



Engaging Employers and Professional Bodies in Curriculum Design

Introduction

This session on engaging employers and professional bodies in curriculum design will review the JISC-funded Supporting Responsive Curricula (SRC) project at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), highlight lessons learned and draw out key questions and issues for debate. SRC is a four year project funded under the JISC's Curriculum Design and Delivery Programme. The project aims to pilot agile, demand-oriented curriculum design processes that promote flexible delivery and enhance learner employability. MMU has recently positioned itself as "The University for World-Class Professionals" and the aims of the SRC project resonate closely with this mission.

The SRC project has been organised around interactions with three key stakeholders: employers/professional bodies; course teams and learners. SRC is making the time available for MMU colleagues to work with employers and professional bodies to articulate high level skill needs and map these against current curriculum. Curriculum design/redesign activity is then driven by reflection upon the extent to which course content and assessment affords learners the opportunity to demonstrate required skills.

SRC is working with Quality Assurance colleagues to understand how approval and enhancement processes can facilitate rapid modifications that course teams wish to make in response to the skills mapping exercise. SRC is also supporting course team colleagues in signposting these skills so that learners can collect evidence of ability in those terms and marshal the evidence to support job and professional body membership applications. To help learners understand how to showcase their talents in ways employers value and understand, SRC is also facilitating opportunities for employers and learners to meet.

Questions to discuss once the conference opens can be found at the end of the synopsis.

Progress so far

SRC's first year of activity has focused on benchmarking the current situation within MMU, so that progress over the four years of the project can be assessed. Pilots have also been established that will engage employers and professional bodies from four key sectors: Creative Digital, Financial Services, Law and Physiotherapy. Benchmarking activity has examined current course approval and modification processes to understand the opportunities and barriers they might present to agile, employer-oriented curriculum design/redesign. Focus groups have also been held across the institution and at varying

levels in the organisational hierarchy to understand working interpretations of “responsive” curricula.

More details about SRC and the questions it has raised for us are available at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=isx72v5aBRM

Within the project, pilots have been selected to explore different aspects of engaging employers and professional bodies. Law and Physiotherapy have mature high level skill frameworks and a culture of continuous professional updating. The strong reflective practitioner culture in Physiotherapy has enabled considerable progress to be made within the first year on a high level skills map, created in consultation with employers and professional bodies, and reinforced with learners through an electronic portfolio and personal tutor support. Senior Learning and Teaching Fellow, Claire Hamshire, provides more detail:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8fwVI4ddLo

Financial Services is moving quickly to a similar position, and colleagues in Accounting and Finance are drawing on their experience with Accounting professional body skill mappings and exemptions. For Creative Digital, however, there is no obvious, mature high level skills framework. SRC is working with a network of employers and industry bodies to develop one, reviewing job roles to identify recurrent skills and validating the emergent framework with employers. A focal point for engagement has been a “ProDevDay” organised by MMU and Manchester Digital in which students and course leaders had the opportunity to meet with employers. To view a video of the event, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqy9JiJ-038

In order to embed these examples of good practice on a wider scale, both the SRC project and its sister projects within the JISC Curriculum Design and Delivery Programme, have identified the need for systems support for skill mapping and agile, integrated curriculum approval and modification workflows. This presentation from the University of South Queensland in Australia highlights what could be possible:

www.usq.edu.au/extrfiles/itsu/CPMS_JISC

MMU’s Supporting Responsive Curricula project has raised a number of issues which would be interesting to explore within this conference:

- Q. Can employer needs and timeframes be handled with standard QA processes?*
- Q. What are the pros and cons of a separate “responsive” QA route?*
- Q. Can employers predict future skill needs better than universities?*
- Q. Could effort of up-front course approval be better directed towards ongoing improvement?*
- Q. Who responds when sector needs don’t fit disciplinary boundaries?*
- Q. Does this agenda really work for all subjects?*
- Q. Does the agenda mean that universities will become factories producing knowledge workers?*

Q. What is the value in mapping skills to curricula?

Q. Is it sufficient to tag assessment activities with skills likely to be demonstrated?

Q. Can learners benefit from tagging evidence of ability in ways that facilitate its re-use for job applications and professional body membership applications?

Q. Are different types of professional e-Portfolios required for different disciplines?

Q. What are the most effective ways of bringing employers and learners together?

Q. What are the benefits of an authoritative and accessible source of curriculum information when pursuing an employer engagement agenda?