonal social skills and to stimulate further extracurricular activity, particularly volunteering.

Students were encouraged to reflect on their PDP and their acquisition of aptitudes and knowledge and to critically audit their own skills and abilities. The criteria for self-assessment focused heavily on skills learnt within business contexts. Students were responsible for researching and securing placements, although support is given by tutors within the Politics Department. No timescale was given to outline when students should begin to apply for placements or a deadline for when one should be

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secured. Upon securing a placement, students were expected to inform the module tutor and to complete a learning agreement. Students began their placements following the final examinations and after all coursework had been submitted at Level 2. They were allocated a personal placement mentor (PPM) (though this was usually the module tutor) to liaise with each student, primarily through the university Blackboard virtual learning environment. The PPM was also responsible for establishing communication with the PPM. Students were asked to provide regular reports to the PPM, summarising their experiences on a weekly basis. Students were also expected to complete a personal placement log which outlined twelve 'learning claims', thus encouraging reflective learning. Students had to obtain an end-of-placement evaluation from their placement provider and were also expected to complete a 1,000-word report which should provide an overview of the placement experience, an evaluation of learning and reflection on how the placement contributed towards academic and career plans. Students were encouraged to identify any politics-course-specific skills or aptitudes that were relevant to the work placement and any other useful learning experience (e.g., life skills or organisational skills).

### **Work placements 2006/7**

During the academic year 2006/7, a total of twenty-six students participated in the PWP module, of which twenty-four passed. The module remained a popular part of the student experience and was seen by many as integral to their academic and personal development. Indeed, students were predominantly positive about the module, with some noting that the placements provided 'a fantastic insight', were 'informative' and a 'positive influence on my life'. The contribution of work placements to the development of self-confidence and belief within work and academic contexts is central in the reflections of many students. Comments from students highlighted that they felt both 'privileged' to be given such opportunities and also 'valued', 'acknowledged and praised', 'part of a

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team' and 'accepted at all levels of the company'. Some obviously benefited from being given responsibility within a range of work environments which contributed to 'a unique learning curve' which they 'thoroughly enjoyed'. However, some students did complain that their placements were 'boring', 'unfocused' and involved significant amounts of repetitive and unchallenging work. Students did not always see the point of the placements, particularly when placed within less challenging environments. This noted, more sophisticated reflection highlighted that, although the placements might not be 'always fun', they provide 'some good experience of what day to day life in an office would be like'.

The vocational background of the placement providers chosen by students was diverse, reflecting their differing career aspirations and the perceived relevance of the work placements (see Figure 12.1).

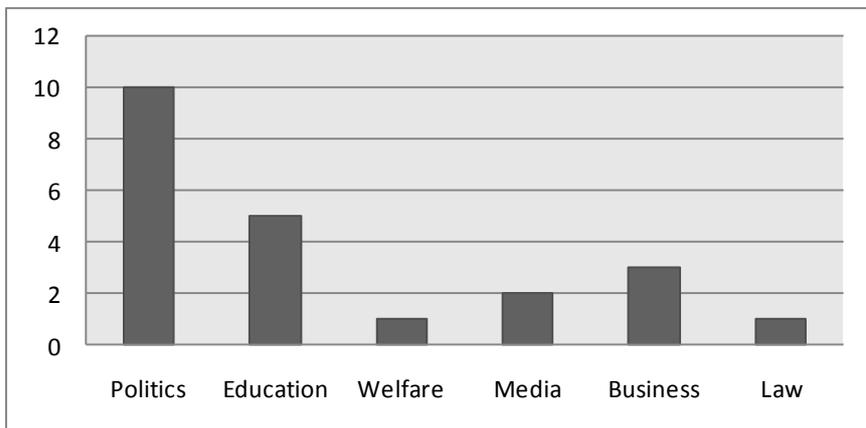


Figure 12.1 Placement vocation 2006/7.

The vocational focus of the placements chosen reflects a number of factors that influence the quality and experience of the module for students. A significant number of the placements were determined by the career aspirations of students or were seen to refine options after the placement. This is particularly true of those students who chose politics, education and welfare placements. However, a number of placements appear to have been of little relevance to students' academic discipline or

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their future careers. Some students either took placements with providers who merely offered work experience in an office environment and who consigned students with menial tasks. One student was allowed to work for a family business where his PPM was a family member. Another student was given the option of opting out of the work placement as she felt she had 'enough work experience', instead working on an administrative project within the university. It was clear that some students felt the module offered little opportunity beyond the acquiring of general work skills which were not necessarily linked to their university studies. Of more concern, some lacked sufficient understanding of the nature of their duties during their placements or even detailed knowledge of their placement providers.

Whilst placements tutors provided some guidance on placements, the process of planning and obtaining a placement appeared to fail some students. The timescales for students to ensure they secured a placement lacked rigidity, with some only finding placements during the examination period in May. Some students had significant problems in identifying suitable placements that not only enhanced their key employability skills but also provided opportunities to recognise and develop their knowledge and apply theory to practice. Although a Work Placement Contacts resource was compiled during 2005, it had only been used by three students in a two-year period. The period of the placements also varied considerably. Most students met the six-week requirement, with some beginning their placements early and continuing into the summer. However, the length of some placements was significantly less than the prescribed period, with three students only on location for two weeks. For many students, the six-week placement at the end of the academic year was extremely unpopular as it cut deeply into the summer break and limited time for getting paid work, planning for the final year of studies or going on holiday.

There were also deficiencies in the level and quality of mentoring that students received on placement; most students contacted their university mentor infrequently, or not at all, during the duration of their

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placements. This in part was a result of the member of staff running the module leaving the university in April 2007. However, regardless of such challenges, there was no system for on-site visits by university tutors prior to or during the period of the placement, and no assessment of the health-and-safety implications for students, placement providers or the university. The lack of contact with the student limited the ability of the module tutor to assess the placement or the student or establish contact with the placement provider mentor to discuss any matters arising – particularly suggestions on how the scope of the placement might be developed to tie theory and practice together more coherently. This lack of a structured formal set of pre-placement procedures was mirrored by the absence of an end of placement ‘debrief’ programme whereby student and placement provider could liaise with the module tutor to debrief and discuss any immediate issues arising from the placement.

The quality and quantity of assessed work submitted by students for the module proved extremely variable – largely due to the pass or fail assessment criteria. This was not reflected in the marks obtained, with only two out of the twenty-six students failing the module. This noted, students and staff had concerns regarding the intellectual value of the module and its contribution to final degree classifications. The pass/fail assessment criteria limited the connectivity between academic and vocational experiences, and there was little to motivate students to produce high-quality reflective work that linked theory and practice during the placement or in any of the assessed work associated with its successful completion. Most students dropped the work-placement module from their final degree submission as it had little value within the university’s overall degree credit framework. A situation therefore arose whereby motivated students or students who had highly engaging placements often produced placement logs and reports that demonstrated strong work founded on critical reflection of their own experiences. Similarly, students who sought to maximise the placement experience tended to induce more reflective and constructive placement-provider assessments which aided future academic and career development. For many students, however, the

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placement log and report did not reflect their experiences on placement sufficiently. The logbook layout was of limited value for many students, as its parameters of reflection were overly prescriptive. Students struggled to complete many of the learning aims outlined as their placements did not provide opportunities for reflection within the parameters outlined in the learning logs – particularly those aims linked to ‘customers’, management, peer observation, group work or personal responsibility. Analysis of placement logs over a three-year period indicated that many were completed retrospectively after the placement had been completed. Some logs were submitted incomplete but passed, with some students not completing all the learning claims outlined (the term ‘claim’ is itself problematical and suggests ambiguity regarding the propriety of the actions recorded) or even entire learning claim sections. This limited understanding of the development of key skills during the placement highlights difficulties that many students experienced in reflecting critically and productively about their experiences on placement.

Such difficulties in reflecting on the value of placements were also evident in the placement reports submitted by students. Again, the quality and quantity of work submitted varied enormously, with some providing detailed reports that tended to draw on their positive experiences on placement. Most reports replicated experiences outlined in the learning logs and were largely used to provide a narrative overview of what happened during the placement. This situation was compounded by the limited nature of assessment feedback given by module tutors and placement providers, which consistently failed to link the academic and vocational dimensions of the placements or to provide suggestions on how they might influence future studies or career progression (particularly with regard to third-year dissertations). There was no system whereby placement provider and university tutor liaised to assess placements and to discuss their implications for the future academic and vocational progression of students (or the possibility of further placements).

The PWP module was ground-breaking when introduced and still provided a positive experience for most students. There were many

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obvious benefits for students taking the module regarding employability, with most students learning to design CVs and introduction letters, gaining vital skills and experiences not normally undertaken during academic study. The placements provided an excellent opportunity for students to seek experience in environments in which they may wish to establish future career plans (or realise that their future may lie in other vocational areas). Most importantly, when placements were relevant and well structured, students gained vital work experience *and* work-based learning. However, for some students, the stated objective to facilitate work-based learning rather than mere work experience was clearly not being met. Many students had some form of work experience during their secondary schooling, which, together with greater levels of IT competency amongst young people, meant that the module was not always perceived as necessary or contributing to academic or vocational progression. As such, the module required revision to provide greater consistency for students, the university and placement providers.

### **Revising the module**

It was important that students should be encouraged to view the placement as an opportunity, not an obligation, and to link the experience to political literacy and active citizenship. The aims of the revisions to the module were to deepen the placement experience, ensuring that it formed a central strand of each politics student's personal and academic progression. Moreover, the remit for such changes was to develop a module which could be extended across the Division of Criminology, Politics and Sociology and, ultimately, across others parts of the Department of Behavioural Sciences. Although I had some previous experience of student placement programmes, this had been specifically focused on a parliamentary programme based at Westminster which tended to exclude students from non-traditional backgrounds (who could not make the commitment), from lower socio-economic groups (who could not afford to live in London), or students who struggled academically. The challenges were to develop a

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module that focused on local politics, thus ensuring that all students had equal access to a worthwhile and constructive placement experience. Therefore, it was necessary to build on good existing practice whilst also drawing on the advice and recommendations of those closely associated with politics work-based learning placement programmes across the university. Caroline Gibson and others who had contributed to the HEFCE FDTL5-funded project The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics, were invaluable in providing guidance and kindly allowing the use of their model learning agreement, health and safety and placement-provider information documents.

Of central importance was the refocusing of the module to ensure it emphasised political activities: it was a *politics* work-placement module after all. The learning aims and outcomes of the module were revised to explicitly focus on the key political themes. Students were to find work placements which had overt political connections, thus encouraging them to embrace the module as part of a generic approach that interlinks theory and practice during all three years of their undergraduate studies (particularly in relation to third-year dissertations). The placement period was also reduced to three weeks (fifteen days) to be spread through the second year rather than located at its end. Placements were to be structured to suit the needs of the student and the placement provider but could not coincide with students' timetabled compulsory lectures and seminars or compromise their ability to prepare for and submit coursework. As such, placements could take place over the duration of the academic year on a day or two day per week release basis, in weekly segments over the Christmas or Easter breaks, or both, or a combination of the two approaches. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for finding placements that suited their own circumstances and were also attractive and feasible for placement providers.

It was important that placements were established as a key part of the politics degree at Huddersfield, meaning preparation for placements began during the first year and was tied to generic themes that promoted active citizenship, volunteering and employability. First-year students were

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therefore encouraged to plan their placements, liaising with university tutors and discussing options for placements with the 'Hands On' volunteering unit based in the Students' Union and also the University Community Projects Office. Representatives of the 'Hands On' volunteering team and Careers Office presented a compulsory one-hour session at the end of the first year which outlined opportunities available at Huddersfield, emphasising the relationship between academic study and career opportunities and the contribution of volunteering to personal and professional development.

For second-year students, an induction programme was introduced involving five weekly two-hour sessions to enhance skills and to provide guidance for obtaining high-quality placements. The first session provided an overview of the module and assessment and gave students an idea of the different kinds of placement available. Three third-year students were asked to give short presentations on their placements and answered questions on the challenges and rewards of the module. The second session involved members of the 'Hands On' volunteering team, who gave further advice on the range of placement opportunities available. Representatives from Mencap and Kirklees Refugees and Friends Together (KRAFT), both previous placement providers, provided short presentations on how students should apply for a placement and what they expect from students. To supplement this, details of placement providers who have expressed an interest in taking students were posted on the module Blackboard site. The third session involved the university careers office which provided a supplemental session on preparation of CVs and letters of application. This session also emphasised the importance of obtaining a placement which related to both academic *and* career pursuits.

In Week 4, all students attended an individual PDP/placement meeting with the module tutor to discuss possible options regarding placement providers. Each meeting was scheduled for twenty minutes in length and provided students with an opportunity to discuss their placement ideas and how this linked with their PDP. Students were required to complete a draft CV and letter of introduction for approval

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during this session and to discuss deadlines by which they should apply to placement providers and gain their agreement. Students were encouraged to consider in what ways their placement might contribute towards their third-year dissertation, to assess what opportunities for primary research might be facilitated by their placement, what research skills can be utilised and in what ways contextual understanding could refine dissertation research questions and empirical research.

When a potential placement was identified, a preliminary visit to the placement provider was arranged for each student together with the module tutor. These visits established a personal relationship between student, module tutor and placement provider, facilitating effective channels of communication during the placement and afterwards. It also gave students an opportunity to gain experience of the environment they would be working in, thus alleviating many of the concerns or anxieties students may hold about the placement. It also provided an opportunity for discussion regarding learning aims and opportunities during the placement, how it links to academic studies and the mentoring responsibilities undertaken by the placement provider. A learning agreement was signed by all three parties during this visit. Any health and safety issues which might influence the placement were discussed, with a health-and-safety agreement signed during the visit. A structured approach to mentoring was established, both remotely and 'on-site', through the module Blackboard site, and a visit to each placement-provider location by the module tutor during the placement period. This not only provided first-hand opportunities for module tutors to assess each placement but also allowed students and placement providers to reflect on the learning aims and workplace experience. A regular weekly placement mentor meeting involving the student and the PPM was also introduced to discuss issues arising from each week of the placement.

Assessment of the module was also revised, with students expected to complete a rolling online learning blog and a 1,500-word assignment which was to investigate links between the theory and practice of politics. The two dimensions of assessment would embed the established aims of

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connecting the academic and vocational themes of the placement and those of personal and professional progression. During week 5, a session was held with all students on how to complete online blogs and the placement report and how to engage in objective critical reflection during placements. Students were now expected to complete four 500-word blog entries via the module Blackboard site – three submissions were to be made after the completion of each five-day period on placement, and a fourth entry was to be submitted at the end of the placement. Each report provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences each week in a structured manner, highlighting how and in what ways learning aims have been achieved or otherwise, identifying the development of key skills and evidence which links theory to practice, and reflecting on personal performance in the workplace. The blog approach limited the opportunity for students to replicate work and encouraged a process of on-going recognition of learning and development.

The placement assignment was redesigned to provide students with experience of producing research-based coursework of 1,500 words in length that drew on their research methods training and was located in political theory and practice. The format for assignments was brought into line with established coursework essay norms, encouraging greater emphasis on analytical approaches and drawing on primary and secondary research material. The experience of writing an original research assignment whereby students had some input in the scope of the research question gave greater ownership and encouraged a more personalised approach to learning. Each placement provider was provided with a placement-assessment form which provided opportunities to give feedback on the student's performance and also to identify positive and negative features of the placement programme as whole. This furnished students with constructive 'real' appraisal of their performance and also highlighted areas for improvement of the module. The module tutor contacted each placement provider to discuss placements and maintained relationships for possible placements for future cohorts.

## Room for improvement: reflections on new practice

The revisions introduced to the PWP module could be considered a qualified success, with many of the aims of the modifications partially or wholly met. There was an overwhelming shift in the focus of the placements achieved, with all placements incorporating explicitly political dimensions (see Figure 12.2).

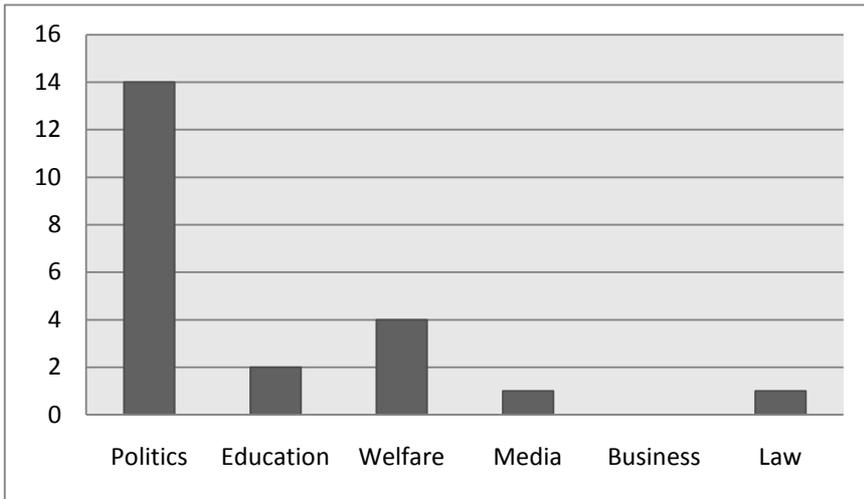


Figure 12.2 Placement vocation 2007/8.

Those students who worked in areas of welfare, media, law and education consciously shaped their learning agreements to ensure that they could link theory to practice. As one student who secured a placement teaching politics in a local school noted, ‘the class knows that my degree is politics and shockingly enough appear to value my knowledge on issues’. Students responded well to the shifting of responsibility, meaning the expectations and demands of the module were intensified: ‘Unlike a lot of the other modules, this one is very much about the student’s organisational skills and ability to get things done – you are much less “spoon-fed” than perhaps the more theoretical modules, which I think is good for beating a

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laissez-faire attitude to university.’ The potential for the placement to energise students and to build confidence was palpable, particularly with students who were sometimes overwhelmed in formal classroom environments. One such student working with a local MP suggested the experience ‘has been beneficial to me as it has improved my problem solving and communication skills’. Another, who was tasked with revising Kirklees Council’s Equality and Diversity agendas for transgender citizens, noted ‘training/workshop courses and self-research now mean that I know more about legislation relating to trans-people than anyone else in the council!’ The student concerned was invited by other local authorities to provide advice on drafting policy and is now working part-time for Kirklees Council.

Indeed, the renewed focus on the local dynamic of most placements has intensified links with local politicians and government, NGOs and local media. In particular, the successful placements of three students within Kirklees Council has led to a number of subsequent student-led projects, including the provision of citizenship workshops within local schools and the organising of a Local Democracy Week event for over eighty young people at the university. More importantly, such links have facilitated opportunities within Kirklees for the 2008–9 cohort, and the Policy and Governance Division is discussing the development of a graduate scheme. Eight students gained placements in the constituency offices of local MPs from all three main parties, and three were offered subsequent internships during the summer of 2008 at Westminster. Again, this has opened further opportunities for this year’s cohort, and two local MPs now offer placements with guaranteed internships at Westminster. Working in a pressured environment such as a constituency office encouraged one student to acknowledge ‘how hard the job is, often constituents have been hard to deal with and I have gained first hand experience of this’. It also enhanced knowledge of the relationship between local and national politicians; as another student commented, ‘before my work placement I didn’t realise the close and intricate relationship held between MPs and councillors, obviously I realised that they were members of the same party

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and that they would come across each other but thought they would work more separately.’

Overall, the quality of placements improved considerably, and many students noted that it had clarified their future career plans. One student who already worked within the Department of Work and Pensions was seconded to the national policy unit in Sheffield and was given responsibility for rolling out a new Job Centre Plus policy initiative across England. The experience had a marked effect on her and her future career plans. She noted that ‘my placement has been an important part of both my academic and work life. It has shown me new career options, made me contacts within the department and improved my position at work as they see how keen I am to stay within the department.’

However, for some students, the experience failed to stimulate interest in future careers and actually provided a more general understanding of an office environment which is more akin to the original work-placement scheme. One student, who had a placement with Unison, noted ‘I am not entirely sure I would like to go into this type of career, it has given me the experience to know I can work in an office.’ Some concerns endured as to the quality of the placements, with one student noting ‘specific skill learning has been short of content’. The embedding of the placement with the academic year was also not popular with all students. One commented ‘I think that maybe I would have gotten more out of it in the original format’, though he continued by noting ‘I also have a part-time job which would have been a problem if I were working somewhere else for six weeks.’ The new structures did not alleviate some of the problems identified earlier, particularly with students who were less motivated. Two students did not secure their placements until January, and both were unable to find a placement without considerable support. One of these two students secured a placement with the President of the Students’ Union at the University of Huddersfield but, even though he was working with friends, still managed to elicit negative feedback on his performance.

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The introduction of new forms of assessment also only partially addressed identified areas of concern. In particular, the online blogging was popular with many students and did encourage them to critically evaluate their progression during the placement. Those students who were well motivated provided some incisive evaluation of the impact of their placements and the challenges experienced. One student noted that ‘the placement was beneficial to me because I realised I may well have what it takes to become a lecturer but lack many of skills required.’ However, this remains an area of some concern. Some students did not complete their reports until after their placement had ended and provided little in-depth critical reflection. For many, the blogs were merely a forum to recount what they had done on placement. On reflection, the level of instruction for students on how to critically analyse their experiences was too brief and narrow in focus. The placement assignments were also of a deeply variable quality. Most students provided work of good quality and drew on a range of research skills to address an area which related to their placement. However, the 1,500 word limit restricted the more motivated students from developing their research, thus ensuring that many of the essays lacked clarity of argument and depth of analysis. Of more concern, some students still experienced difficulty in separating completely the blog and the assignment, meaning content was shared. This, on reflection, can be attributed in part to the failure to revise the pass/fail assessment in accordance with the graduated school assessment criteria. Students still felt the module lacked the academic value necessary to encourage them to engage in sustained and developed research and analysis.

Some the problems identified can be attributed to the developmental nature of the induction programme. Whilst the revised structure certainly improved the quality of the module, some students ‘felt abandoned’ after Week 5, and a minority felt unclear about the aims and objectives of the module even after the sessions. Although the attendance patterns of some of these students were patchy, it was clear that the induction sessions did not wholly succeed in ensuring that all students were clear about the module and its assessment in particular. Some students felt they lacked

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support after the induction period, particularly if they had not already secured a placement. Such criticisms have foundation and highlight areas for further consideration. Key to such shortcomings was the implications of the considerable resources required to manage the module. In particular, what became evidently clear during the year was the time required to supervise the module was insufficient. This meant that there was not time to visit all students either when learning agreements were signed (although I did speak to all placement providers by phone) or whilst students were on placement. This had a number of implications, the most notable being that not all students received an appropriate level of pastoral support. Moreover, some placement providers did not meet all aspects of the learning agreements, and minor problems that emerged were not addressed in a timely fashion. Finally, the potential to 'de-brief' students has not been realised, meaning that although there has been a noticeable energising of many students, there lacks a systemic approach to developing emergent themes into the third year.

### **Room for improvement? The development of placements at Huddersfield**

Focus on the political participation of young people, particularly those between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, has increased significantly in the past decade. The creation of a Youth Citizenship Commission as part of the ongoing Governance of Britain review (Ministry of Justice 2007) highlights the growing role that higher education institutions will be expected to play in developing political literacy and participation. Whilst it is unclear whether citizenship education will be formally introduced in higher education institutions as a direct mechanism for political socialisation, it is likely that it will play a greater role in many other education settings from primary schools to those in post-sixteen education and training, adult education and universities (National Foundation for Educational Research 2008).

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The teaching of citizenship challenges politics lecturers to consider whether curricula in universities across the UK should incorporate education *for* politics as well education *about* politics (Smith et al. 2008: 135). It is clear that the placement module goes some way to meeting such commitments, encouraging students to undertake experiential learning which develops skills for and about active citizenship. The quality of placements has improved in the past year, and the module is now firmly embedded within the politics programmes offered at Huddersfield. The revision of the module has established a more structured programme which has encouraged students to link the theory and practice of politics. This has been reflected in the significant number of students who are undertaking research for dissertations on themes that link to their placements. Indeed, there are two students who have chosen to take the PWP module in 2008/9 even though they will receive no credits for its successful completion. The success of the revised module has seen it rolled out across the Division of Criminology, Politics and Sociology, with a further fifteen non-politics students taking the module in 2008/9. Plans are in development to also offer the placement module to Erasmus Mundus scholarship students to add value to degree programmes offered.

The module has also raised awareness that good-quality placements can be attained within the local community which provide a rich academic and personal experience. There has been a discernable increase in the preparedness of students to undertake activities linked to active citizenship, and levels of volunteering have also improved. Students within the division are currently setting up a student society to host films, debates, lectures and field trips relating to their studies. The presence of politics students on the university campus and in the local community has visibly increased, this in part due to experiences gained within the PWP module. Moreover, the involvement of students in events such as Local Democracy Week has raised awareness of their own role in promoting democratic participation, both as citizens and as political educators. Future events are already being discussed with Kirklees Council involving not only students taking the module but also encouraging participation from first-

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year students. Such activities have proven important in developing a greater sense of collegiality amongst politics students and across the division.

This noted, there is considerable scope for further improvements to the module – some of which have been introduced in the academic year 2008/9 but many which will need to be introduced over a longer period. During the summer of 2008, the pass/fail assessment was revised and is now in accordance with the graduated school assessment criteria. Students are now expected to complete three blog reports of 500 words during their placement and a research assignment which has increased to 2,500 words in length that focuses on a project which is agreed by the student, module tutor and placement provider. Students are expected to present a short abstract which outlines the research question and identifies modes of research to be undertaken during the placement which will contribute to the successful completion of their assignment. These revisions will give the module greater academic value, thus further enhancing its place in the politics curriculum, and are further supplemented by an extended and more focused induction programme. Further emphasis has been placed on supporting less motivated students to find good-quality placements, and supplementary sessions have been set up to provide guidance on blogging and critical reflection.

Furthermore, first-year students have been encouraged to begin thinking about their placements at an earlier stage and to undertake some form of volunteering. Indeed, evidence from the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project and from other programmes within Huddersfield University would suggest that many students change their placement choices after volunteering during their first year. Third-year students will be offered a post-placement ‘debriefing’ interview which is supplemented by a group session given by the university tutor, ‘Hands On’ volunteering staff and the Careers Office. In this session, students will be encouraged to discuss their experiences and career plans. Where appropriate, these interviews will be filmed and a resource built for future cohorts to use. The Careers Office has also held Careers Express ‘drop-in’

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clinics during the first few weeks of the new term, and students have been encouraged to undertake some form of volunteering either on campus or in the community.

However, the greatest challenge remains the limited resources allocated to the module. The development of good pedagogic practice needs to be complemented by appropriate resources to ensure the module is run in a proactive and professional manner. Moreover, additional resources are required to build and sustain long-term relationships with placement providers. Although the number of teaching hours allocated has been increased this year, this remains insufficient to fully meet the demands of the module. The ability of a single module tutor to visit all placement providers and to maintain an appropriate level of pastoral support is limited by other teaching and research demands. The core issue is the lack of recognition that the successful delivery of the placement module differs to other modules due to its increased needs and challenges. This has meant that although students are getting better quality placements, the full potential of the module is yet to be realised both in encouraging work-based learning and enhancing active citizenship in the community.

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## **Chapter 13**

# **Exploring Scrutiny and Democracy: A Student's Perspective**

*Jordan Walmsley*

For most of the students on my course, looking for a placement provider started at the beginning of our second year when the placement module began. We were all aware that the placement module was in our second year so over the summer of 2007 I scanned the internet for a placement that provided relevant experience for a politics student. The Policy and Governance Department at Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council offered a range of opportunities which I felt would develop my knowledge of local government and democracy. I wrote to the Head of Policy and Governance to enquire about the possibility of a placement that would meet the fifteen-day requirement for the module. I received his enthusiastic reply within the next week informing me that it would be possible to provide a placement. From what I already knew about the Policy and Governance Department, it was going to be the perfect place to take me out of my comfort zone and into an environment where I could gain real experience.

On starting the work-placement module I was impressed with the way it was structured. The format of the module provided specific lectures ranging from finding a placement provider to writing a letter of application and creating a CV. A number of students had never had a job and were unsure of what kinds of placement and career opportunities were available to politics students. This is not a reflection of their ability but of their lack of experience. The structure of induction sessions helped students to gain valuable experience, with some getting good placements working with MPs and in the civil service.

The placement itself consisted of fifteen days on placement which I broke down into two parts to fit it around my university work. Although I fitted my placement into holiday periods, some students found it difficult

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to find time out of university to complete their placements. These two parts of my placement were very different experiences, both in structure and in what I learnt. The first period, where I was based at the Civic Centre in Huddersfield, allowed me to experience a variety of different aspects of the workings of local democracy across the whole department. This involved meeting with the heads of the various teams within the department and finding out what they did. As I had never been in an office environment or worked in a political environment, this was a new and interesting experience. It was interesting meeting the different people that worked in this department who provided valuable insights into how local government works.

This first two-week period introduced me to the different aspects of formal and informal meetings, neither of which I had had any opportunity to experience previously. Formal meetings like the scrutiny committee meetings I attended gave an opportunity to see what research councillors undertook in a range of policy areas. Councillors and scrutiny co-optees presented their progress and findings to the relevant scrutiny committee which then evaluated the research and provided constructive feedback. These meetings were entirely councillor-driven and were very formal. After the meeting, having taken in a lot of information which was in part quite complex, I felt a sense of achievement as I was able to understand most of what was going on and felt much more confident because of the experience.

I also attended a scrutiny meeting in Wakefield on city regions, in this case, the Leeds City Region. Everyone in attendance was a scrutiny officer from the local authorities involved in the Leeds City Region. The focus of the meeting was the need for improved scrutiny of the Leeds City Region Executive as it had started to make decisions that would affect people within its jurisdiction. As scrutiny works hand in hand with democracy, as a check and balance, decisions being made without formal scrutiny were arguably undemocratic as the executive is not being held to account. My previous experiences of scrutiny meetings meant I felt more confident in this meeting. Although I had very little input, since I did not

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have enough background knowledge to make suggestions, it was very interesting seeing how much officers were keen to promote democratic practice. By the end of the meeting, on the way back to Huddersfield, I had an in-depth discussion with officers about the need for scrutiny of the Leeds City Region. After this meeting, I was able to have a debate with a very experienced officer about these issues. We also had the opportunity to debate other issues such as recent de-industrialisation in the Huddersfield area and the need to modernise public services. It was interesting being with people who took an interest in my views on a range of political issues.

At the end of this first period with Kirklees I was asked to choose a team within the department to spend my second part of the placement with. Since I found I was learning more about scrutiny and its importance to democratic processes, I chose that team. In the time between the first part of the placement and the second, I communicated with Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council and was told that a project would be put together for me regarding scrutiny. I would be working in a section of that office which was separate from the Civic Centre in which I had previously worked. I communicated with the head of the scrutiny team and told him of the dates that I would be in his office. However, there was a period of about six weeks during which no communication took place, and this proved to be something of a mistake.

Unfortunately, when I arrived at the scrutiny office, starting back at my placement, they had somehow mixed the dates up and had me down for later in the year. Therefore, they were not expecting me to begin the second part of my placement. This highlighted that more communication between myself and my placement provider should have taken place so problems could be minimised. Nevertheless, they seemed enthusiastic that I was there, and the terms of the project were quickly agreed. Since I had attended a scrutiny meeting regarding city regions on my first two weeks, one of my projects was to find out at what stage other city regions were at regarding scrutiny development. It was interesting researching city regions in general as they have been created due to the understanding that people no longer live their lives within the boundaries of local governments, and,

thus, issues such as transport should be managed by areas that accurately reflect people's travelling habits.

As part of my research, I emailed two different councils from each of the thirteen city regions and asked scrutiny councillors to what extent scrutiny existed for their city-region executive. Most of the councillors replied and reported that either their city region's progress had not reached the stage where scrutiny was necessary or they had not started with any scrutiny of the city region. Only one city region, the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH), had set up a scrutiny process and was having the first scrutiny meeting in the coming month. I presented my findings to the scrutiny team who appeared pleased they were ahead of other city regions. Within the Leeds City Region itself, Kirklees is by far the most proactive with regards to scrutiny and leading on ideas. This is also true in other areas of the council, which is why Kirklees was chosen as Council of the Year in 2008.

The other project was research on whether other councils across the country were scrutinising aspects of local life and government, for example, regeneration with regards to health policy. This, at first, was a little tedious as it involved searching through endless committee meeting minutes to find details on, for example, to what extent successful regeneration affects infant mortality rates or health statistics. This became more interesting as I developed some specialised knowledge concerning the connections between the extent that an area had success with regeneration and health issues. The project developed my research skills, particularly using the Internet to find and interpret reports on how different councils operate and the extent they can improve the lives of their citizens. However, although the two projects were interesting and I learnt a great deal from them, I was finding my time in the scrutiny office a little tedious. As it was Easter, some of the staff from the office were on holiday on different days, and political activity seemed to be coming to a close before the 'Purdah' period. Some changes in staffing meant it was very busy at the same time meaning officers had less time to spend with me.

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However, the placement provided an opportunity to get involved with the Local Democracy week. As I was doing my work placement with Kirklees, I was able to establish ties between the Council and the University of Huddersfield. It was decided that for the Local Democracy week, Kirklees and the University would work to put on a series of workshops and a Question Time for young people in local communities. Since this issue had been touched upon whilst on my placement, I put together two workshops about 'Rights and Responsibilities'. The day was a great success, ending with a question-time event where the young people were able to question local councillors on issues such as the right to vote at sixteen and environmental issues.

Overall, the experience of my work placement was very positive, and I have learned new skills which drew on knowledge gained during my studies but within a local-government environment. I feel so much more confident about public speaking, particularly in meetings. Talking to councillors and officers has given me more confidence in formal situations which will be very valuable to me in future. Working in a scrutiny office in Kirklees enhanced my understanding of local democracy – it was an exciting political environment. The placement also provided opportunities to develop my research skills and has contributed to my academic progression. I did have one issue with the length and structure of the placement. Fifteen days is simply not enough to get to grips with the working of any office and does not allow one to acquire the necessary skills needed to really shine. Although many students in the past have complained that it is difficult to financially sustain themselves on placements over the summer, I would suggest that opportunities are provided for students who wish to extend this period. It has been a fantastic experience for me and my fellow students, many of whom have found possible career paths to follow.

## **Chapter 14**

# **The Community-Based Research Initiative at Oxford Brookes University: The Emerging Model in Social Sciences and Law**

*Richard Huggins and John Kelly*

### **Introduction**

Community-based research (CBR) offers students in higher education a distinctive form of engaged scholarship and a transformative approach to undergraduate research, teaching and learning and critical engagement (Jansen et al. 2006; Kiely 2005; McIlrath and Mac Labhrainn 2007; Mobley 2007). In addition, it offers the opportunity for students to place their discipline within a wider social context that enhances both learning and the student experience (Parilla and Hesser 1998). The model proposes the development of an initiative in community-based research that is genuinely collaborative and driven by community interests in terms of identifying the issues for investigation, research and analysis. In this sense, the model builds on central aspects of other initiatives, such as the founding ethos of the Reinvention Centre (a centre of excellence based at both the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University), which seeks to develop elements of Ernest Boyer's work in terms of civic engagement, reinvention of the undergraduate learning experience and the role of universities within their communities (Boyer 1990, 1996; Boyer Commission 1998). This chapter will explore the literature and proponents of CBR that influenced our formation of a CBR initiative at Oxford Brookes and review the progress we have made over our pilot year.

## **CBR principles and rationale from community and political perspectives**

Boyer's work has been very influential in the USA and, of late, in the UK. The Carnegie Foundation has continued to fund major projects building on his work. A variety of models and projects have been inspired by Boyer's ideas, such as the Reinvention Centre at Stony Brook, New York University, *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, and the Arts of Citizenship Program at the University of Michigan, provide various examples of critical engagement with 'the scholarship of engagement' within and across various institutions. Such developments pose interesting questions concerning the role and scope of university education and learning and reflect considerable scholarly concerns with the scope of active learning, citizenship, student and university–community engagement and the application of knowledge and skills outside the classroom (Brew 1999, 2003; Harkavy 2006; Jansen et al. 2006).

One of the main concerns with those involved with CBR within universities is the relationship between researcher and research subject. For universities to engage fully with communities in their research practices there are many obstacles to be considered when implementing CBR initiatives, such as ownership of findings, subject involvement in design, sustainability of projects, etc. Marcia Hills and Jennifer Mullett (2000) analysed the relationship between subject and researcher and proposed an alternative paradigm. In contrast to traditional epistemological understandings of the objective and the study of the 'real world', Hills and Mullett suggest that extended epistemology allows the researcher to participate in the 'real world' and remove the detachment that is so heavily valued and regarded in order to be objective. CBR endorses the notion of practical knowing where the researcher participates in the world they are trying to understand and can create a subjective–objective understanding.

Warwick-Booth (2005) presents three different understandings of CBR from different commentators:

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1. Richard Sclove (cited in Warwick-Booth 2005) argues that community-based research can be defined as research rooted in the community, serving a community's interests and frequently encouraging citizens to participation at all levels.
2. Hills and Mullett (2000) describe a community-based approach as valuing the contribution that community groups make in the development of knowledge about the community. Thus, community-based research is a form of collaboration between community groups and researchers to create new knowledge to bring about change.
3. Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein (cited in Warwick-Booth 2005) describe it as a collaborative approach to research that involves all partners in the research process and recognises the unique strengths that each brings.

Within the UK, the political and social context of community self-evaluation has been considered a tool in social-regeneration projects in recent years, especially in government and local government. CBR is increasingly considered a means of empowering and increasing awareness and understanding within communities, leading to greater participation and motivation in community designed models for improvement (Warwick-Booth 2005). Regeneration projects can be regarded as being heavily project-managed with strict financial control that stifles community involvement. This can lead to target-driven projects that restrict the input of a community in their design (Warwick-Booth 2005). For those that endorse CBR there is a failure to produce meaningful outcomes from such target-driven and heavily expert-controlled research. There is a disharmony between what needs to be examined by the community and what is deemed necessary by the investigator. According to Green, social programmes should be accountable for the difference they make in the lives of their participants and not just for providing service-based initiatives (cited in Warwick-Booth 2005). Implicating communities in CBR programmes empowers the community towards sustaining such

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programmes by reducing the reliance on professionals and administrative organisations. Target communities can therefore continuously steer regeneration in the context of *their* needs through *their* agendas.

The current political context of community empowerment in contemporary local-government policy would seem to have a strong resonance with the ideals of CBR. The Community Development Exchange (CDX) is a UK organisation advocating community development that has created a set of principles for community empowerment: ‘What is Community Empowerment?’ (2008). This paper contains community-development values that include: the recognition of community skills and expertise, equality, democratic and cooperative participation and working towards social justice. Another set of principles within this document, named Dimensions of Community Empowerment, presents the dimensions for progressive community involvement including:

- working in ways that increase peoples’ skills, knowledge and confidence;
- inclusion for all those who are affected by the community issues at stake;
- recognising that exclusion exists within communities requiring organisation around common goals and cooperative and democratic decision-making processes.

The paper values many of the principles endorsed by advocates of CBR. Sustainability, mutual respect and challenging traditional power structures are listed as core mission values of community empowerment. CBR creates new means of producing knowledge which is very much compatible with the policies and values of empowering communities.

Both at policy level and at local-government level there has been in recent years an impetus towards community empowerment in decision-making and actions affecting community issues and resources. In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government produced a consultation paper ‘An Action Plan for Community Empowerment Building on Success’ (Department for Communities and Local Government

The Community-Based Research Initiative at Oxford Brookes University 2007). The political climate is certainly in favour of initiatives that endorse community involvement, and CBR is a means of empowering communities if it is designed, proposed and conducted with best-practice values. The paper discusses the need to close power gaps between disadvantaged communities and local government. The paper suggests that severely underprivileged communities would benefit the most from empowerment schemes but tend to be the most marginalised. Community leaders have reported feeling stifled working with statutory organisations and that their input is not valued to the degree it should be.

This presents a problematic situation for progressive community empowerment, but in other ways an opportunity for alternative partnerships aside from statutory and non-statutory coalitions. The potential for deprived areas, community leaders and community groups working with universities is very powerful, through providing resources for CBR projects at the sharp end of exclusion that may produce new community opportunities and new angles of academic research.

## **Student opportunities and advocacy**

There have been numerous collaborations between students and communities on projects organised by universities, colleges and community action groups, predominately in the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK. Understanding the effects these have on student learning, course programmes and the regard students have towards such projects is key in determining the potential for ongoing CBR initiatives or centres. The following examples were chosen on the basis of their varying analyses of their practices and outcomes.

A student and community collaboration project was undertaken by the University of New South Wales in Australia as part of a course component. The findings of this research have been written up in 'Student Involvement in Action Research: The Role of Community Gardens in Neighbourhood Renewal' by Linda Corkery (2003), who was responsible for teaching the course component Environmental Sociology for Landscape

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Architects. Both Corkery and a colleague Bruce Judd decided to allow students to work in a service-learning partnership on garden and streetscape design projects. Positive outcomes were noted, such as allowing students to work in multicultural contexts and the ability to demonstrate research activities and strategies through a direct and relevant medium. Students undertook various types of projects in their research including landscape evaluations, independent study projects, compiling and assisting in on-site interviews and focus groups. The views of student researchers from the project gives an indication of how they believed their experience was different from conventional undergraduate learning:

The skills I gained from this exercise were foresight and persistence. . . . The responsibility and energy to ensure I finished this project were generally my own. I suppose this has given me confidence but also encouraged me to think far more when I set my goals and objectives. . . . The practical outcome . . . of assisting a fairly under-resourced area was a good incentive to continue.

I found the work at Waterloo very beneficial; it was good to deal with the community at first hand and face to face. I have since used this experience in interviews . . . in community consultation. I found it beneficial as the project was directly relevant to a practical application . . . and it was obvious that the things we were doing needed attention. It was also good to feel like I was doing something worthwhile (quoted in Corkery 2003: 3).

Catherine Mobley at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, USA, conducted research on students who had undertaken a service-learning initiative and presented the design of the project and the findings from her research on student attitudes in her paper 'Breaking Ground: Engaging Undergraduates in Social Change through Service Learning' (2007). The service-learning projects began in 2001 and entailed students working with Coalition, which supports the homeless in South Carolina, by organising events for National Hunger and Homelessness Week. Mobley's intentions were to engage students in specific concepts, to increase

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students' feelings of self-efficacy to engage in social change efforts and to challenge student perceptions of individuals who are homeless. Techniques included integrated lectures, frequent project meetings, policy research about homelessness, celebration and reflection. The research into student attitudes included a pre-test and post-test to determine their perceptions and skills relating to policy and advocacy. Students on the social-policy course who did not participate in the project were also presented with the test. Post-Breaking Ground students were found to consider 'working towards equal opportunity' as being essential to them personally and were more likely to agree with the statements 'most misfortunes that occur are a result of circumstances beyond their control' and 'I feel that I can have a positive impact on local social problems' after completing the project and also in comparison with the control group that had not undertaken the community-based project. There was a significant change regarding the students' attitudes towards social justice as a whole after completing the course, and the opinions of project students changed towards the causes of homelessness. The control group appeared to foster a belief in structural causes for homelessness in the post-tests, whereas the Breaking Ground students' attitudes changed very clearly towards a belief in community activity and community service. The social-policy group completed a more in-depth study into causes of homelessness and discussion time with peers through presentations. The project did less in-depth research but had grass-roots experience with homelessness. For Mobley, the shift in students' attitudes regarding homelessness from the project group provides proof that community-service projects can enliven the social world for students.

The tangible outcomes for the community's homeless were that students actively helped in support for the homeless; campaigns and fund-raising initiatives were undertaken. The aims of the project were met in part: efficacy towards social advocacy of students was seen to increase, and students were found to drastically change their opinions about the causes of social problems (Mobley 2007). This project does indicate that by engaging students in community research and activity, as well as academic

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study, they seem to develop a more rounded appreciation of social phenomena because they can apply their understanding in a real environment. The study suggests that research engagement in the community is perhaps at an optimum for students when they are studying their broader courses. There is also an argument that students who participate in community activities may have a clearer idea of how their study can enable them to participate in society, either through employment or community schemes, etc.

The perceptions of students towards CBR schemes at Harvard University were reported by Derek Bok (2007). Schemes included a limited number of courses whereby students could work outside the university on activity-based learning (ABL) projects. The pilots were designed to assess the practicality of such schemes, and recommendations were made for similar projects. The investigation into student attitudes found several difficulties students encountered with time management, understanding what was required of them and knowing how to approach such research in the correct manner. As well as citing student concerns, the paper reported the concerns of teaching staff after interviews were held with them. Their key concerns were: time commitment and workload management in course development; training and course organisation; lack of awareness of ABL pilot project; and funding.

The report makes the following recommendations for activity-based learning:

- Present students with clear course and research expectations.
- Make allowances for the time requirements of undertaking CBR for students who have to juggle such projects with their other course commitments.
- Introduce ethnographic research methods to students before they undertake projects.
- Make clear grading and evaluation of student projects.
- At the recruitment stage of any CBR scheme, make clear the involvement and requirements of the project through

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promotional materials (many students were not aware of the full potential of what was on offer, and some were not at all aware of the schemes).

- Ensure community partnerships are based on shared understanding of principles and objectives.
- Implement long-term planning and strategies to ensure the projects are well administered and funded.

These analyses of student attitudes to CBR projects suggest that students regard them as fulfilling and ultimately beneficial. The addition of active placement learning alongside traditional academic study has proven that with the necessary planning and supervision the student experience can be enlivened and enriched. In this sense, our initiative seeks to develop elements of ‘active citizenship’ and a critical scholarship of engagement that encourages students to reflect on both the nature of their discipline and the critical skills that their discipline can bring to action and understanding in the social world (McIntyre 2006; McIlrath and Mac Labhrainn 2007; Reardon 1994).

## **The CBR initiative in Social Sciences and Law at Oxford Brookes University**

At Oxford Brookes, our CBR initiative has drawn on examples of best practice from programmes in the USA (for example Michigan, Penn State, Tufts, Boston, MIT) and work in the UK (for example, the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics and other FDTL5 projects, Birkbeck, Liverpool Hope, Roehampton) – with which the project lead has established links – to develop a sustainable model of community-based research that will facilitate civic and outward-facing student engagement and that will support a number of strategic objectives within the Brookes Student Learning Experience Strategy, including linking research, learning and teaching, enhancing student personal development, development of

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project and transferable skills and enhancing employability (Barnett 2007; Taylor 2007).

In the summer of 2008, Richard Huggins, the Assistant Dean of Social Sciences and Law (SS&L), and John Kelly, the Outreach and Student Research Coordinator, began work on the CBR model and initiative within SS&L at Brookes. The first steps were to create a strategy and plan for the year ahead and to reflect on our initial attempts to instigate undergraduate involvement in community research. To start with we contacted statutory and non-statutory community organisations and discussed the possibility of forging research partnerships based on mutually beneficial aims:

1. a potential context for student involvement in an organisation that would prove beneficial to our partner;
2. meaningful, manageable and intellectual involvement criteria for potential student participants.

Negotiation of community partnerships was always encouraged to start with the potential for the community. It was vital to ensure that we did not create projects that merely facilitated a placement scheme for students. By listening to the agendas of the organisations we talked to, we managed to identify areas of potential for us to work with partners on. We employed a tactic of approaching third-party organisations that have contact with many small community groups as smaller community initiatives are easily overlooked. Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council were obvious points of contact that seemed to provide a channel of communication to smaller community projects. We also spoke to the Oxfordshire Community Foundation as they fund many small initiatives. It has been vital to maintain the impetus with the groups of people involved in the pilot CBR initiative. Even if we have not worked together this year, the ultimate aim of the CBR centre will be a well-networked community-research model for students and communities. As well as local project proposals we instigated an international partnership with the Palestinian Centre for Communication and Development Studies in Hebron. Our aim for the first year of the pilot CBR initiative was that

The Community-Based Research Initiative at Oxford Brookes University students would work on at least two to three of the proposed projects, and others would be developed to be worked on the following year.

## **Project outcomes 2008/9**

### *Neighbourhood Policing Engagement Project*

The police facilitated the involvement of student volunteers to assist with the annual Public Consultation Survey in Marston, Oxford. Students went from door to door and assisted in school surveys. Following this involvement, some students undertook a number of research strands. These included:

- visual audits of the Marston area;
- media analysis of crime, disorder and policing for comparison to the priorities raised by the survey;
- an assessed independent study by a student on the portrayal of the police in the media;
- a follow-up survey and analysis of results by two students on the impact of police consultation and national policing issues on public confidence in the police in Marston;
- assistance and practical insight for a dissertation student's writing on the war on drugs;
- and a news report made by a media and film student on the project overall with interviews from Brookes' staff, students and police officers.

### *Ex-service personnel and homelessness in Oxfordshire*

Working with the Royal British Legion (RBL), two Geography students undertook an initial study into the extent of ex-service personnel homelessness. They interviewed key figures and looked at statistical data to create a report as part of their independent study module. This formed an initial phase of our partnership with the RBL.

## **Project work 2009/10**

### *My Life My Choice (MLMC): digital stories*

MLMC work with young people who have learning difficulties. This project has independent funding sources as well as being supported through Brookes' Outreach Learning Programme. The project entails making short films/digital stories about members' experiences of accessing health services. This will be taking place from September with the involvement of Oxford Brookes students and staff as technical support. Students will also undertake reflections on how well they thought workshops held at Brookes worked, as well as the potential to expand the project into other areas of academic study. MLMC have also proposed working with students who have information technology and communication (ITC) skills to create a programme that will encourage the training and enhancement of ITC skills through combining the gaming software of Solitaire within a skills programme.

### *Oxfordshire User Team (OUT)*

OUT are commissioned to carry out a service-user survey by Oxfordshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team each year. In 2009/10, students from SS&L will work with OUT to review and enhance the research tools employed, to manage data outputs, to complete summary outputs and to locate this work in the context of wider policy framework both nationally and locally.

### *Political, social and cultural comparative project: Palestinian Centre for Communication and Development Studies*

Two psychology students worked with the centre in Hebron to create a timeline for the project. This commenced in June 2009, and the intention is to complete the work by August 2009. The project will involve video conferencing and other forms of communication to create a comparative piece of work that will be stitched together in both Hebron and Oxford and cross-analysed.

### *Ex-service personnel homelessness*

The RBL is very keen to promote the issue of rural ex-service personnel homelessness to key sectors in homeless service provision and policy-making. Therefore we hope to be able to assist in the coming year. Our willingness and RBL's intent to work with us again has been communicated, and we hope to progress towards new proposals in the coming months.

### *Neighbourhood Police Project*

We hope to remain involved in the area of consultation as we made such positive contributions through our student involvement in the first year. Structural implementation of the CBR initiative would allow greater engagement in this area through survey analysis by students in research methods modules in SS&L. We have continued to discuss various potential research criteria and means of progression with the police.

## **Reflections and evaluation**

In June 2009, Oxford Brookes hosted a conference to present and discuss the student work and future proposals and to draw suggestions and ideas for the coming academic year. The visual and written representations of student research were well received by Oxford Brookes' staff, community partners and members of the public. This event portrayed a cross-section of the initiative from proposals and rationale discussed by our partners and ourselves, and then discussion with students on how their work progressed and came to fruition. The event closed with a discussion on the future direction of the CBR initiative. The issues and queries raised were as follows:

- How does the work on the CBR initiative feed into the broader issues of community life in Oxford such as social deprivation?
- Are and how are the coordinating team planning to ensure that the research partnerships that recruit students for one or two years at a time remain sustainable and longitudinal?

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- How does the reflection of academia translate into action on the part of community institutions within the CBR partnership?
- The question of centralisation of the initiative within the university was raised. Would this enhance the recruitment, project potential (multidisciplinary) and efficiency of the initiative?
- Is there scope for a multi-organisational approach?
- Regarding the Neighbourhood Policing Project, is there scope to extend the involvement in the police–public consultation process to create an analysis of public survey results across many neighbourhoods in Oxford? And will Brookes and the Thames Valley Police be able to work together to recommend an improved means of delivering public consultation?
- Where will the publication of these and future projects take place and who will they be accessible to?

### **Where next?**

Addressing the reflections and queries listed above is an appropriate means of gauging our progress and contemplating how we aim to move forward with the initiative. Many of these considerations were also our own, and it was interesting to hear people, unfamiliar with the CBR initiative prior to the conference, asking the same questions. All of the queries raised were pressing issues that need to form a part of our pilot-year review.

One of the hardest questions to answer after running the pilot was whether this initiative acts in any form on community life as it is lived for citizens and does it impinge on social deprivation? We believe that involving a public resource such as a university in as many ways as possible in local communities is a valuable use of resources. The CBR initiative at Brookes is just one of the ways we can be involved and provide a resource/service through mutually beneficial partnership with community organisations. In this year's pilot schemes, for example, the

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Neighbourhood Policing Project has meant students and staff have input ideas that may facilitate greater participation in police consultations in the future. These ideas will need to be piloted, and we hope that Brookes will be involved in this. The local community has been aware of our involvement with the police, and the feedback from residents has been positive. Some local residents from the area in which we undertook our study with the police attended the conference.

For the pilot projects to have a more significant impact, it is clear that the research partnerships we create will have to become longitudinal and sustainable. This is a community engagement principle that occurs time after time in the literature surrounding CBR. For those who attended the conference that did not have academic or social research backgrounds it was also an important issue and one of the main queries raised in the discussions. It is clear in our project plans for next year that we aim to expand the CBR centre in SS&L, but we also plan to work with the RBL and the police once more. We have made these projects our priority as we need to consolidate our partnerships as part of our commitment to sustainability.

How do we and our partners act on the findings from the research? This again is a question of ongoing and sustainable partnerships. The research may vary in the amount of action that can be taken on the part of the organisation or by the university, but the university will aim to remain involved wherever possible. Following the current project work this will be assisting with alternative means of consultation with the police in the future. Further inquiry into the extent of ex-service personnel homelessness in rural Oxfordshire will feature in future project work in our partnership with the RBL.

Due to the university's proximity as a major institution within the city we have the potential to enrich CBR research projects through creating a community research network. This enriches the experience for students and widens the potential of small, stand-alone research projects. For example, to broaden our research partnership with the RBL we are planning to involve Oxfordshire Nightshelters in the homelessness study

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this coming academic year. Overall we have expanded and cemented research partnerships with smaller community organisations (listed under 'Project work 2009/10' above).

We were able to confirm at the conference that part of our commitment to a community-centred initiative at Oxford Brookes was a shared approach to the findings. This will take the form of web-based data, accessible by all. We also aim to assist in the sharing of data produced by our initiative where requested by community partners in other forms.

The questions of research networking, community action and sustainable partnerships are all connected to the need for the CBR initiative to be centralised within the university. This has proven difficult on two levels. First, the Reinvention Centre is one umbrella under which the CBR initiative has grown (the School of Social Sciences and Law being the other), but the Reinvention Centre covers a great deal of other research areas other than community and civic engagement. Therefore it is not possible to embed our centre there. Second, we lack the centralised resources with which to embed the centre as a multidisciplinary CBR initiative (although we recruit students from any school within the university). The resources required would not be significantly large, and the initial costs would be the heaviest as coordinating the centre would be less resource-intensive were it fully embedded within the academic structure of the institution. Therefore, whatever form the CBR initiative takes in the future is largely dependent on our position within Oxford Brookes University.

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## **Chapter 15**

# **Citizenship as a Roadmap for Change: The Strange Death and Resurrection of Politics**

*Jonathan Gorry*

### **Introduction**

Max Weber famously saw the practice of politics as the ‘strong and slow boring of hard boards’ (1958: 128). If so, some tough wood is to be found in the platforms on which those who teach politics stand. These are rough times, and rougher times lie ahead, with some university politics and international relations departments facing too few students, declining revenue, deteriorating student–staff ratios, job cuts and ever-increasing commercialisation. And this despite a dramatic increase in the number of applications to undergraduate political science programmes nationally. Can we, in the spirit of 1968, thus hope to be ‘realistic while demanding the impossible’? Crucially, can we make our voices heard over those who ask in ever strident tones what a non-professional or vocational degree is for? What does it do? How useful is it? The contention of this chapter is that one answer may be found in perhaps ploughing fresh fields: the method is to provide a ‘nuts and bolts’ review of the University of Northampton’s proposal for a BA in Citizenship.

### **Fresh boards**

As teachers of politics we are, or should be, passionate about our subject. (Weber was surely right when he noted our vocation requires a definite passion like unto the Passion.) The ‘who gets what, where, why and how’ questions cannot be any more important. Yet young people in particular seem disengaged from voting, political parties and electoral politics more

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generally (Sloam 2008). The word 'politics' stands as a dirty word, inevitably tarnished by popular anger over 'flipped' mortgages, expense scandals and politicians who don't seem to understand or care. But people are nevertheless interested in *political issues*: poverty, the War on Terror, themes of justice, the financial crisis, the environment *ad infinitum*. If the word 'politics' needs rescuing from bad repute, universities should not look the other way. Regrettably however:

So much [university] funding simply follows measurable productivity, multiplying useless and needless publication of articles, the majority of which are rarely read by anybody, as if every teacher had to be, or pretended to be, an original scholar. And now there is little funding for extramural teaching, such departments diminished or collapsing all over the country; for funding now overwhelmingly favours vocational, certificated courses. Those in the community who value education for its own sake and non-vocational study are now left out in the cold or charged 'the real cost' which excludes much real need. Lifelong learning does not mean a multiplication of qualifications (Crick 2000: 144–5).

This commercialisation of the sector began with the predominately vocational, economic thrust of the Thatcher years but found willing apostles in government and university management up to and including the New Labour project. Issues such as employability, teaching quality and research assessment have dominated the agenda. How we as teachers of politics respond to these issues is surely important, but there is a sense that our discipline has been out-manoeuvred. As Bernard Crick neatly put it nearly a decade ago, politics has 'locked itself up, or been locked up where it can do no harm, in the ivory tower' (2000: 113). But things do not have to be this way: 'citizenship education' is an idea whose time has come.

Citizenship education is by no means a new subject and has been debated by British educationalists for at least forty years. But since the 1990s we have witnessed an explosion of interest (see Callan 1997; Heater 1993, 2004; Crick 2000; Faulks 2000; Kivisto and Faist 2007). Such debate led to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

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establishing an advisory group in citizenship education under the able chair of Professor Crick and the publication of the Crick Report, *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*, in 1988. The Crick Report was massively influential, and, since 2002, citizenship has been a compulsory component of the National Curriculum for all school pupils from primary to post-sixteen. Moreover, the role of universities in promoting citizenship education was formally recognised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in its strategic plan for the period 2006 to 2011:

[Higher Education] plays a key role in developing active citizens, and sustaining a civilised, more tolerant and inclusive society. Graduates are, on average, more likely to vote in elections, hold more tolerant attitudes to other races, and are more likely to be involved in their communities through voluntary activities (HEFCE 2006: para. 42).

This is by no means novel thinking, and such ‘traditional liberal’ aims found currency in 1854 with John Henry Newman’s *Idea of a University*, before being mimicked by the Robbins Report of the 1960s and reiterated by Dearing’s *Higher Education for the 21st Century* in the 1990s. If this citizenship project is left to the micro-managers, however, it seems possible that such sentiments will be interpreted to include simplistic policies of the type that model the university’s working week on that of schools in order to create ‘real’ university communities not ‘virtual’ ones (cf. Attwood 2009 on Liverpool Hope’s assault on home-working and the autonomy of academic life). Nevertheless, and although the Funding Council is silent on how this goal is to be realised (Smith et al. 2008), teaching citizenship should be seen as a part of a wider pedagogical framework in which a student’s education is a participatory transformative experience. Our vocation as teachers likewise surely demands not just that we cultivate critical intelligence but that we also reflect on issues that are important to us both morally and socially. One thing we certainly could do here is to make clear to ourselves our own stated and unstated presuppositions about what both university and notions of community

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mean, for ‘universities are part of society and, in both senses of the word, a critical part which should be playing a major role in the wider objectives of creating a citizenship culture’ (Crick 2000: 144–5). Perhaps we need to (re)discover our mission, our sense of progressive purpose. At the very least, citizenship is an opportunity to make a difference where it does matter. (Perhaps herein lies another argument to open up our modules to non-social-science subjects as ‘tempters’ or ‘tasters’ and as a consequence aim to break down disciplinary barriers.)

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this new citizenship undergraduate programme is to foster within students understanding of, and enthusiasm for, the contested idea ‘citizenship’. It was Aristotle’s *Politics* that demonstrated state and citizen as inherently political but nonetheless moral concepts. This in itself raises questions about who citizens are, what politics is and the resources necessary to drive society forward and to achieve the common good. On this view, readings of citizenship must be seen as historically derived alternatives and contentions. There is thus a clear tension to be explored between ideals of good civics (e.g., learning facts, figures, the need to obey state laws, etc.), and the challenges of active citizenship (e.g., wars on poverty, injustice, the power of protest, etc.). For Aristotle, ‘he who has not learned to obey cannot be a good commander. Ruling and obeying are two different things, but the good citizen ought to be capable of both; civic virtue consists in knowing how to govern like a freeman and how to obey like a freeman’ (1959: 73). From this casting of rights and responsibilities, there is a real difference to be assessed between the British experience of being subject to Crown and the American and French sense of citizenship as something being gained from below via blood, sweat and tears. ‘Put simply, a subject obeys the laws and a citizen plays a part in making and changing them’ (Crick 2000: 4). And this debate in turn encourages a particular pedagogy in at least two ways.

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First, it offers opportunity to widen participation by dialoguing increasing interest in the politics of identity post-9/11. The security implications of the events of 9/11, and the impact of global developments on everyday lives, are present in the public mind as never before. Indeed, it could be argued that the structure of political and sociological discourse has in fact shifted from the local and national level towards a much greater concern with (and about) issues of social engagement more generally. The controversies of *jihad*, Hugo Chávez's participatory democracy, Barack Obama's previous life as a community organiser and Gordon Brown's emphasis on 'British values', all illustrate that the idea of citizenship that has cultural capital and currency all of its own. Second, and precisely because citizenship is a lesson in and about social engagement, its successful study requires the insight and methods of a number of disciplines. A single award in citizenship – perhaps to be followed at a later date by named 'pathways' – clearly needs to synergise a number of different social-science subjects (not just politics but also law, history, American Studies, sociology etc.). In so doing, the establishment of a BA in Citizenship as a 'parent' of a core family of awards both enhances the academic profile and reputation of contributing subjects while at the same time promoting a stronger social-science identity. Here a willingness to transcend traditional academic boundaries itself demonstrates an ability to engage with changing regional, national and international realities within higher education. (It also keeps management happy by enabling the School to improve its ability to participate in wider undergraduate provision and bring effective economies of scale through an efficient pooling of the School of Social Science's human resources.)

## Conclusion

The BA in Citizenship aims to provide students with a suitable foundation for careers in both private and public sectors. A core purpose is to nurture not only a robust intellectual flexibility but also high levels of analytical, written and verbal skills attractive to employers. We want to develop a

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range of generic intellectual and personal transferable skills applicable to a variety of careers including postgraduate research. It is hoped that the degree will enable students to undertake postgraduate programmes through which professional qualifications, such as teaching, social work, etc., can be attained. In addition to these professional programmes, citizenship graduates will probably find employment in education, with local authorities, health authorities, non-governmental organisations and voluntary associations.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the University of Northampton BA in Citizenship programme is very much in the planning stage. It is short on detail as to the precise nature and number of modules to be offered. One thing to be clear is that an experiential element is seen as an essential 'core' aspect. To this end we want to develop a highly successful BA in Politics placement with MPs at Westminster to include a voluntary service or 'service-learning' element. This will be made an explicit and compulsory part of the educational experience. We see this both as good in itself and as an essential element and necessary precondition for the University of Northampton's vision of (civil) society and democracy. A second thing that is clear is that we see our role as teachers as one in which we should strive to introduce students to a wider cultural inheritance. Music and film are cultural facts that frame the social situation into which we are born. This may mean reinventing the past for pedagogical purposes, but it also means a module that puts film and music in the picture as repositories of value (perhaps not so difficult if one was politicised by *Two Tone* and *Ghost Town*).

Citizenship challenges the meaning and role of the university in the twenty-first century. And it also challenges our role as teachers in twenty-first-century universities. By its very nature, the BA in Citizenship project is 'normative'. It is and cannot be value-free. But bias should not necessarily be seen as a bad thing if it is tolerant and reasonable. Citizenship, as subject and practice, offers a bridge between the traditional idea of the university as a place to value education for its own sake and as a way of squarely facing the challenge – some would say threat – of a

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succession of governments committed to business-facing universities, employer engagement and the throttle of skills agendas. This possibility alone should be particularly attractive to those of us in ex-polytechnics or colleges of higher education who have seen the aim of scholarship long neglected. To create transformational educational experiences with integrity should be the art of the possible. As Reinhold Niebuhr might have allowed, adopting the field of citizenship could be a ‘method of finding proximate solutions to [some pretty] insoluble problems’ (1944: 118). This programme is very much a case of ‘work in progress’ but its attempt is certainly a reflection of a strategy. One could say that it is the acceptance that the tide of commercialisation may not easily be stopped, but the recognition that if we acknowledge the current we can at least direct the stream.

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## **Part IV: New Directions in the Teaching and Learning of Politics**



## Chapter 16

# Futility or Utility?: FDTL5 and Teaching and Learning in Politics

*John Craig*

In 2004, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales (HEFCE) allocated over £1 million to projects in politics and international relations through Phase 5 of the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL5). However, the allocation of such funding for teaching and learning development is not guaranteed to have a wide or sustained impact on academic practice. Some evaluations of the centres of excellence in teaching and learning (CETLs), for example, have questioned the extent to which they have been able to enhance learning and teaching across the sector, and the effectiveness of FDTL projects has also been publicly questioned in the past (*Times Higher Education*, 18 December 1998 and 13 July 2007). However, I will argue in this chapter that the allocation of this stream of FDTL5 funding to the disciplines of politics and international relations has been a worthwhile investment, not only in terms of the individual work of the projects supported but also through their aggregate impact in promoting research and scholarship on teaching and learning more widely within the disciplines.

The allocation of FDTL5 funds was undertaken through a bidding process in 2003 and 2004 organised by HEFCE and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Eligibility to bid for monies was based on participation and performance in recent rounds of Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject reviews which meant that for FDTL5 the competition was between departments in the areas of politics, economics, archaeology, education, business and management, librarianship and information management, hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism.

Institutions were invited to submit one bid in each of the subject areas in which they qualified. These could be large-scale projects of up to

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£250,000 for three-year multi-institution initiatives; medium-scale single-institution projects of up to £150,000 for three years; or smaller-scale single-institution projects of up to £75,000 for two years. To ensure that bids would have an impact beyond the institution at which they were based, all were required to have in place convincing strategies for dissemination as well as meeting high thresholds for institutional support and innovation. All projects, however, had to address a combination of generic and subject priorities under the headings of curriculum design, employability, teaching and learning, assessment, student progression and achievement, learning resources, quality assurance and professional development. Both the subject-specific and generic criteria were derived from the developmental issues that were identified during the QAA Subject Review rounds, and those that were identified as specific to the subject area of politics are identified in Box 16.1.

As a result of a two-stage process, a total of thirty-two projects were awarded funding, five of which were based in politics. These were:

1. The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics, led by the University of Warwick with Coventry University and Oxford Brookes University.
2. Teaching Citizenship in Higher Education, led by the University of Southampton with Keele University and Liverpool John Moores University.
3. Politics Active Research Learning Environment (PARLE), led by the Open University with the universities of York and Huddersfield.
4. Preparing Students for Politics (PREPOL), led by Nottingham Trent University with the universities of Birmingham, Lincoln and Central Lancashire.
5. Case-Based Learning in Politics, led by the University of Huddersfield.

**1. Curriculum design**

- a. Incorporating the development of students' skills in the practice of politics.
- b. Developing curricula that engage students and encourage active learning – for example, use of role play and simulation exercises, case studies, data analysis workshops and student-led group work.
- c. Developing subject specific materials for Politics research students.
- d. Designing materials for the incorporation of problem-based learning in the curriculum.
- e. Designing more effective interdisciplinary courses or modules.

**2. Employability**

- a. Developing generic employability skills.
- b. Increasing opportunities for work-related learning, including work-based learning, placements, work experience, work-shadowing, internships in HEIs and FECs.

**3. Teaching and learning**

- a. Developing practice in use of group work.
- b. Implementing pedagogy to encourage deep approaches to learning.
- c. Developing teaching methods to maximize student engagement, participation and attendance.
- d. Enhancing the use of student feedback tools.

**4. Assessment**

- a. Achieving alignment (and transparency) of assessment methods with aims and stated learning outcomes at module and programme level.
- b. Implementing high quality and timely feedback to students.
- c. Diversifying assessment methods.
- d. Developing ways of identifying and preventing or discouraging plagiarism.

**5. Student progression and achievement**

- a. Responding to widening participation and student diversity while maintaining retention.
- b. Improving induction processes and transition to HE, reflecting the diversity of students new to the study of politics.
- c. Mapping, tracking, evidencing skills and student achievement using personal development planning.

**6. Student support and guidance**

- a. Designing subject specific career development based on knowledge of graduate destinations.
- b. Improving pre-entry guidance to increase numbers of politics students.

**7. Learning resources**

- a. Enhancing access to and use of learning resources.

- b. Developing use of digital and non-digital learning resources relevant to the teaching of politics.
- c. Integrating use of IT including virtual learning environments to support learning.
- d. Collaborating to produce distance learning materials.

**8. Quality assurance**

- a. Involving students more effectively in quality assurance processes.
- b. Making better use of and responding to external examiners.

**9. Professional development**

- a. Developing more effective professional development strategies – including for established staff, postgraduate teaching assistants and part-time staff in HEIs and FECs.
- b. Designing and implementing forms of subject specific training for new lecturers.
- c. Helping staff to respond to the impact of widening participation.

Box 16.1 Politics subject priority areas. (Source: HEFCE 2003)

Before turning to explore the work of the projects, it is important to record that this list includes only those who were successful in the bidding round and that other politics departments also worked on preparing bids and exploring ideas for teaching and learning development projects. In this process, departments were supported by C-SAP, which organised a series of workshops through which potential bidders could come together, share their ideas and make contacts with like-minded colleagues. In addition, between the first and second rounds of bidding, further developmental events were organised by the HEFCE and the HEA which allowed those who had reached this stage to meet together and share ideas. One of the results of these events was to provide the opportunity for those who were involved in putting together the projects to get to know each other better and was to provide the basis for later collaborations.

During the course of their existence, the exact scope and sometimes even the names of the projects evolved as a response to the work that they were undertaking. On this basis, any attempt to outline the work of the projects is likely to be partial, capturing only some of their activities, and the work of the Scholarship of Engagement project in developing better practice around the use of placements within politics courses is extensively

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explored elsewhere within this publication. Nevertheless, a broad picture of each of the other projects can be usefully sketched.

Under the direction of Rose Gann at Nottingham Trent University, the PREPOL project focused upon exploring the perceptions of students on the nature and scope of politics courses within higher education and to developing resources that would provide potential applicants with clear and helpful advice on what they might expect from a politics degree. The project undertook a range of qualitative and quantitative work to establish a firm research base for addressing this issue. The team developed the 'Politics and You' website ([www.politicsatuniversity.com](http://www.politicsatuniversity.com)) which includes a range of video resources through which current students and lecturers share their views on what they find interesting about politics and how this can develop a learner's key skills. While these provide an excellent guide for potential applicants to politics degree programmes, they also hold up a mirror to the discipline and allow lecturers to hear the views of students studying politics.

While each of the three remaining projects explored separate aspects of politics, they also shared a common concern in creating learning materials which could be used to enhance the student experience in a variety of contexts. The Teaching Citizenship in Higher Education project started out with the rather longer title 'Politics On-Line Learning and Citizenship Skills', which was abbreviated to POLiS. Under the direction of Graham Smith at the University of Southampton the project aimed to design a range of online resources that could be used for the teaching of citizenship within higher education. The key output of the project has been the project website ([www.soton.ac.uk/citizened](http://www.soton.ac.uk/citizened)) which provides access to eleven learning activities, with additional advice on how the materials might be used within the context of personal development planning (PDP) and further suggestions for educational developers on their use. The activities cover a range of topics including the nature of active citizenship, issues relating to gender and disability and global and environmental aspects of citizenship. Some include resources such as video or online self-

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assessment materials, which teachers might use in a range of ways to create learning opportunities for students.

The aim of the PARLE project was to create a set of learning materials that could be used to support research methods training for politics students and in particular those undertaking postgraduate study. To ensure that they were suitable for a range of distance, face-to-face and blended teaching environments, these were developed as interactive computer-based activities that could be distributed on DVD format to users. Under the direction of Dave Middleton of the Open University, the project team quickly expanded beyond the initial bidding partners drawing in expertise from at least six further universities to develop the materials. In preparing the teaching activities, the project team used both existing materials, such as footage from the House of Commons, and commissioned new materials, such as a video of a focus group and a short audio drama exploring research ethics. The work on the project has subsequently been taken on by the Research Training Consortium ([www.open.ac.uk/parle/index.htm](http://www.open.ac.uk/parle/index.htm)).

The third of the projects that was orientated towards the creation of learning materials was the Case-Based Learning in Politics project ([www.hud.ac.uk/cbl](http://www.hud.ac.uk/cbl)) and was directed by myself. The aim of this project was to explore the scope for developing problem-based learning materials for use in politics both through creating a set of materials that could be used for teaching and by producing a web-based template that could support tutors in developing their own case-based resources. This was the only single institution FDTL project within the discipline of politics, so to ensure that the project engaged the wider subject community, partners from other universities were involved in the evaluation of both the learning materials and the template. As with the materials developed by PARLE and the Teaching Citizenship project, the learning activities produced by the Case-Based Learning project could either be used to form the basis of an individual module or could equally be dipped into as required.

On an individual basis, each project contributed to the development of teaching and learning within politics through the creation of particular

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outputs and their dissemination. A rough and ready attempt to calculate how many conference papers and presentations have been delivered in aggregate by the projects produces a figure in the mid-thirties, although a comprehensive audit of such outputs would undoubtedly result in a considerably higher number. However, to focus on each individual project is to miss much of the combined impact of FDTL5 within the politics discipline.

There were, for example, a number of shared underlying pedagogical themes that informed the work of the projects. Jones (2007), in an interim report on FDTL5 projects in politics for the HEA, identified these as relating to:

- enhancing the relevance and authenticity of learning;
- developing active learning strategies, which make use of problem-based learning, group work and reflection;
- adopting a constructive approach to knowledge and learning;
- improving learner autonomy and responsibility for the learning process.

While there was no conscious process through which the project teams arrived at this situation, the coalescing of the projects around these shared themes in addition to their shared disciplinary identity provided a firm basis for their collaboration in a number of ventures. The most high-profile of these was an event held at the Houses of Parliament on 21 October 2008. This was organised by Rose Gann and Jacqui Briggs (University of Lincoln) with sponsorship from C-SAP and the Political Studies Association (PSA), and hosted by Lord Parekh. All five of the politics FDTL projects exhibited at the event and were featured on an Innovations in the Teaching and Learning of Politics DVD, which was launched at the event and subsequently distributed to all politics departments in the UK and through the 'Politics and You' website ([www.politicsatuniversity.com/innovations.html](http://www.politicsatuniversity.com/innovations.html)). The DVD also featured

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the work of the PSA Teaching and Learning Specialist Group (PSATLG), to which I will now turn.

The establishment of the PSATLG was a direct result of the award of FDTL5 monies to the politics projects. When the project initially received funding, the project directors were keen to explore how we could work together to present our work to the rest of the politics profession. An initial round-table event at the 2005 PSA Annual Conference at the University of Leeds, facilitated by Jon Cope of C-SAP, had proved a little disheartening as only one person present was not already involved in the projects. As such, while the round table did provide an opportunity for further information exchange between the projects, it did not enable us to engage others in our work. It became clear to us that to reach beyond those who were already involved and to ensure that the projects would in future have space within the work of the PSA we needed to take the initiative in constructing an infrastructure to support this. In pursuit of this, in 2005 Philippa Sherrington (director of the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project) and I successfully put forward a proposal to the PSA for the creation of the Specialist Group. The proposal was supported by colleagues from each of the FDTL projects and identified the aim of the group as being to create 'a network for those who are interested in pedagogic issues within the discipline, to communicate with one another and to debate and discuss the challenges ahead'.

In the four years since its foundation, the membership of the group has grown to more than fifty academics at over thirty different institutions, with the majority of current members being drawn from beyond the original FDTL5 project community, including the current group treasurer Stephen Thornton (University of Cardiff). Group members have been successful in organising at least two teaching and learning panels at each of the last four PSA Annual conferences in Manchester (2009), Swansea (2008), Bath (2007) and Reading (2006). Papers have explored a wide range of topics including podcasting, information literacy, the use of drama and novels in teaching, as well as topics such as citizenship, research methods and placement learning which relate to the areas explored by the

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projects. Attendance at each session has generally been within the range of fifteen to twenty people, which demonstrates the participation of a wider audience within the profession.

In addition to the presentation of papers at the PSA Annual Conference, PSATLG has also begun to organise its own conferences. The first of these was a two-day event in 2008 hosted by Royal Holloway, University of London under the academic direction of James Sloam. The conference explored the theme of 'Teaching Democracy: Youth, Citizenship and Political Science Education' and included eleven papers. A second PSATLG conference is scheduled for September 2009 and will be hosted by the University of Leeds, under the academic direction of Simon Lightfoot and Cathy Gormley-Heenan (University of Ulster). The theme for this year's event will be 'Teaching Politics and IR: The State of the Discipline' with over twenty presentations planned. Through such developments, PSATLG can be seen to have been successful in creating new spaces for the exploration of teaching, learning and assessment issues within the politics discipline.

It is important to acknowledge that the events and activities that I have reviewed in this chapter do not form a comprehensive list of all the teaching and learning activities that have taken place within politics over the past five years or even those that have been a result of the FDTL5 projects. C-SAP has continued its work in supporting the development of teaching and learning in social-science disciplines through organising conferences, providing project funding, sponsoring teaching and learning prizes and launching the online journal *ELiSS: Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*. Each of these strands of activity have combined with the groundswell of work within the politics subject area to further push forward the development of teaching and learning research and scholarship. In addition, the work of others, such as Sarah Hale in editing a symposium in *European Political Science* in 2008, which included papers from a number of FDTL5 projects (Craig and Hale 2008; Middleton and Bridge 2008; Sherrington et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2008), should also be recognised in contributing to this development.

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Politics has often been characterised as being a relatively conservative discipline with respect to teaching and learning. I have argued in this chapter that the investment made by HEFCE within Phase 5 of the FDTL funding stream has had a significant impact on teaching and learning within the discipline, as reflected in both the individual outputs of the funded projects as well as a wider catalytic effect that has been produced. It is noticeable that the conversations of a few years ago on the futility of trying to develop teaching and learning activity within the discipline are now a thing of the past. While there is no guarantee of future levels of activity, it is clear that the impetus for these activities has outlived the period of FDTL funding and the breath of the teaching and learning community that is now active within the politics profession suggests that there is a strong likelihood that these activities will prove to be sustainable for the foreseeable future.

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