Employability and non-traditional, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) learners

Commenced: 2006

What is it?

This CETL project aims to recommend ways to support CPD learners through their personal "journey". This needs to be done by embedding support for employability and PDP (Personal Development Portfolio) into the whole course. At present these things exist but they need "joining up". Learners' perceptions will also be investigated before further development takes place.

Scenario

Sally, an experienced IT professional, is studying part-time for an MSc. With no degree she wants to gain a qualification; Sally's employer is sponsoring her because they want her to develop broader managerial skills.

The MSc course is like embarking on a journey into unknown territory, fortunately Sally discovers the first module is all about this important transition. She learns how to use the e-learning environment and meets other new students online, through social conversations and group activities.

Sally also starts a Blog as part of her PDP; she reflects on her goals, and plans how she will fit study in with work and family commitments. With peer and tutor feedback on her draft essay, she develops the essential academic and learning skills required for the course.

Each module completed is a step on the long journey, which can be tough at times. While filling in each end-of-module evaluation, Sally reflects on her learning and how to apply it to her professional environment. She shares this with her employer at development review meetings.

The dissertation project is the second big transition point. In the research methods workshop the tutor asks students to reflect on their learning and how best to apply this to their work-based project. It's important to choose a topic that will give value to the employer, but also be interesting for the student. Reading her PDP and Blog, Sally realises how far she has progressed since she embarked on the MSc journey! Now is also time to consider her career and future plans, as well as identify the specific skills she needs to develop for the dissertation.

What is involved?

There are four aspects to the project:

1. Research (focus group and interviews) to investigate perceptions of post-experience distance learners about PDP, employability, career management, and the relevant support and resources provided by ACES and by central SHU services.

2. The first study module, introduced a couple of years ago to address transition into Masters study and e-learning, has received good feedback from learners, suggesting that this core module gives learners confidence, motivation, and some autonomy within their new e-learning environment. PDP is introduced here and is generally well-received. The aim is to improve the e-learning support as follows:

   - Career Management materials suitable for CPD learners

   - Pilot Turnitin as a tool to help learners understand referencing and how to avoid plagiarism

   - Use Blogs as part of PDP

   - Work with SHU learner support services

3. Working with a colleague, Gerry Goldsmith is improving the ACES module evaluation process to help students reflect on their learning at the end of each module. They aim to produce a pool of survey questions that will be useable by CPD modules and courses across our Programmes.

4. Suggest an approach for embedding employability and PDP within the Dissertation stage and the Research Principles and Practice module.

Sheffield Hallam University

SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

Why is the project important to the CETL and the University?

This project complements other CETL projects which relate to full-time learners because this project addresses the needs of off-campus learners, people who study while working.

Continuing Professional Development is a market that SHU has identified as important. The faculty of ACES has experience of running professional MSc courses for many years, and is currently developing a new CPD Programme. This project is very timely, to address employability and PDP for these learners.

What impact do you hope the project will have?

This project will provide a model that can be tailored for use across the CDP Programme in the ACES Faculty, and possibly other faculties. The project links with other work being done by colleagues and thus involves a number of tutors and Course Leaders who will take the model forward into various courses.

Future Developments

Further work will need to be done to develop the approach suggested for the Dissertation stage. There is scope for further development of the Turnitin pilot, and of Blogs. Audio nuggets would enhance the materials already produced.

Links

Moon J (2004) Reflection and Employability. York: LTSN. Higher Education Academy. last accessed 11/4/06 at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/1433.htm

Brenda Little and ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team) colleagues (2005) Part-time students and employability last accessed 11/4/06 at:http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/1433.htm

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This information can be made available in other formats. Please contact us for details.