

## **Professional Skills Evaluation** (Kath Leigh and Abigail Hind)

### **Goals & Objectives**

- 1 Further develop the Professional Scholarship Programme to include online learning objects for transferable, technical and intellectual skills
- 2 Employability skills development
- 3 Support career management and personal development planning

### **Professional Scholarship Programme**

The Professional Scholarship Programme is embedded within each Harper Adams' course designed specifically to develop transferable skills such as the ability to think critically, analyse information, communicate clearly and solve problems. The curriculum is designed to encourage students through the personal development process and the *Aspire* programme aims to ensure that the Professional Scholarship Programme enables all students to identify and fulfil their professional ambitions. This has been achieved, for all students, through an Academic and Professional Development module in Year 1 (and now three distinct modules for 2009/10), a Research Methods module in Year 2 for Honours students, Placement in Year 2/3 for all students and Individual and Team Project Modules in Years 3/4 for all students.

- 1 *Further develop the Professional Scholarship Programme to include online learning objects for transferable, technical and intellectual skills*

### **Academic & Professional Development**

As the Virtual Learning environment (VLE) sits within the College's Managed Learning Environment (MLE) this constrained the use of Moodle (VLE) within the APD module. Therefore three new smaller modules were validated for 2009-10: Academic Development; Introduction to Research Methods and Personal Development to allow staff a more flexible presence.

New resources arising from *Aspire* fellowships:

- Developing web-based activities and articles for APD (2005/06)
- Developing online resources to develop students' information literacy skills (2008/9)

### **Research Methods**

In 2008-9 an online, cross-college resource for research skills development reviewed and developed. New resources from *Aspire* fellowships in 2009-10:

- Developing learning resources and activities to enhance research skills
- Creating a flexible learning support community to facilitate the development of independent postgraduate research

### **Honours Research Projects**

Guidance notes produced based on discussions with staff including how Major Project support can be included into placement notes and guidance to staff. New

resource from an *Aspire* fellowship (2008-09) and resources to support postgraduate research skills in 2009/10:

- Production of an e-learning tool to enable students to use Genstat software within their major research projects.
- Research information skills module developed with significant online support

**Placement** Harper@work on placement supports placement students, although a small minority have reported that they did not have easy internet access in 2008/9.

2 *Employability skills development*

3 *Support career management and personal development planning*

**Placement** Managers are reporting fewer concerns from employers about the students they are getting on placement. In each of the last three years 56-58% of students have been awarded the highest employability grade possible by their employer and less than 1% of students fail placement employment.

### **Personal Development & Career Planning**

- Purchase of *Destinations* software from Reading University, and adapted for Harper use, as online support for Personal Development and Career Planning. Ready for 2008-09 academic year.
- Harper@Work: online presence on Moodle supporting students on placement.
- Use of Mahara an online tool to enhance the recording of experiences. Piloted in 2008-09 with a group of students on placement in Animals area – further trial with group in 2009-10.

New resources and research from *Aspire* fellowships:

- Report on project researching & developing students' motivation towards, and effective learning of, mathematics and numeracy skills. (2005-06)
- A programme of tools, for leadership and professional development, delivered through online media to support postgraduate students and work based learners (2009-10).

### **Rural Skills Programme**

In 07/08 Harper Adams ran a programme of rural, practical skills as a pilot programme in response to course evaluation forms and course reviews which suggested a need to enhance practical skills in professional practice. The pilot programme was aimed at FdSc/HND Agriculture and Countryside, Environment, Leisure & Tourism students although after an initial, exclusive booking period for this group the programme was opened to all students.

The programme has expanded from the pilot to include more courses and additional ones on safe use of pesticides PA1 & 2, animal transport and trailer training (with Trailer Training – Wales). No courses were delivered on site because of lack of staff time. Table 1 shows level of funding and uptake of courses by students

**Table 1 Summary of Rural Skills Programme**

	2007-08	2008-09	Planned 2009-10
No. of Students	34	93	
No. of places	41	153	174
No. of Accredited Courses	11	36	34
Level of Funding (secured additional to the <i>Aspire</i> Programme funds)	£4,460	£30,000	£35,000

There is similar funding available in 2009-10 as in 2008-09 but there is a desire to incorporate practical skills into the curriculum from 2010 with the Rural Skills Module mainly delivered in-house, which has now been approved.

### **Impact of this work?**

#### **Student Achievement**

Tutors from each of the six undergraduate course suites (agriculture; animals and veterinary nurses; business and food; CELT; engineering; and REALM) and the Extended Foundation Degree Programme nominate individuals from each study area. Awards are only made if evidence of excellence has clearly been demonstrated. There are awards for both Foundation Degree and Honours Degree students for excellent performance in the Academic & Professional Development module (£30) and awards in each course suite for the Research Methods module, the personal development plan ('assignment 3') submitted for placement assessment and in the Work-based Project for Foundation degree students (£50 each). There is also an award for the most improved performance across the Essential Skills modules of the Extended Foundation Degree Programme (£50).

Tables 2 and 3 summarise four year data related to student satisfaction levels and other key performance indicators related to professional skills development

**Table 2: Student 'better than satisfied' ratings for PSP elements arising from annual course surveys**

Student Satisfaction Ratings for Professional Scholarship Programme				
	2005 - 06	2006 - 07	2007 - 08	2008-09
APD	30%	45%	43%	36%
Research Methods	30%	41%	36%	44%
Honours Research Project	75%	74%	75%	67%
Personal Development Planning	52%	60%	55%	63%
Careers Advice and Guidance	55%	37%	48%	65%
Placement	80%	81%	81%	80%

For course and module feedback students are asked to rate on a scale of 1 (poor) – 5 (excellent), where 3 = satisfied. The above ratings are for 'better than satisfied' ie a score of 4 or 5.

Scrutiny of each course area highlights marked differences in satisfaction levels amongst students for the three PSP modules, despite the various tutors and their students working to the same broad based module descriptor within which they are

expected to contextualise their studies. Specific work had been undertaken to improve the online resources to support the Research Methods module by a new tutor to the team, Julie Boone. The REALM/RPM course suite students scored these modules consistently lower than students from other course areas.

The apparent improvements in personal development planning and career advice and guidance might, we hope, derive from the developments in each of these. It might also be, in part, accounted for by the clarification of what each of these incorporates within the course survey, as we had a suspicion that the previous descriptors meant that students saw these aspects in too narrow a light, when providing feedback.

**Table 3 Key performance indicators related to professional skills development**

Objectives	Actual 2005/06	Actual 2006/07	Actual 2007/08	Actual 2008/9
First year Degree student continuation (progression) will improve from 92% (88%) in 2003/4, to <sup>1</sup> :	94% (86%)	95% (92%)	95% (91%)	95% (94%)
Proportion of Honours Graduates achieving good degrees is to improve	54%	54% <sup>2</sup>	54% <sup>9</sup>	50% <sup>9</sup>
Graduate employment/further study levels across the curriculum will be in the top deciles in the sector:	97% (2005 grads)	98% (2006 grads)	99% (2007 grads)	96% (2008 grads)

Student progression has strengthened, although the achievement levels of final year Honours students has declined when compared with previous years, for reasons that we have yet to identify. External examiners continue to indicate that the quality of our students' work compares favourably with that elsewhere, and do also hint that our standards are high. Graduate employment slipped a little although remains 10 percentage points higher than the sector mean.

<sup>1</sup> Continuation of first year honours students at May, progression into subsequent part in brackets.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes students on joint programme with Beijing Agricultural College