
Joining up Work-Related Learning - Working Effectively with Industry

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At Liverpool John Moores University's Centre for Sport, Dance and Outdoor Education, staff within the Sport Development programmes feel it is vitally important to enable students to gain as broad a range of employment-related skills as possible. To that end, tutors work to ensure that work-based learning (WBL) and work-related learning (WRL) are an integral part of the BA (Hons) Sport Development with Physical Education (PE) programme and this has been the case since its inception in 1999.

A particular feature of the programme relates to the many chances students have to work alongside industry professionals. The key ingredients for student experiences/projects and research are based on creating partnerships and developing network systems in communities and schools and with other institutions. By working with external agencies and organisations, staff in the Centre for Sport, Dance and Outdoor Education strive to build a holistic curriculum which, when using WRL, seeks to provide a 'connectivity' for both students and partners alike.

Working with the CETL Community Support Officer, this connectivity between the curriculum and the industry involves initiatives such as: the development of innovative and collaborative employer engagement; opportunities for students to work with WRL partners at undergraduate Years 1 through to 3 and at postgraduate level; for industry experts to engage with curriculum design; for WRL partners to get to know what the Sport Development students 'are all about' through working together at all levels. In the long term, such connective links provide positive results for all concerned.

The aim of this article is to give an insight into placement provision on the Sport Development with PE programme.

Year 1 placements take place with Liverpool City Council's SportsLinx project, which introduces students to a number of subject-related key concepts, along with giving students their first taste of work-based learning. With links to a taught module and their learning experiences at the fitness testing sessions, students are able to place sport development and physical education in the context of school and community, whilst developing key skills, and gaining knowledge and experience in a innovative and exciting collaboration between higher education and sport development.

Occasionally the placement opportunities are expanded at Year 1 and additional links are offered. For example, in the academic year 2006/07 the Programme worked with the World Fire Fighter Games which were held in Merseyside in 2008. This exciting opportunity allowed students to work with event managers to organise and assist with the 60+ events that made up this international event. Furthermore, students became involved in voluntary capacities and a number of students continued to work with the events managers after Year 1 had finished.

Year 2 aims to enable students to identify and understand the roles of the main partners responsible for providing sport and leisure opportunities in a WBL environment; to provide a practical environment aligning course theory with industry application; and to develop student experience in a range of fields.

The module comprises of 20 days WBL placement, preceded by two weeks of taught sessions and tutorials, with allocated tutors both prior to and on completion of placement. Students can complete no more than two placements.

Placements at Year 2 are undertaken in various settings such as local authorities, sport clubs, schools, County Sport Partnerships, etc, etc. Students can either organise their own placements or can be supported in identifying a suitable provider.

Year 3 WBL is part of a core module which allows students the opportunity to specialise in a chosen area, whilst linking previous experiences from Year 1 & 2. Students choose to undertake either a work-based placement or an individually-negotiated task. It is an opportunity to choose a specialist area and plan a long term sustainable project whilst on placement; to demonstrate skills acquired throughout the course, as well as to develop contacts for career progression.

The module aims to allow the students to experience, first hand, the policies and practices of their chosen agency; to establish links between work placement, theoretical studies and course based competencies; to experience an area of work relevant to future career choice; and finally, but most importantly, to reflect upon their own development.

It is through the Department's commitment to employer engagement that it is possible to present a diverse range and number of opportunities at all levels of the portfolio of

programmes on offer. One such example is the partnership with Everton Football Club's Youth Academy. Everton Football Club operates an extensive and highly successful Youth Academy. The Academy has established new and improved structures for coaching, recruitment, medical and sports science support, administration, education and welfare.

The aims of the Everton Academy are to:

- identify and develop players for the first team squad
- develop players who can save the club expenditure
- develop players who can earn the club revenue in transfer fees
- develop players who can make professional football their first career
- develop players who can make a career outside football
- most importantly, offer players of all ages an opportunity to experience the best development programme possible

There is an ethos which permeates throughout the Academy. There is an understanding that an Academy is not just a building, not just a group of people, or not just a programme. It is all of those things and more... ..it is a philosophy, a culture, a way of doing things... this is known as THE EVERTON WAY.

(www.evertonfc.com/academy/what-is-an-academy.html)

Students have an opportunity to fully engage in this approach with all of those involved in the Academy. They become fully immersed within this philosophy, and quickly become valued members of the Academy team.

The partnership with the Everton Academy enables a number of students to undertake their Year 2 and 3 work-based learning in this environment and such an opportunity would not be available but for the enthusiastic engagement from the team at the Everton Academy with the LJMU Sports Development Department. This enthusiasm is evident with all the industry partners, and through a long and continuous process of building-up strong relationships with each and every one of them, Sports Development tutors aim to enhance the levels of employer engagement. As noted at the beginning of this article, the Sport Development with PE programme began in 1999 and one of the most satisfying elements of employer engagement is with graduates who now work in industry and provide high quality placements for subsequent undergraduates. This exciting opportunity to continue to further develop the work-based and work-related experiences will go a long way to maintaining the currency of delivery integral to the sport portfolio of programmes which strive to enhance student employability.

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