



The Scholarship
of Engagement
for Politics

**The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics
FDTL 5
Report on the Transferability Phase**

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The Transferability Team

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Introduction

As we noted in the concluding section of the Final Evaluation Report (Gibson et al, 2008: 37), our bid for transferability funding was successful. We thus embarked on the transferability phase of the project, lasting from November 2007 until the end of June 2008, by working with four new partner institutions with the central aim of adapting the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics to meet the institutional requirements of the transferability partners. Whereas the main phase of the project was focused on developing models of placement learning and setting up, running and evaluating placements, our approach was now to provide advice, encouragement and support to our new partners to enable them to introduce models of placement learning suitable and appropriate to their courses and institutional structures and to learn from their experiences.

We employed three main modes of delivery during the transferability phase: presentations to groups, usually departmental teaching and learning committees or interested academics from the social science departments more generally, at the new partner institutions; consultations with smaller groups or individuals; and the information available on the project website. Formal presentations, which included video clips of students talking about their experiences, allowed us to effectively convey the findings of the project and the benefits conferred by short, research-based placements. Individual consultations were the main means by which the specific institutional strategies were devised. And the website provided a point of reference in terms of providing access to our project templates as well as a source of general information on the project.

We saw in the formation of the new transferability partnerships the opportunity to develop new models of placement learning to complement the models we had already devised. Therefore our goal was not to impose or overlay our models of placement learning on our new partners' institutional, degree and module structures, but to find innovative and appropriate means of extending the scholarship of engagement into novel institutional settings. We sought to learn from our partners as much as to share our experience, knowledge and models.

The transferability partners reflect the diversity of educational contexts in British higher education, with varying levels of placement activities prior to their involvement in the project and with a variety of motivations for embedding placement learning in their degree courses. The transferability partners were:

Division of Criminology, Politics and Sociology, University of Huddersfield

Department of Politics, Keele University

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds

Department of Law, Governance and International Relations, London Metropolitan University

In terms of the further development of the project, our approach to placement learning was advanced in four key areas as a result of our consultations with the transferability partners:

The development of new models of placement learning: The new partners provided new institutional frameworks and approaches to the use of placements, which allowed us to develop new models of the scholarship of engagement appropriate to each context. In short, three new variants were developed: a revised level-two work placement module (Huddersfield); placements embedded in employability modules (Keele and Leeds); and forms of community-based learning (London Met).

Use of careers services in delivering employability modules: The Careers Service at the University of Leeds runs whole modules in employability for interested academic departments, rather than just running a few lectures on CV writing and job applications on work placement modules, which is generally the case.

New modes of blogging: Placement students' blogs were a very important dimension of the original project, but few universities provide their students with this facility. We learned from the University of Huddersfield that a blog facility is available on the Blackboard virtual learning environment.

Innovations in linking community-based learning to Politics courses: The developments at London Met suggest novel ways of extending the scholarship of engagement in the direction of community-based learning.

The main achievements of the transferability phase of the project were the development of institutional strategies for the effective implementation of the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics at the four new partner institutions, resulting in the development of new models of placement learning, and the further dissemination of the project's results and outputs.

Institutional Strategies

The central aim of the transferability phase of the project was to bridge the gap between the *awareness* of our models of the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics in the national higher education community, generated by the original three-year project, and attempts at their *implementation* within UK Politics and International Relations departments and cognate disciplines. Through working intensively with four new partner institutions, we aimed to embed the Scholarship of Engagement within their undergraduate curricula.

Our new partners represented a nice mix of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities, but also the rural and the urban, with diverse student bodies. The new partners also had a variety of past experiences with placements. Therefore we devised a variety of strategies for implementing the scholarship of engagement tailored to the institutions’ regulations, priorities, and prior experience of placement learning.

The University of Huddersfield

We were delighted when Dr Andy Mycock in the Division of Criminology, Politics and Sociology agreed to work with us on the project. The division was a pioneer in the use of placements in the teaching and learning of Politics, with a mandatory level-two Politics Work Placement module that dates back to the late 1980s. Dr Mycock is a new appointment at Huddersfield and was eager to make some alterations to the module which he inherited.

This case demonstrates the effectiveness of our project website. Dr Mycock discovered our project online and downloaded some of our templates, such as the Partnership Agreement (parts of which now appear in his Learning Agreement Relating to Work-Based Learning), adapting them to suit the requirements of his module and institution, and established contact with the project team. He also made a number of alterations to his module in line with the findings of our original project: he reduced the minimum length of placements from 10 weeks to 15 days and set up a blog for students to record their reflections on the Blackboard module website.

Following our consultations with him, Dr Mycock will make further changes to the module in line with our model of placement learning as soon as the university’s procedures for module amendments allow. At present the module is assessed on a pass/fail basis and the pattern of assessment includes the employer’s assessment of the student’s performance. It is proposed to remove the employer’s role in formal, summative assessment and to grade the module on the basis of online learning logs (blogs) and research papers (which will replace the current ‘work placement academic report’). Finally, placements will be built around research projects undertaken for placement providers.

In terms of the development of our project, Huddersfield is an important and interesting case. The placement module is mandatory, even for joint honours students, and the students have to find their own placements (although they are supported in this by academic and careers service staff). This has important implications for

sustainability, as one of the dimensions of our model of placement learning which is a source of concern for many heads of departments is how to resource the setting up of placements. However, with students arranging their own placements, the alternative concern emerges that placements will not be properly focused on suitable learning outcomes. Working on this, we've concluded that the best way forward is for the module handbook to incorporate a paragraph which students will include in letters of application to prospective placement providers stating that the centrepiece of any placement should be a research project. This point will be reinforced in a revised version of the learning agreement.

We made a presentation to the Division of Criminology, Politics and Sociology on 12th March 2008, which was important because staff from the other two disciplines plan to explore means of integrating placements into their programmes and were keen to learn from our experience. Therefore at Huddersfield the findings of our project cascaded to cognate subject areas.

London Metropolitan University

Like the University of Huddersfield, London Met has a long experience of using placements in the teaching and learning of Politics. As a result of the merger in 2002 of London Guildhall University and the University of North London, which created this large urban university, there are currently a number of placement modules available to students of Politics and Public Administration including: one-semester and year-long variants of the level-three Politics and International Relations Work Placement modules (administered from the City Campus); a one-semester Professional Placement module (administered from the North Campus by the Placements Office in the Careers Service) which can be taken at level two or three;¹ a level-two module Managing Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations which requires experience of working in the voluntary sector; a level-two summer placement module for BA Public Administration students; and placement opportunities on the MA in Public Administration (Cormack and Konidari 2007: 94-95). There are also extra- and co-curricular placement opportunities, such as the Three Faiths Forum's Undergraduate ParliaMentor scheme, which organises placements with MPs for a number of students in London.

In the national context revealed by our 2005 survey of Politics and International Relations departments, London Met's use of placements is very innovative. In line with our models of placement learning, the placements on the above modules are often very short (the City Campus one-semester module requires a minimum of only 10 days on placement, while the Professional Placement module has the most substantial requirement of a minimum of 25 days). But there has also been innovation in linking work experience to the Politics curriculum. The City Campus placement tutor Dr Peter Laugharne has been creative, using the placement as a 'peg' on which to hang the academic placement report. For example, a student interested in becoming a teacher undertook a work placement at a primary school and wrote her report on

¹ This module grew out of the 'capability curriculum' developed by the University of North London prior to the merger (Page 1998: 40).

education policy, while a student who found a placement at an investment bank wrote his report on financial services legislation.

Despite the many and varied placement modules that are already available to students of Politics and International Relations, new placement opportunities have been developed, informed by the transferability phase of the project (and for which there is clearly an appetite among the students, given the number who attended our presentation to academic and careers service staff on 16th April 2008). The most concrete of these developments at this stage is the incorporation of five-day placements on a new level-two module The New Diplomacy. In line with the Scholarship of Engagement for Politics, placements will be identified, negotiated and arranged by academic staff and embedded in this content module. Placement opportunities are currently being negotiated with international NGOs and other relevant actors in London. Following the experience of Huddersfield, a blog facility will be set up on the Blackboard module web for students on placements to record their experiences, with the intention that non-placement students will also benefit from the placements through reading the placement students' logs and interacting with them. Picking up on a suggestion in the Final Evaluation Report of the main project (Gibson et al, 2008: 29n), this module will also experiment with SMS text messaging for students on placements to report on their progress without having to find a networked computer. (In 2008-09 London Met will trial software provided by TxtTools, and this module will be one of the pilots.) Following the model we developed at the University of Warwick, the placements on this module will be assessed through reflective electronic logs and essay questions tailored to the research projects the students undertook on placement.

There are also plans for the incorporation of placements into new programmes. The new BA in International Development includes a mandatory level-three placement module, with placements organised by academic staff. And a proposed foundation degree growing out of Dr Maurice Glasman's Faith and Citizenship Initiative will involve a placement. As part of this initiative the department has joined London Citizens. We are in the process of negotiating placement opportunities with this organisation, which should result in activities closer to the US experience of service learning, action research, and community engagement. We have also consulted with colleagues in Law who are interested in embedding *pro bono* work for voluntary organisations into their curriculum.

The University of Leeds

The School of Politics and International Studies already makes some use of placements. All students at the University of Leeds can spend their third year on a work placement to graduate with the words 'with Industry' appended to their degree titles. More specifically, the third year of the four-year BA Politics and Parliamentary Studies (PPS) programme comprises an internship either in Westminster or in the US Congress or Canadian Parliament, although placements are also possible with research offices and political consultants in London. Similarly, placements in the European Parliament are available as part of the European Parliament Studies programme. While these programmes are very successful and confer excellent benefits in terms of learning, personal development and employability on their

graduates (many of whom go on to work for MPs and other political actors), placements are exclusive to the programmes and not all students in the school can benefit from them. Therefore the University of Leeds joined us as a transferability partner in order to develop alternative models of placement learning for all students of Politics and International Relations.

We made a presentation to the School Learning and Teaching Committee on 6th February 2008, when we also met with staff of the Careers Service and its Placement Office, and we have been working closely with Dr Simon Lightfoot who has begun identifying placement opportunities through the school's PPS alumni, but also with ASDA – the company's headquarters is based in Leeds and students might gain experience of politics in action through working in its Parliamentary lobbying section. We have also explored the possibility of PPS students mentoring Politics and IR students on the latter's much shorter placements.

A number of possible models of embedding placements in the curriculum are currently under consideration, such as a new level-two module, Careers in Politics, incorporating placements, or the adaptation of the model developed by Geography: a 10-credit Careers for Geography module delivered by the Careers Service in the first semester, followed by a 10-credit Enterprise for Geography module in the second semester. Whichever model the school ultimately adopts, it will be well supported by Leeds' system of placement administration which deserves mention. The Placement Office has been incorporated into the Careers Service and provides an online database of available placements offered by employers and other providers – an excellent example of joined up university administration.

Keele University

Despite its justified reputation for innovation in university-level education, it is notable that unlike the other transferability partners, Keele University has neither a placements office nor any tradition of incorporating placements into degree structures, except in disciplines where it is now a recognised part of the curriculum such as engineering.

The project team had made a presentation to the Politics Department at Keele University in March 2007, but we made another presentation during the transferability phase in 5th March 2008. On this occasion our audience included staff concerned with teaching and learning issues in the social sciences as well as a consultant employed by the Vice Chancellor to explore ways of embedding employability in programmes across the university as a whole. We were able to impress on those present the important benefits to both student learning and employability that placements can offer. In a subsequent conversation, the consultant noted the importance of placements and the desirability of establishing a placements office at the university level to facilitate and coordinate such activity.

We have been working with Dr Matthew Wyman, our contact in the Politics Department, on suitable ways of embedding placements in the Politics provision at Keele. Although these developments are at an early stage, it seems most likely that placements will be integrated into his existing level-two module, The Practice of

Politics, which prepares students for political careers. Dr Wyman has applied for university money to fund a placements officer for his department in the interim period before and until an appointment is made centrally.

Conclusion

Our new partners had institutional frameworks and approaches to the use of placements different from those of the three original partners, which prompted us to develop three new models of placement learning appropriate to these novel contexts: a substantially revised level-two work placement module (Huddersfield); placements embedded in employability for Politics modules (Keele and Leeds); and forms of community-based learning (London Met).

Project Dissemination

We made significant progress with the further dissemination of the project's activities and findings, including the production of a 16-page brochure setting out the main findings of the project and including the reflections of our HEA advisor, placement providers, students and project team members. The brochure was distributed at conferences and via the mailing lists of appropriate professional bodies (such as the Political Studies Association), and is available for download from the project website (www.politicsinaction.ac.uk). The project team members also continued to promote the project at various national and international conferences, including the American Political Studies Association and International Studies Association annual conventions in the United States in 2008. However, our main means of disseminating the project's findings during the transferability phase were a national conference in June 2008, publications in academic journals, and the further development of the project website. (Dissemination will continue beyond the life of the project. For example, members of the project team will make a presentation at the 'Innovations in the Teaching and Learning of Politics' showcase at the Palace of Westminster on 21st October 2008, organised by the Political Studies Association and C-SAP.)

National Conference

We hosted the national conference 'The Scholarship of Engagement Politics: Placement Learning, Citizenship and Employability' at the University of Warwick on 10-11th June 2008, which attracted representatives from all of the stakeholders involved in the project: academic staff, university careers services and placement offices, placement providers, and students. The conference presented the main findings of the project and the transferability stage (by exploring various models of placement learning in Politics), but also broadened its focus to explore other means of engaging students (such as simulations with trained and experienced actors), and issues of community engagement, active citizenship, placement assessment, and employability more generally. We were very pleased that three of the transferability partners made presentations, along with some of the other stakeholders. Alongside talking circles on the themes of active citizenship and employability, the following papers were presented, which we are currently preparing for publication (see below):

Professor John Annette (Birkbeck College), 'Keynote Address: Civic, Public and Employer Engagement and the Scholarship of Engagement'

Professor Barrie Axford (Oxford Brookes University), Anna Walker (former student at Coventry University, now at Warwickshire County Council), Andy Wade (student at Coventry University) and Elaine McGladdery (West Midlands Local Government Association), 'The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics: Placements and Active Learning'

Dave Edey, Alvaro Mellado Domínguez and Ali Ahmed (Senior Lecturer and students at London Metropolitan University) and Hannah Lewis (International Alert), 'Simulations in Peace and Conflict Studies'

Dr Andrew Mycock and Jordan Walmsley (Senior Lecturer and student at the University of Huddersfield), 'Re-imagining Work Placements: Linking Theory and Practice for Politics Students'

Professor David Woodman (University of Roehampton), 'Up Close and Personal: Some Issues in the Assessment of Placement Learning'

Dr Matthew Wyman and Sarah Longwell (Keele University), 'Teaching the Practice of Politics'

Fiona Buckley (University College Cork), 'Work Placement in Political Science: Justification, Preparation, Implementation and Evaluation'

Steven Curtis (London Metropolitan University), 'Models of Placement Learning'

We received universally positive feedback from the conference participants, including the following comments, which indicate how successful we were at both disseminating our model of the scholarship of engagement and shaping the practice of placement learning more generally:

I had a long meeting upon returning to work yesterday about our own placement scheme and the volume and quality of information I was able to bring back was invaluable. Thank you . . . very much for a fantastically well organised event and thanks to everyone who participated and presented. We have a chance to kick our programme off on the right foot.

Great conference - really got something from it (& you cannot always say that!).

I . . . enjoyed the day tremendously - all the speakers gave relevant information. The talk circles were instrumental in providing much thought provoking information. A positive experience. Thank you . . . for arranging the event.

Many thanks again for the invite to the conference - it was extremely beneficial in shaping approaches for developing our placement provision.

. . . it was a really good event (both the formal and informal sessions) and something that has not only given me food for thought, but has also given me loads of ideas for areas of improvement that we will embed within our level 5 Work Based Learning module at Doncaster; and hopefully develop at levels 4 and 6.

Many thanks for organising such a worthwhile and successful event. . . . It was also very good to meet colleagues from other universities and exchange ideas.

I'm glad I could come up to the conference; it was a good chance for me to see how our simulations fit into the broader theme of work experience, and also

from an employer's perspective to get more of an understanding of the benefits of student placements.

Thank you . . . for organising such an event, I found out it very beneficial to me, and it was also a pleasure to meet everyone and listen to their comments. I would like the opportunity of attending any more such events.

Given the tangible benefits from sharing ideas and examples of best practice, an informal Placement Learning Support Network emailing group emerged out of the conference. We intend that lecturers and placement officers embarking on the use of placements can use the network to learn from more experienced colleagues, so that examples of best practice and new developments can be shared.

Publications

We made a concerted effort to increase the written output from the project, as during the main phase of the project the emphasis had been on conference presentations and papers given at individual Politics departments. At the end of the transferability phase, the following articles appeared:

P. Sherrington, B. Axford, A. Blair, S. Curtis, R. Huggins and C. Gibson, 'Research-Led Placements in Politics: A New Approach?' in *European Political Science*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2008

S. Curtis, A. Blair, B. Axford, C. Gibson, R. Huggins and P. Sherrington, 'Rethinking Placement Learning', in *C-SAP Newsletter*, Issue 13, Summer 2008

We have also submitted for publication the following article:

S. Curtis, B. Axford, A. Blair, C. Gibson, R. Huggins and P. Sherrington, 'Making Short Politics Placements Work' (submitted to *Politics* in March 2008)

Looking to the near future, the proceedings of our June 2008 conference will be published as A. Blair and S. Curtis (eds.), *The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics: Placement Learning, Citizenship and Employability* (Birmingham: C-SAP, forthcoming), and we have been invited to submit an article proposal on the project to the prestigious *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, which we are currently drafting. At least two further articles will be developed out of the project's findings over the next year.

Website Development

Our new and improved project website went live on 5th June 2008. We fundamentally revised the appearance and content of the website to take into account the closure of the project. It now exists more as a resource for other departments wishing to embark on placement learning initiatives and less as a platform to facilitate the management

of placements by the three original partner institutions (although it still retains aspects of the latter). The appearance and structure of the website was significantly revised to make it easier to navigate. Finally, the website now hosts the Final Evaluation Report of the main project and this report on the transferability phase.

Bibliography

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