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Original Citation

English, John (2012) Employability is the answer but what's the question. In: The Higher Education Academy Workshop and Seminar Series, 10th July 2012, University of Huddersfield. (Unpublished)

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“Employability is the answer but what’s the question?”



Presented by
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Accountants in Organisations – a module delivering impact



English, John and Ireland, Chris (2011) *Accountants in Organisations – a module delivering impact*. In: Graduates with Impact: through excellence in business education, BMAF Annual Conference, 10th - 11th May 2011, Bournemouth . (Unpublished)

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In 2006 we were asked to create a new module that would make an impact in the following areas

- Personal Development Planning
- Academic Skills and Vocational Skills
- Professional Body requirements
- Reflective writing
- Using formative exercises
- Enhancing the personal tutor system
- Shift student focus from numeracy
- Encourage placements

Which employability competences?



- Commercial Awareness (2.0)
- Leadership (1.5)
- Commitment and drive (1.5)
- Problem solving (1.4)
- Managing own learning (1.3)
- Adaptability (1.3)
- Customer Focus (1.3)
- Oral Communication (1.2)
- Motivation (1.1)
- Planning (0.9)
- Team working (0.9)
- Time Management (0.8)
- Cultural Sensitivity (0.8)
- Project Management (0.7)
- Risk Taking (0.7)
- Numeracy (0.5)
- Report Writing (0.4)
- Computer Literacy (- 0.5)

Which employability competences?

Students views based on CIHE competences



Team Working 179

Adaptability 123

Planning & Organising 121

Initiative 107

Leadership 106

Analysis 87

Financial Awareness 78

Personal Development 73

Written Communication 71

Commercial Awareness 46

Lifelong Learning 34

Organisational Understanding 33

Technical Application 11

Achievement Oriented 2

Interpersonal Sensitive 0

Questioning -24

Influencing -25

Process Orientation -70

What underpinned the development of the AIO program in this way?



- The Robbins Report (1963) – contribution to society
- The Bedford Committee(1986) - graduate inadequacies
- CPA Australia (2002) - equipping graduates for professional practice
- Bowden and Masters (1993) - classroom concepts and the workplace
- Key development areas identified are critical thinking, communicating at various levels with various audiences, team working and solving business related problems.

Which area to focus on? Evidence from MC-Dip *www.learning-styles.org*

| Using the MC-Dip learning styles on-line | 1st four weeks |
|---|-----------------------|
| Writing Style | 5.47 |
| Numeracy | 7.05 |
| ICT | 7.14 |
| Presentations | 4.77 |
| Marketing | 5.38 |
| Teamwork | 6.43 |
| Average (10 areas) | 5.68 |

Presentations are obviously a big opportunity area for the students



- Pettinger et al. (2004) - oral communication is an area which needs development
- Gray (2010) - graduates tend to have “inadequate oral communication skills” when commencing employment.
- Stowe et al. (2010) - presentation skills are considered important by both recruiters and academic bodies

How to address this opportunity

- The English and Ireland presentation model:
 - 1st Presentation (formative) only give positive feedback
 - 2nd Presentation (formative) give positive and developmental feedback
 - 3rd Presentation (summative) rehearse with the academic development tutors
- Some brief examples to show how presentations can develop our students' employability



ACCA Business Game



- Business Challenge (ACCA)
- Students must act as group of consultants for a Local Authority and help them make the right decision
- Students present their solution on flip chart paper using the first stage of our method for developing presentation skills



A place to live?
A place to shop?
A place to park?
You must decide
for your local community

Which employability competencies would you expect to develop in this exercise?



- A) Adaptability / flexibility
- B) Analysis
- C) Decisiveness
- D) Initiative
- E) Teamwork / working with others
- F) Tolerance of stress

ACCA Business Game

What do the students say?

- **Financial Awareness** – “During the meetings I wasn’t able to provide the group with any figures, it took me a long time to understand where the numbers came from, although I felt behind in my course my group were very supportive and they helped me. I have decided I will prepare figures before a meeting in future as this will help my understanding”
- **Interpersonal Sensitivity** – “I am too dominant/adamant about my point of view. In this task I recognised/respected the views of others as they were better than my own. From the feedback I realise I must respect others’ views ... something I will continue to do throughout my University course”

Strauss Pricing Exercise

- Strauss Pricing (Module Leader)
- Students are asked to help a client with producing a set of budgets, a pricing strategy and a creative marketing slide for a new unique light weight caravan recliner
- The team solution must be presented by PowerPoint this time using the second stage of our method for developing presentation skills



£150 - Premium pricing?

£124.99 - Penetration pricing?

£72 + £36 - Cost plus pricing

You must help
the client to decide

Which employability competencies would you expect to develop in this exercise?



- A) Attention to detail
- B) Planning and organising
- C) Leadership
- D) Life-long learning
- E) Creativity
- F) Technical knowledge

Strauss Pricing Exercise

What do the students say?

- **Tolerance for Stress** - “When I discovered we had to do presentations my heart skipped a few beats and I was hit with nerves. Could I fake illness to get out of doing them? – the formative process ... has really helped me overcome the fears of presenting and I am finding ways of managing the stress.”
- **Leadership** - “Ever since starting school I have never enjoyed taking the lead or taking responsibility for a task. I felt quite pleased when my team asked me to be a team leader as this gave me the opportunity to get over my fears and take control of a situation”

The issues faced in 2010/11 with our presentation model

- Ever larger numbers on the 1st year
 - Risen from 70 to over 120 students since 2006
 - Likely to be significantly higher in 2012/3
- Greater numbers of overseas students
- Feedback from the presentations
 - Collating the feedback
 - Writing up the feedback
 - Delivering the feedback
 - Getting the students to engage with the feedback
- **Criticality (engagement and thinking)**

The solution

- Involve the students in the process
- Speed up the process using IT
- Working SMARTER!
- So what did we do?

Using Google docs and imbedding a link into Unilearn we asked the students to help us with the feedback



- What were the most pleasing aspects (3) of this presentation?
- Write about one way in which this presentation could be improved?
- Scale Rating
 - Audibility (How easy was it to hear the delivery)
 - Supporting visuals (flip chart)
 - Structure
 - Content

The data (feedback in words)

| Presentation | ACCA Game 😊 | ACCA Game 😞 | Strauss 😊 | Strauss 😞 |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Tutor | 2287 | 1126 | | |
| Responses | 25 | 25 | | |
| Average | 91.48 | 45.04 | | |

The data (feedback in words)

| Presentation | ACCA Game 😊 | ACCA Game ☹️ | Strauss 😊 | Strauss ☹️ |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Peer | 7074 | 6012 | | |
| Responses | 351 | 351 | | |
| Average | 20.15 | 17.13 | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Tutor | 2287 | 1126 | | |
| Responses | 25 | 25 | | |
| Average | 91.48 | 45.04 | | |

The data (feedback in words)

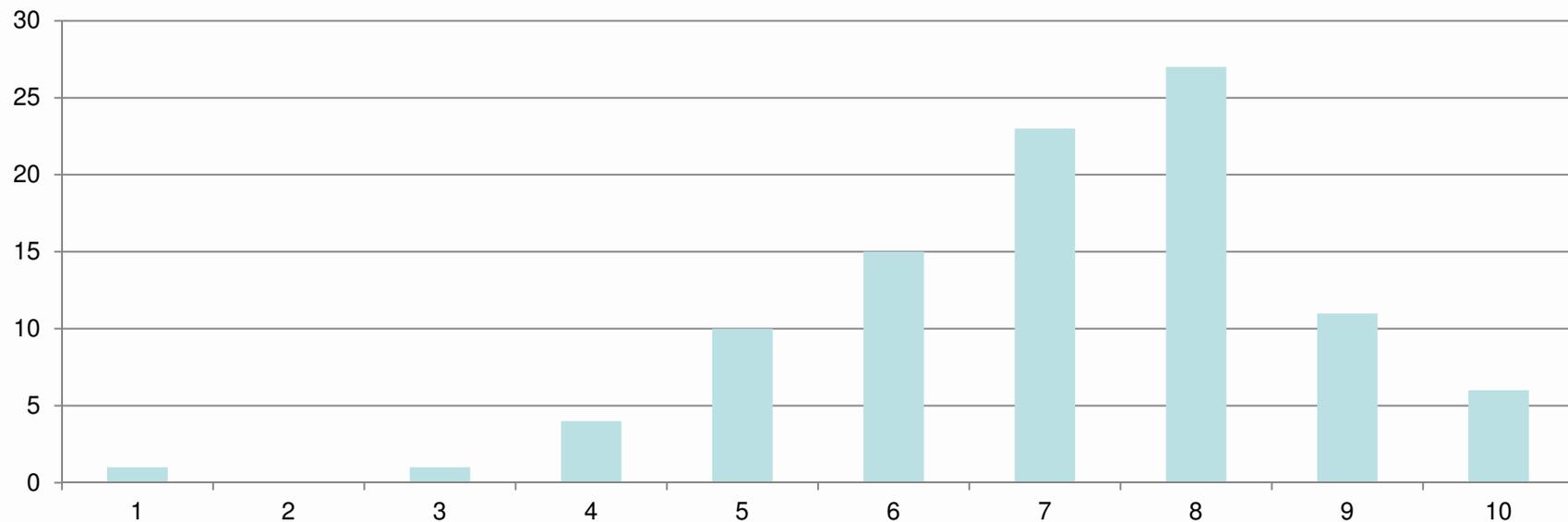
| Presentation | ACCA Game 😊 | ACCA Game 😞 | Strauss 😊 | Strauss 😞 |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Peer | 7074 | 6012 | | |
| Responses | 351 | 351 | | |
| Average | 20.15 | 17.13 | | |
| Self | 2919 | 2470 | | |
| Responses | 86 | 86 | | |
| Average | 33.94 | 28.72 | | |
| Tutor | 2287 | 1126 | | |
| Responses | 25 | 25 | | |
| Average | 91.48 | 45.04 | | |

The data (feedback in words)

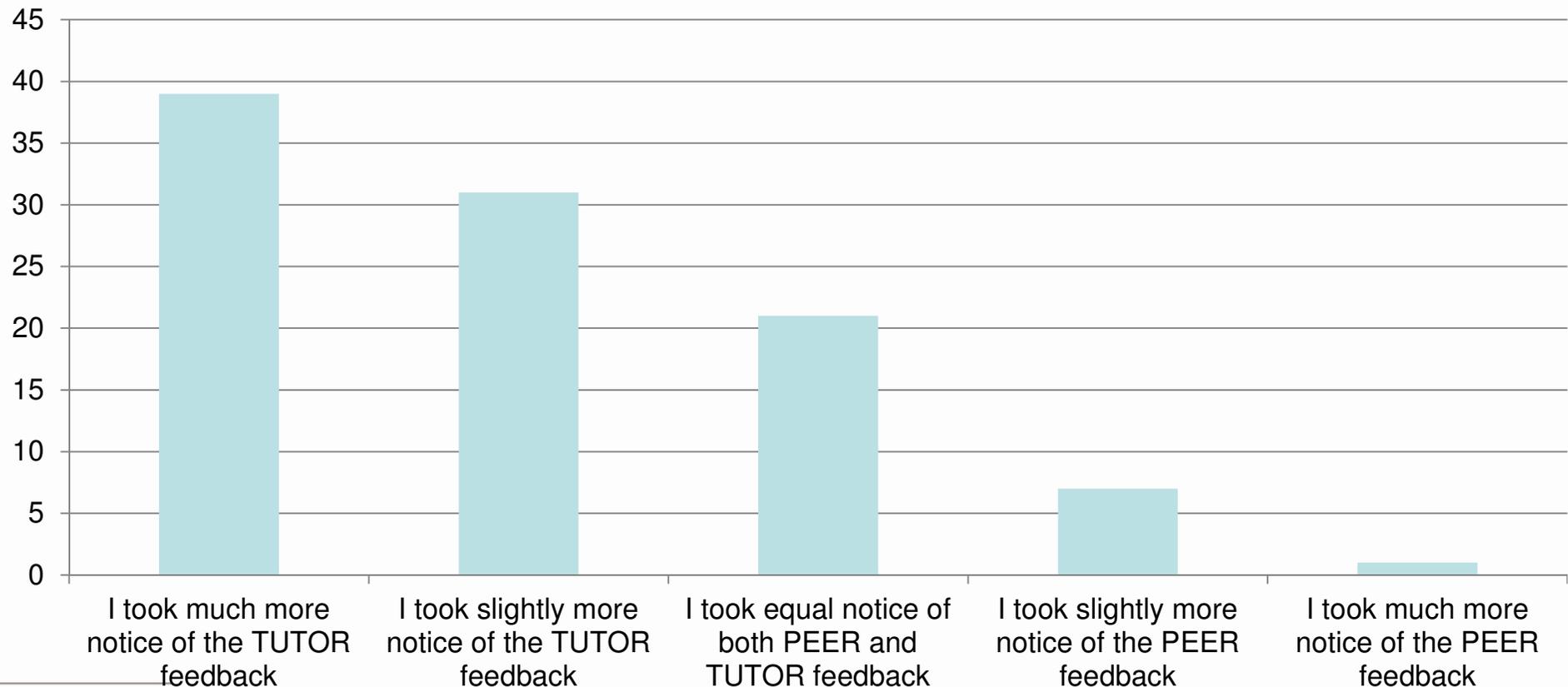
| Presentation | ACCA Game 😊 | ACCA Game 😞 | Strauss 😊 | Strauss 😞 |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Peer | 7074 | 6012 | 14657 | 19101 |
| Responses | 351 | 351 | 431 | 431 |
| Average | 20.15 | 17.13 | 34.01 | 44.32 |
| Self | 2919 | 2470 | 3883 | 3610 |
| Responses | 86 | 86 | 81 | 81 |
| Average | 33.94 | 28.72 | 47.94 | 44.57 |
| Tutor | 2287 | 1126 | 1489 | 3528 |
| Responses | 25 | 25 | 23 | 23 |
| Average | 91.48 | 45.04 | 64.74 | 153.39 |

Was it worth it?

Rate the usefulness of the peer feedback you received on the ACCA Business Game and Strauss presentations on a scale of 1 to 10 (98 responses).



Which feedback did you pay most attention to?



How did you use the peer feedback?

| | Yes | No | % ✓ |
|--|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| I used the ACCA PEER feedback to help me prepare the Strauss Presentation | 66 | 32 | 0.67 |
| I used the Strauss PEER feedback to help me prepare this final presentation | 87 | 11 | 0.88 |
| I used the PEER feedback in the final Portfolio Section 20 Report | 63 | 35 | 0.64 |

The way forward?

- Students are still developing we have only just started the process
- Employability competences need to be regularly revisited not just in AIO in the 1st year but across the whole course
- The current exercises can only address limited issues
- New materials and ways to gain engagement need to be developed especially for the those who need it most
- If we could wave a magic wand what areas would we ask to solve?
 - time management, planning and organisation, commercial awareness and life long learning

But has it made a difference?
 Evidence from the MC-Dip analysis
www.learning-styles.org



| Using the MC-Dip learning styles on-line | 1st four weeks | End of term two | Difference |
|--|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Writing Style | 5.47 | 5.98 | 0.51 |
| Numeracy | 7.05 | 7.31 | 0.26 |
| ICT | 7.14 | 7.52 | 0.38 |
| Presentations | 4.77 | 5.97 | 1.20 |
| Marketing | 5.38 | 5.95 | 0.57 |
| Teamwork | 6.43 | 6.91 | 0.48 |
| Average (10 areas) | 5.68 | 6.24 | 0.56 |

We are making a difference.

This email extract was received from a 2009 graduate a few months ago:



- It would probably be a good time to say ... how valuable your module, words of wisdom and help was in getting me here – thank you John.
- I only wish that I could give back some words of wisdom in how to get your students to buy in to the concept of PDP and soft skills because they are definitely the key to getting onto good graduate schemes and becoming well rounded professionals – just like you said they would."

We are making a difference?

These are extracts from student reflections



- “The best thing about this portfolio is ... it has really felt like a journey where I ...‘identified’ my deepest weaknesses to make myself better which is something I never would have done ... the mark I will receive isn’t important as the way it has changed me as a person is far more valuable.”
- “I have grown throughout the first year... unlocked motivation I did not even know I had.... I have learnt many skills to do with ... presentations, working in groups and how questioning and confidence has a lot to do with your ability to perform as well....I have also taken into account the peer reviews of our last presentation me and my group will take this on board”

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals

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