



Closing the Loop: A Full-Circle Partnership Model for Embedded Industry Qualifications

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Abstract

Graduate employability has become a key priority for UK Higher Education, with universities seeking new and innovative ways to develop graduates ready for employment. Despite this, debate about the role and ability of HE as a facilitator of labour market needs have existed since the publication of the landmark Dearing report > 25 years ago (Tomlinson, 2017). Pedagogic approaches that integrate professional competencies within academic setting have emerged as one strategy to bridge perceived gaps (van Berkum et al., 2024).

Reflecting such debate, this project was developed to foster a curriculum innovation whilst leveraging our relationship as Higher Education partner of the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), the Sport and Physical Activity sector's professional development body. To enhance graduate employability and offer a unique value-added experience, CIMSPA professional standards were embedded into the undergraduate Sport and Physical Activity curriculum, providing students with a unique opportunity to gain industry awards embedded within their undergraduate curricula whilst ensuring that professional competency standards are met for employment.

Central to the project is a reciprocal partnership structure: undergraduate learners complete industry-regulated qualifications as an integrated component of their degree, acquiring industry-validated skills that supplement their academic learning. Through this process two postgraduate learners have now been trained as assessors, returning to support and assess the qualifications they themselves once undertook as undergraduates. This created a 'training the trainer' dimension and operationalises Healey, Flint and Harrington's (2014) conception of students as partners, and towards a model of authentic co-delivery.

The programme has resulted a full-circle approach and an innovative vocationally oriented model for enhancing student employability: students gain recognised credentials within their degrees whilst student assessors develop pedagogic and leadership capacities increasingly valued by employers (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Keywords

Employability, professional competencies, vocational qualifications

References

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