



Left: A student engaged in sport based co-curricular activity
Courtesy University of Gloucestershire

experiences beyond the curriculum then becomes a natural conclusion to the student's HE journey'

The University of Gloucestershire has a wide-ranging sport and exercise provision with over 1,400 students studying for undergraduate, postgraduate and research awards. Early work at the University resulted in the Employable Gloucestershire Graduate (EGG) award. These awards were presented to the students during events to mark other outward-facing achievements such as enterprise awards providing at least some evidence of achievements beyond the curriculum. Within sport and exercise, these awards were able to recognise the significant numbers of students volunteering (SportCVs), where students are supported and funded to take a National Governing Body award alongside volunteering in the local community. More recently, opportunities to undertake internships in areas beyond their subject boost their employability. The University is also planning to extend the academic year to ensure students have more time to undertake periods of practice experience.



words:

Prof David James

David is a Professor at the University of Gloucestershire, a BASES accredited sport and exercise scientist and Deputy Dean for the Faculty of Applied Sciences.

Kelly Goodwin

Kelly is a Senior Lecturer at Bournemouth University, a probationary sport and exercise scientist and Theme Leader for employability, work based learning and professional practice for the Centre of Excellence in Learning (CEL).

The need for verification of co-curricular activities

Central to awards beyond the curriculum is the need to independently verify the activities of the student. These activities might be diverse and levels of student engagement may vary considerably. Unlike credit bearing aspects of the curriculum, where a well-developed culture of assessment exists with learning outcomes, grade descriptors and task-specific assessment criteria, no such culture and shared understanding exists for co-curricular activities that may take on a variety of forms and may well be identified and led by the student and his/her interests. This is a different challenge to the credit for placements that is an established feature of many subjects and courses. Placements are often clearly specified opportunities that form an integral part of the objectives of the course. Those hosting the students are normally carefully inducted into their role, and mentors are in place to support students. In contrast, co-curricular opportunities may be far less predictable and consistent.

It is against this backdrop that the University of Gloucestershire became involved in the HEAR pilot, trialling the concept and informing the conclusions and recommendations that have emerged. The Burgess report marks an important point in HE in the UK and is aligned with the national economic context and the reform of Higher Education. Students will increasingly want recognition for co-curriculum learning, and that recognition will need to be readily accessible to potential employers. The HEAR provides a vehicle for such recognition. If Universities are not able to quickly set mechanisms in place to verify and provide access to the student achievements, commercial providers have solutions in place. These developments provide a game-changing opportunity for sport and exercise courses, especially in Institutions with a track record of co-curricular opportunities for students. The academic transcript and the curriculum vitae may never look the same again. ■

Recognising the co-curriculum: the HEAR has arrived

Prof David James and Kelly Goodwin discuss The Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR)

Introduction

It is striking that, at exactly the same time as there is high graduate unemployment there are also employers with unfilled vacancies (Barber *et al.*, 2013). A lack of requisite personal attributes and skills have been identified as partly to blame and the call continues for institutions to demonstrate how they provide education for employment. Frequently, the value of Higher Education (HE) is being questioned and with competition between universities set to intensify, a tool to demonstrate student achievement per institution has been developed, welcome... the HEAR (the Higher Education Achievement Report). A concise electronic document that details student achievement, piloted in over 90 institutions (over half of the sector) since 2008 (HEAR, 2012).

The Burgess Report

The Burgess Implementation Steering Group anticipate that the HEAR will swiftly become a key feature in differentiating and distinguishing the United Kingdom (UK) HE system from others (Burgess, 2012). It is hoped that eventually, the wider information contained within will eclipse the degree classification and where appropriate, replace it (Universities UK, 2012). For the first time students will be accredited for extra curricular activities and experiences alongside academic grades (section 6.1 of the HEAR).

The University of Gloucestershire – trialling the HEAR

The University of Gloucestershire became one of the initial trial institutions in 2008. Their School of Sport and Exercise is

one of the largest providers of sport and exercise programmes in the UK (Gloucestershire University 2013) and as such, they are perfectly placed to provide comment.

The topics included in the diverse range of sport and exercise courses within UK HE provide a perfect test-bed for the HEAR. The subject area is highly applied attracting students who are interested in gaining practice experience. Although some sport and exercise courses have a long tradition of student credit-bearing placements, most do not. Similarly, some departments are now developing opportunities for students beyond the curriculum but, to date, these experiences have generally not been verified by the HE institution which is a requirement of the HEAR.

Prof David James from the University of Gloucestershire explains that 'most students attracted to sport and exercise courses are intrinsically interested in the subject but unsure where their studies could lead. Opportunities to explore practice, alongside the highly applied content of most courses, allow students to formulate ideas about employment destinations and firm up their plans. Being able to demonstrate to employers their

Reference

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