

Bournemouth University
Centre for Excellence in Learning (CEL)

CEL Theme:
Employability, Work Based Learning and Professional Practice

CASE STUDY:
School of Tourism Sport Employers Forum

By: Gary Evans
Senior Lecturer in Sport Management
School of Tourism, Sport

Key Words:
Collaboration, Employer Forum, employability, professional practice and student experience

Case study synopsis:

We are in the process of reconnecting with private, public and voluntary sectors employers in Dorset. It is apparent from the consultations indicated below they know little about the UG/PG Sport offer and we know little about them. There seems to be a general level of misunderstanding, especially around how Sport and the Employers Forum might work together more beneficially for UG and PG students, but also the Sport Employers Forum.

Background/Context/Problem being addressed:

On commencing the role as Level P tutor for the UG Sport programmes, it soon became obvious we were not connected to local employers as experienced in other HEIs, and as observed as a Sector Skills Council, Skills-Active, Sport and Leisure Management HE Endorsement Evaluator. Also, after reviewing the spread sheets recording where UG Sport students complete their compulsory Industrial Placements, it became blindingly obvious the majority of students do not enter the local Sport

System. This is a missed opportunity for students and local employers.

Creation of an Employers database:

Following the inaugural Back to the Future Symposium 2013, a meeting was organised with Active Dorset, the Dorset County Sport Partnership (Clive Nelson), and lead agency for Sport in Dorset. The purpose of this meeting was to understand from Active Dorset's point of view the lack of engagement with the local Sport System. Active Dorset could not point to any specific reason for the non-engagement, however, agreed an opportunity existed to foster stronger working relationships with Dorset based Sport employers. The number of Sport employers in Dorset is around 70, and Active Dorset agreed to provide contact details of senior managers they had on their database. The School of Tourism's DDP Team also agreed to create a database of Sport employers for us to start to contact, a database integrating the Sport subject team contacts, Active Dorset, the School of Tourism's Placement Co-ordinators and DDP's own database. It is pleasing to say this database is coming together well with something like 20 private, public and voluntary sectors employers listed on the database.

Outcomes and benefits to the student:

Following the meetings with Active Dorset and DDP, the Sport Employers Forum was born with a series of breakfast meetings

organised with what we perceived as the initial Sport Employers Forum members. The purpose of the breakfast meetings was to introduce the Forum and run focus groups to elicit feedback on what UG Sport delivered to students as the pre-Industrial Placement Level I, Personal and Professional Development in Sport Unit. We were keen to test on the first instance the relevancy on the offer to UG Sport students. It is fair to say the Forum received the Unit enthusiastically and feedback volunteered by the Forum was summarised in notes compiled by DDP which we will act upon to inform minor employers' recommended changes to our offer. The Forum's also provided the opportunity to address misunderstanding, and discuss other ways we might be able to collaborate with employers (see attached models). The School of Tourism sponsored breakfast meetings care of I. Jones were certainly worth the time and effort, and DDP are in the process of arranging B2B meetings with Forum members to try and activate their positive support for the benefit of UG and PG Sport students.

Critical Reflections:

A number of the Sport Employer Forum members suggested they were completely confused with who to contact, for example, sportBU, academic sport, Placement Co-ordinators, in fact, they find BU a very complex organisation to make sense of. They also suggested they are budget sensitive, thus agreeing to

take students on 1-year paid Industrial Placements would need to go through their boards, so they need assurances a constant

flow of UG students would be available thereafter. Active Dorset recommended doing this via a letter of agreement. It is apparent internal inertia is likely to hinder working relationships too, for example, after the April's breakfast meeting an employer offered to an UG Sport Industrial Placement that was not organised and brought to the attention of the Level P tutor at the end of August. The apparent move away from professional practice in preference to research driven activity is causing confusion too. Otherwise, we just need to become much smarter in how we work with Sport employers.

What worked well, what didn't:

The Sport Employers Forum is in its infancy, however, the breakfast meetings and focus groups have certainly provided invaluable feedback to improve how we prepare UG Sport students for their professional practice opportunities. The Back to the Future Symposium needs to continue as our flagship event to showcase what we do, and to help build the relationships with Sport employers. We are hoping the B2B meetings will start to activate some of the opportunities suggested by employers. However, we must avoid missing

opportunities such as the Sport England fund to support collaboration between HEIs and employers.

Recommendations:

To have an open mind about what we are trying to achieve professional practice wise for UG/PG Sport and take away what bits you can which you think might work for your programmes.

Any academic or professional member of staff is more than welcome to attend any of the professional practice events we are running, just drop me an e-mail:

gevans@bournemouth.ac.uk