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Accountants in Organisations – a module delivering impact



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Outline



- The module
- What we do in the first four weeks and why we do it
- Examples of module activities
- Student reflections on the exercises
- Preliminary results of survey of employability from students' perspective
- Have we made an impact?

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

Placement Literature



- Ward (2006) - placements impact on the students' achievements
- Paisey & Paisey (2010) developing skills via placements
- SurrIDGE (2009) developed and quantified these ideas in his research
- Koh and Koh (1999) - National Service impact on male degree performance
- Gracia and Jenkins (2003) - final year performance and placement

How did we develop the AIO program?



- We needed an original vehicle within the module so we created a theoretical placement company - G.R.Adco Ltd
- The students apply for a position by submitting a CV and covering letter, all will be accepted by the company
- Whilst 'employed' by G.R.Adco Ltd they would participate in a series of interesting 'graduate' tasks during the year
- The early introduction to writing and plagiarism is extended by using reflection, formative exercises, PDP Portfolios all linked to the consideration of their employability using the Student Employability Profiles (Rees, Forbes and Kubler, 2007)

What sort of content have we included?



- **Baseline exercises**
 - Employability competences self review
 - Learning and Leadership styles
 - Individual Learning Profile
 - Essay writing, CV and Covering letter exercises
- **ACCA Professional Body Business Game**
- **STANCE Business Meeting and Report Writing**
- **Strauss Pricing Exercise**
- **Flintoff Accounting Analysis**
- **University presentation**

Why did we develop 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.

Putting writing into the equation



Common misconception – it's all about numbers

Students wanted to get on with their studies

Focus on writing from day two of induction

Establishing baselines

Writing (two short assignments)

Competencies (self-reviews)

Let's look at some of the exercises (both formative & summative)



- ACCA Business Game
- STANCE Business Meeting and Report Writing
- Strauss Pricing Exercise
- Flintoff Accounting Analysis
- University Presentation



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?

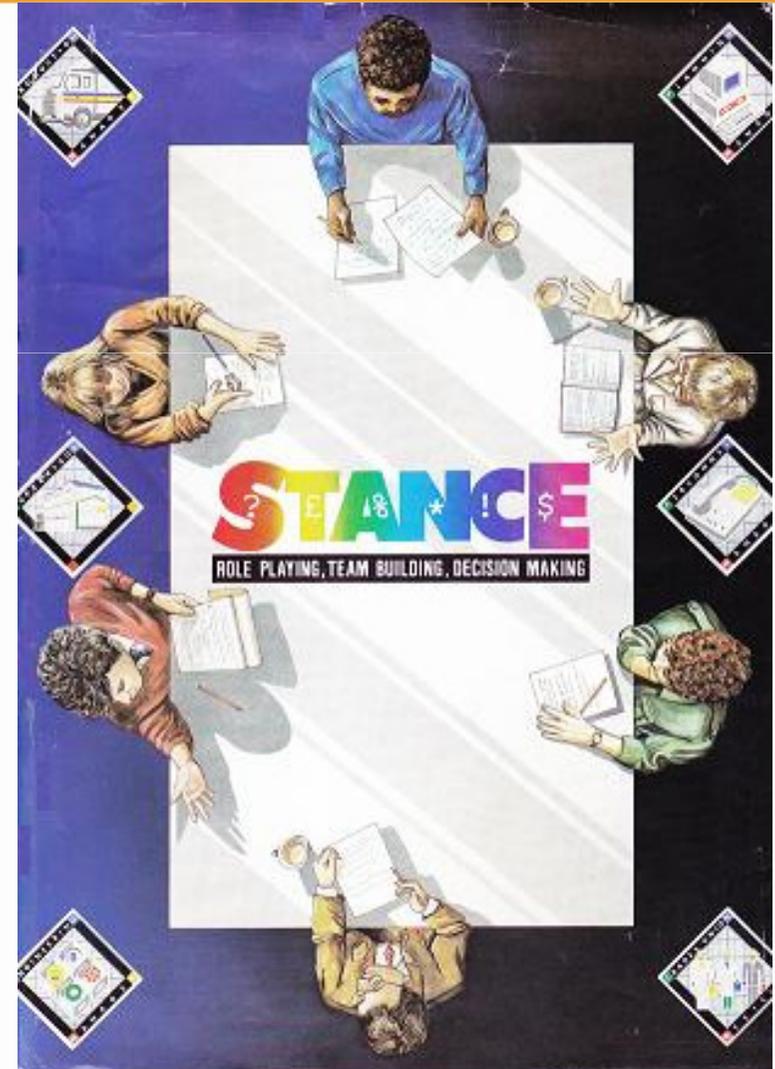


- **Financial Awareness** – “During the meetings I wasn’t able to provide the group with any figures, it took me a long time to understand where the numbers came from, although I felt behind in my course my group were very supportive and they helped me. I have decided I will prepare figures before a 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”

STANCE Business Meeting

- STANCE (Unilever)
- Students participate in a 'board' meeting to discuss and resolve a number of Company issues
- The CEO cannot attend the board meeting but has asked each 'player' to send a written business style report of what happened, how it happened and how they felt about the decisions made

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



- A) Achievement orientation
- B) Commercial awareness
- C) Influencing
- D) Written communication
- E) Organisational understanding
- F) Interpersonal sensitivity

STANCE

What do the students say?



- **Judgement** – “In my History A-level ... I was advised not to make judgements and to stay unbiased, so I didn’t support either side of an argument and this worked as I got an A-grade. In this exercise I realised that I must evaluate the arguments and come to a decision rather than sit on the fence. I am going to try to turn a past weakness into a strength”
- **Leadership** – “I had a disastrous experience at school when being forced to be team captain and we lost badly ... This task shows that I can do it (leadership) but I know I can develop my leadership skills even further”

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

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£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”

Flintoff Accounting Exercise

- Flintoff Accounting (Module Leader)
- Students are asked to analyse a client's manual accounting records and then attempt to persuade them to use accounting software instead
- An individually written letter incorporating both a technically focussed approach concerning the analysis and then adopting a persuasive style to market the accounting software

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Balance Sheet or Statement
of Financial Position?

Profit and Loss or Income
Statement?

I prefer to do things my way!

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



- A) Financial awareness
- B) Professional expertise
- C) Listening
- D) Judgement
- E) Questioning
- F) Technical application

Flintoff Accounting Analysis

What do the students say?



- Influencing - “In the past I have never been good at influencing people’s decisions, but I really enjoyed this task of advising Andrew Flintoff to change and use electronic accounts”
- Professional expertise - “When I was writing the letter I had to draw on things I had learnt in Financial Accounting ... I struggled with this and had to go back over the things I had learnt to enable me to apply it in a practical way”

University Presentation



- Students are allocated a group presentation title
- Drawing on their experiences of previous exercises, consideration of previous feedback and their reflections linked to their employability
- Using the final stage of our method for developing presentation skills



1st Presentation (formative)
only positive feedback

2nd Presentation (formative)
positive and developmental feedback

3rd Presentation (summative)
rehearse with the academic development tutors

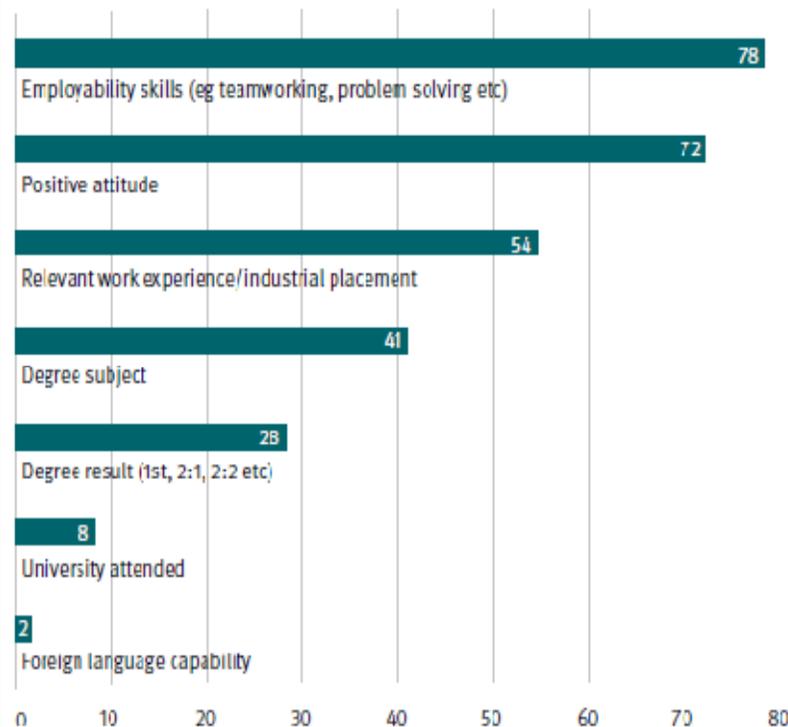
The way forward?



- 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

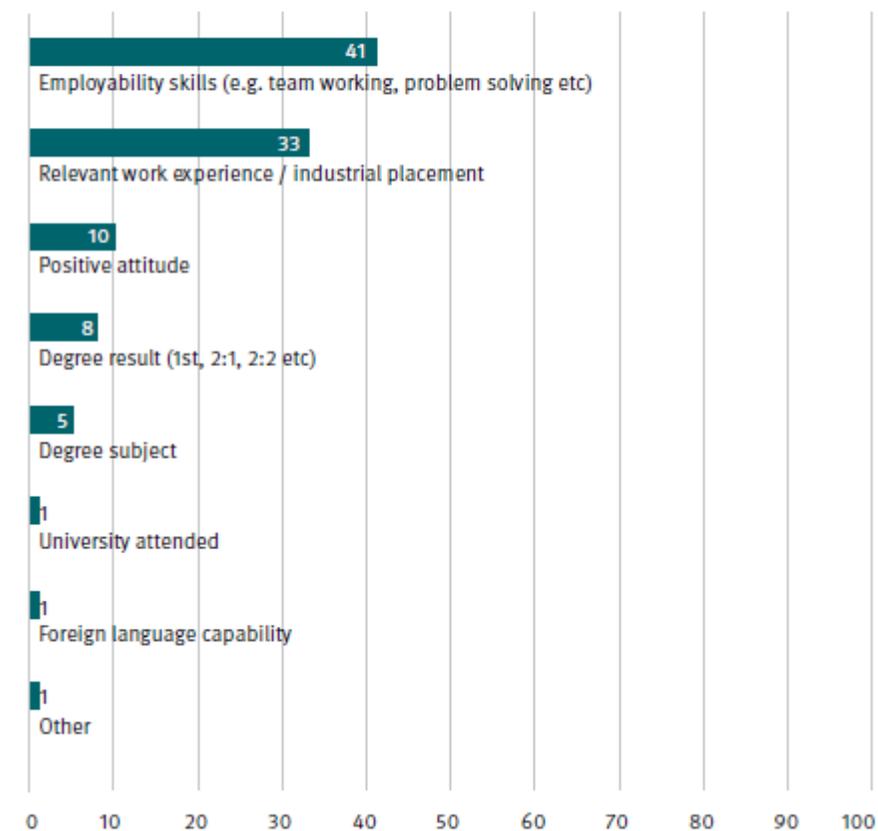
Important factors – employers and students perspective

Exhibit 1: Important factors considered when recruiting graduates (%)



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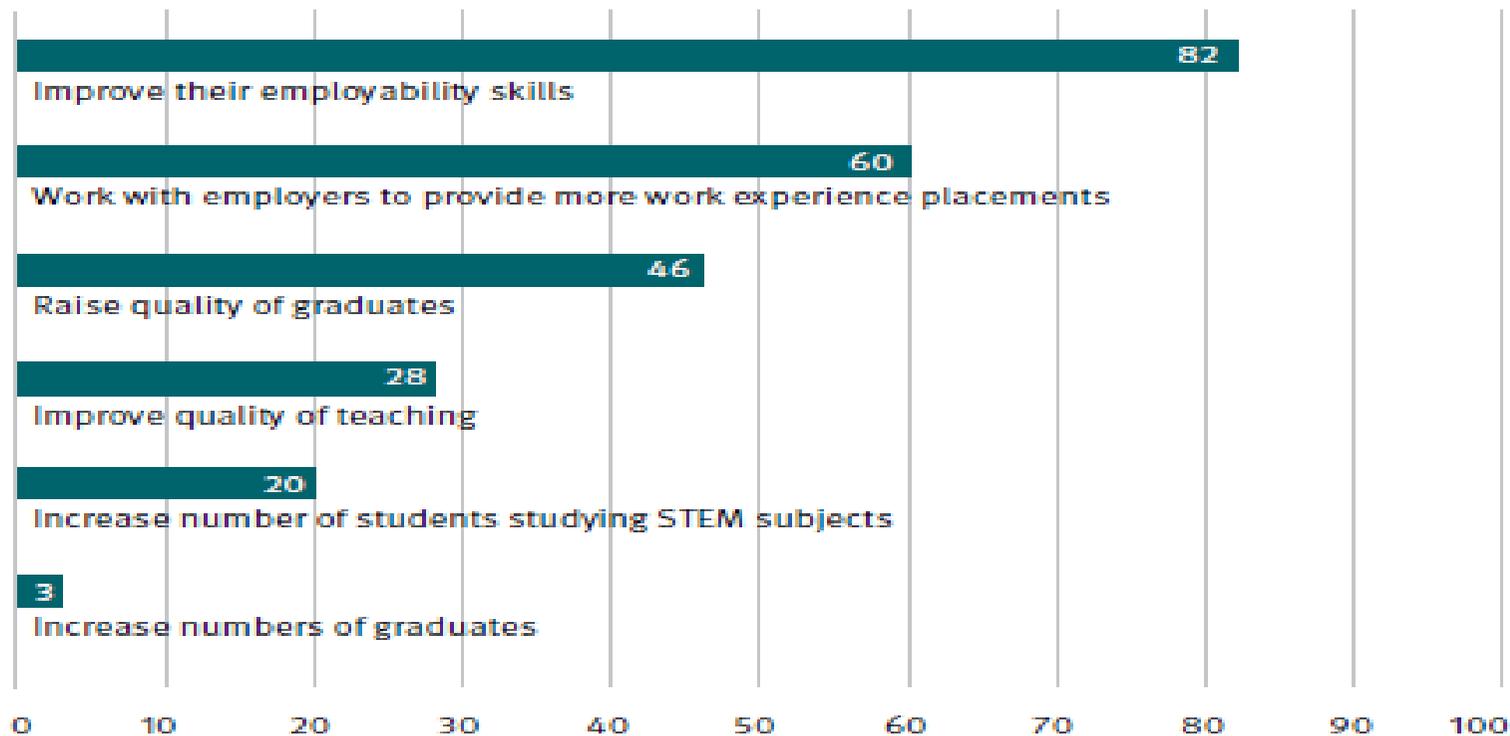
Exhibit 4: Factors which students think employers value most when recruiting graduates (%)



CBI – Future Fit report (2009)

This what the employers think we need to do

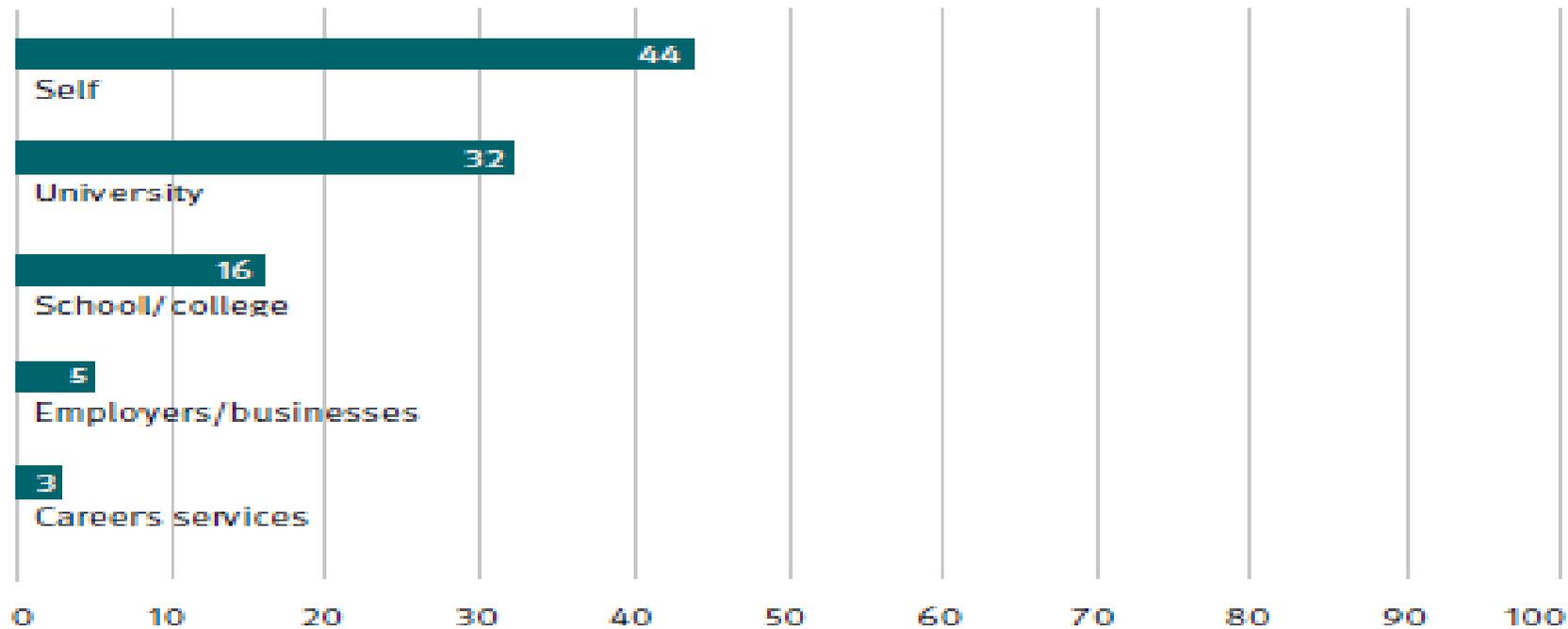
Exhibit 3: What should universities prioritise in terms of undergraduates? (%)



Employability - Who do the students think is responsible?



Exhibit 5: Who is primarily responsible for helping students acquire employability skills (%)



CBI – Future Fit report (2009)

Employability - Who do the students think is responsible?



Responsibility (1st choice)	Student	University	College	Employer
Years 2009 and 2010 – 146 selections	73	42	15	16
Expressed as a % of first selections	50%	29%	10%	11%
Exhibit 5 comparison	44%	32%	16%	5%

Employability is an essential element - but for whom?



	Further Education	Higher Education	Employers
Mean	4.187	4.213	4.000
N	150	221	150
Std. Deviation	0.617	0.629	0.808

Using a five-point Likert Scale – 1 = totally disagree up to 5 = totally agree

Employability should feature – where?



	All degree modules	Just one module	All 3 years of the degree	Just 1 year of the degree
Mean	3.676	2.877	3.767	2.423
N	221	221	221	150
Std. Deviation	0.981	1.142	1.016	1.021

Again using a five-point Likert Scale – 1 = totally disagree up to 5 = totally agree

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

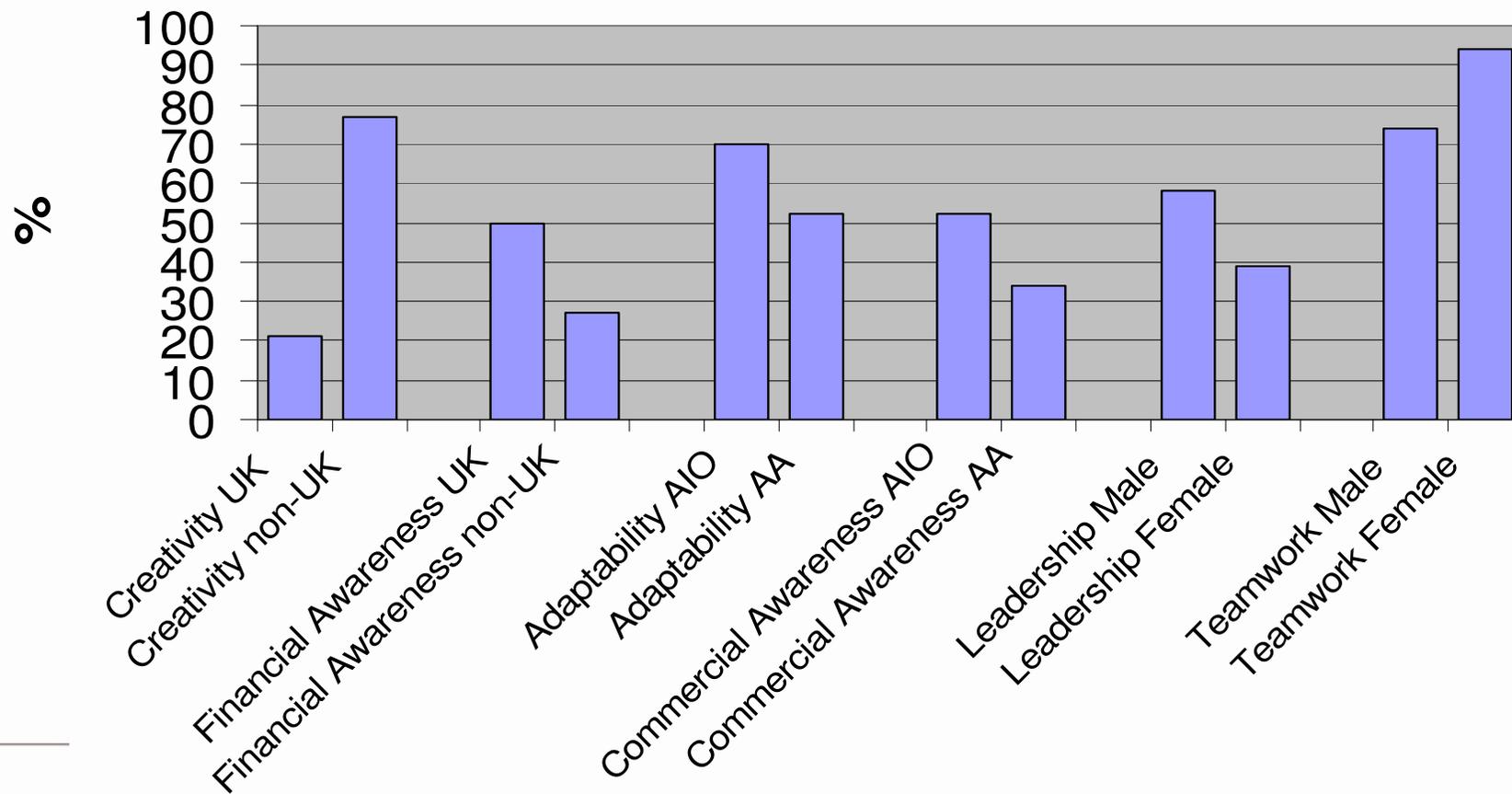
Interpersonal Sensitive 0

Questioning -24

Influencing -25

Process Orientation -70

Selected Comparisons of Competency Ratings



Are we making an impact? Evidence from MC-Dip 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

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Are we making an impact?

This email extract was received from
a 2009 graduate:



- “I wanted to tell you about the management diploma ... It is obvious to me that my fellow graduates (on the scheme) did not have the benefit of these sessions at their universities. The diploma has a massive emphasis on personal development using regular self assessments and reflective logs Although I whinged at the time, the logs have made this task almost second nature to me ... My work is issued to my peers as exemplary; it is acknowledged by my mentors and reported back to the managers of the company.

Are we making an impact?

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."

Are we making an impact?

This is an extract which shows the impact of our original assessment



- “...I have made some big **personal developments** since starting university... these I personally think **came from completing this portfolio** but I have to say it has not been easy. The portfolio has been one of the **hardest tasks** I have ever been a part of ...
- The best thing about this portfolio is that it **hasn't felt like an assignment** ... it has really **felt like a journey** where I opened myself up and 'identified' my deepest weaknesses to make myself better which is something I **never would have done**
- ... After everything I have been through with this portfolio I think that **the mark I will receive isn't important as the way it has changed me as a person is far more valuable.**”

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