Taking the LEAD: Reflections on using eportfolios for students to evidence employability skills development

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www.dit.ie/LEAD
Presentation outline

• Background to the LEAD Module
• Employability/Development of Graduate attributes

• Overview of the LEAD Module
• LEAD module strengths and challenges
Development of Graduate Attributes: Nationally

Hunt Report (2010) – the inclusion of generic skills

‘The undergraduate curriculum needs to place more emphasis on generic skills, especially those required for the workplace and for active citizenship’

DCU response – Generation 21 Plan

‘It’s our responsibility to ensure we’ve done all we can to make sure that they are developing the attributes that we know employers want today’ (MacCraith 2011)
Employability.....

• “.....a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”. (Yorke, 2004)

• "the development of a set of aptitudes, attitudes and attributes which enable DIT students and graduates to develop academically, vocationally, socially and personally, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy in career paths which are personally fulfilling and successful”. (Kilmartin, 2014)
Becoming (Growth)

Academic

Social

Vocational

Personal
Is the contribution of extra-curricular activities to employability recognised?

• Employers are looking for students who are intellectually able, skilled interpersonally, team players, numerate, literate and self motivated.

• Many of these attributes are acquired, practised and demonstrated through extra-curricular activities.

• Students often find difficulty in appreciating the contribution their work experience and especially “free-time” activities make to their employability (SCEPTrE project, 2009).
Differences in approach taken between awards (taken from SCEPTrE project, 2009)

- What was emphasised e.g. **education/ employability/ leadership**
- Their focus e.g. **personal/professional development or employability**
- Level of student commitment required
- Who is included/excluded from applying
- How they are organised/resourced and marketed
- Types of experiences that qualify for award and whether there are specialist pathways
- How they are assessed, by whom e.g. are employers involved?
- Form of recognition e.g. credits/certificates/awards
- Whether awards are included in transcripts
- How awards are resourced and who is involved
- The extent to which the scheme is an explicit part of the university’s concept of Student Experience
SCEPTrE Framework: Holistic Focus

- Experience, skills sessions, ongoing recording & strong emphasis on reflection, portfolio integrating a reflective account
- Recognised by certificates
- Personal development with employability as a sub set

Examples: Exeter Award, Lincoln Learn Higher Award, Sheffield, Aberdeen STAR Award
Background to LEAD Module internally

‘...all (DIT) programmes will provide students with a range of opportunities to develop, practice and be assessed on an agreed range of key employability skills. These to be made explicit as learning outcomes within the appropriate programme documentation’ Academic Council 2007

- EAM Module validated March 2008
- Approval for LEAD pilot January 2011
- Programme Team/mentors: drawn from Careers, Sports, Campus Life, LTTC, DITSU, Clubs and societies, Disability, Counseling
- First students enrolled on LEAD Module March 2011 (students in key leadership roles were selected to apply)
- First LEAD graduation September 2011
DIT Student Engagement Strategy (2012-15)

Key objectives of the DIT strategy are as follows:

To:

• Enhance the DIT institutional learning environment, associated policies and infrastructures to better support processes and practice that support student engagement;

In advancing this strategy on Student Engagement and building on existing best practice DIT will:

• Create an enhanced overall student experience
• Build further DIT’s reputation as a place to study and to recruit graduates
• Promote student success and the achievement of learning outcomes
• Lead to an enriched learning environment and higher student satisfaction levels
• Promote greater student retention
• Underpin DIT’s funding model
• Enhance the development of the student graduate attributes needed for effective engagement in society and in the workplace.

The DIT LEAD award recognises students leadership roles in extra-curricular work with DIT clubs, societies, ditsu, sports and volunteering in the community. Through participation in LEAD, you will develop and reflect on a range of employability skills benefiting you both personally and professionally.
LEADership skills

1. Effective communicators
2. Active team players
3. Problem solvers
4. Creative innovators
5. Digitally literate
6. Global citizens
LEAD 2015-6 module structure

Students apply online – short listed (approx 20-30) are interviewed

LEAD Module is structured around 100 learning hours (5ECTS):

• A series of 7 mandatory workshops
  • Induction/Introduction workshop (personal action plan, blog set up etc.)
  • Skills development workshops: WordPress, Goal Setting/Resilience, Reflective Writing, Interview Techniques, Mind Mapping etc.
  • Final Leadership reflective workshop – meeting DIT president

• Two mentor meetings (structured around learning agreements)
• Student engagement in activities
• Maintenance of a reflective blog + gathering of evidence

Module is assessed by ePortfolio
Student Learning agreement headings – negotiated with mentors during first session (often re-negotiated during subsequent mentor meetings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill No</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Personal goal</th>
<th>Learning opportunity</th>
<th>How will you know you are successful?</th>
<th>Target date for completion</th>
<th>Evidence of learning</th>
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LEAD module portfolio assessment

Portfolio Outline (approx 2000 words):

1. **LEAD**: Personal leadership and personal development plan (approx 300 words)

2. **ENGAGE**: log of engagement in activities (approx 300 words per skill + evidence)

3. **ACHIEVE**: reflections upon personal achievements (approx 800 words)

4. **DEVELOP**: summary of your personal development journey (approx 300 words)
Reflection Essay

April 30, 2016 ~ Leave a Comment

Liadain Sheehy
DIT Rowing Club

Reflection Essay
LEAD award: a diversity of LEADers
A diversity of evidence

“A well thought out and structured letter and the personal touch of including our Logo was a key deciding factor. Well done Gavin”

Amy Fortune – AIB Bolton St. Branch Manager and Student representative

“Absolutely loved the detail that was taken when producing this letter, just having our logo included in a mock up design helped us get a feel for it and appreciate the personal touch that was taken. We look forward to working with you guys”

Barney McGill – Manager – D2 nightclub and Harcourt Hotel
Agendas & Minutes please

There are some example e-mails that I have sent out during the two years I have been in the society.

(Example of the e-mail sent to invite DIT staff to the event)
Dear Mr. Gormley

On behalf of the Poker Society I would like to invite you to the much anticipated DIT Poker Night, gearing up to be an amazing night. We have 14 fully professional casino tables including blackjack, roulette and poker for approximately two hours, with prizes for the winners of the night. In addition, we have live performances from two bands, The Riptide Movement and Nookie. It is a fabulously themed night so semi-formal dress is encouraged but not essential. Feel free to bring a guest if you wish.

Any questions about the night, or if you require extra tickets please contact me at as soon as possible by email or on 0861750954.

Hope to see you on Wednesday night
Best Regards

Paul
Communicating with the group through Facebook.

**Using Facebook to promote events**

Evidence of use of technology

**Piece I wrote for The DIT News piece on W4Z**

We had a long stop over in Nairobi airport. We had already flown from Dublin to Amsterdam and from Amsterdam to Nairobi. From Nairobi we were about to fly to Zimbabwe and then from Zimbabwe to Ligonja. Then, just a six hour bus journey and we would be in Mzuzu. I think having over 27 hours of travel in total we were starting to get a little disconcerted.

There were so many things in Nairobi airport that were reminiscent of home. I saw Holly Willoughby's face on a copy of Company magazine. Smirnoff vodka was sold next to Marlboro cigarettes, both priced in US dollars.
In this section, I'll be discussing how I developed my skills over the course of the year preparing for the event, with a few examples of how I was able to achieve the results. Some of the examples include snippets from my blog entries as well as some evidence gathered throughout the course of planning the event.
Reflection Essay

Liadain Sheehy
DIT Rowing Club

Reflection Essay

I’m so happy that I took part in the LEAD/SEAD program. The experience and knowledge I have gained will help me so much in later life. I’m in my final year of a Higher Certificate in Business Management and after doing this programme I feel more confident in myself that I will be able to continue on to do a degree programme successfully.

I joined DIT Rowing Club in September 2014. As I stated in my learning contract at the start of the year, I love working out but I was getting sick of going to the gym every day, so I decided to join the rowing club when I saw them on society day last year and haven’t looked back since. Making vice-captain last year boosted my self-esteem and confidence. Everyone looks at the V.C for direction and answers. I wanted to be able to fulfil my duties. I hoped doing this program will help me achieve this and I was right. I wanted to enhance my life experience and be ready for the working world when I leave college and I feel the program has helped me a lot in getting there. I met such great people and enjoyed our gatherings and learning workshops. What I’m walking away with now after completing this programme is far more then I imagined at the beginning of the year when I decided to sign up.

My 3 skills I choose were Leadership, Excellent Communicator and Active Team Player. I wanted to develop these skills as I feel the club/team will benefit more from me being able to lead more promptly, communicate more clearly and to be able to gel among the men and ladies while showing...
LEAD Early Evaluation Feedback: Content/structure

Tutor/mentor sessions:
• were ‘motivational’ ‘good opportunity to check progress’

Blogging was helpful for some....
• ‘in capturing events that may have forgotten details on otherwise’ ‘a great opportunity to think back and reflect on the whole year and useful for capturing events’ ‘it really helped me to vent and evaluate things’

....but not for others....
• ‘I didn’t feel comfortable sharing thoughts online’ feeling ‘it was hard to motivate myself to sit down and do it’
LEAD Early Evaluation Feedback: Most/Least useful?

• Did taking the module change the way you do things?
  ‘it made me reflect more on events that happened hence changing the way I would do things’ ‘makes you think about the work you’ve done and what went well and what didn’t + improvements’

• The most enjoyable aspect of the module was the interaction with others involved in the module ‘seeing how other people run societies/clubs and learning from their experience’, ‘developing my skills with a great bunch of people’
LEAD Early Evaluation Feedback:
Would you recommend the module?

- it’s a good way to develop your leadership skills + employability skills’
- ‘yes you learn how to represent yourself which is an important skill’
- ‘it’s a great to be acknowledged and to make contacts with the other society leaders’
- ‘its going to be helpful when going to interview’
- ‘definitely, it’s a great learning method’

- Thanks for the opportunity, I hope I don’t let you down!
LEAD challenges

• Resource intensive (mentor time/support)
• Award not recognised as part of programme
• Misperceptions around LEAD award (aims and content)
• Perceived status of award diminished (as a result of increased numbers (SEAD)/ calibre of students attracted)
• Poor student (& staff) engagement and retention
• Student challenges with ePortfolios eg reflective writing, aligning evidence with skills, time management etc
• Too many changes in the award structure methods
• Over emphasis on end product rather than process
Modifications made to LEAD 2012-15

• Student recruitment process and numbers
• Awards structure: session no./length/format
• Catering for different reflection abilities
• More continuous assessment – manage workload
• Introduction of SEAD/LEAD
• Change in focus of workshops/more emphasis on eportfolio work
• SEAD discontinued in 2014 now more of a focus on leadership in LEAD
‘Meaningful volunteering experience enables students to develop and demonstrate a range of core skills highly valued by employers: from problem solving to leadership to communication skills.

Undertaking DIT's LEAD module also demonstrates motivation and commitment to active citizenship and will certainly enhance your CV. I highly recommend it.

Turlough O' Sullivan - former Director General of IBEC