Responding to Employers: Moving into the Mainstream
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Creating Future-Proof Graduates: Meeting Skills Gaps in the Classroom

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Plan for the workshop

- Background to the project, its aims and processes
- Work with employers
- What did we create
- Have a go
- How can you use these resources

Project Team

Project Background

- 'Creating Future-Proof Graduates'
- NTFS Project 2007 £200,000 from HEA + contribution from University
- A Partnership Approach
- 8 resources addressing key skills
- 3 strand evaluation strategy
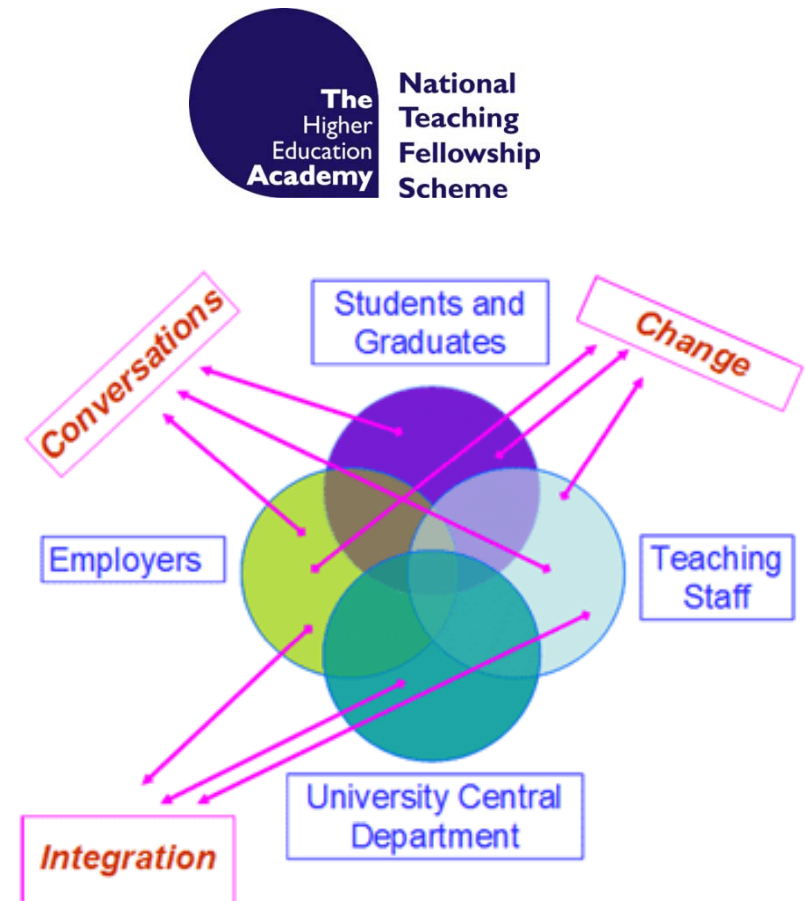
Project Objectives

- Linking the classroom with professional practice
- Bridging the gap between teaching and learning and professional demands
- The project aims:
  - To produce a suite of simulated critical incident case studies to enhance students employability skills across a range of disciplines / sectors
  - To involve employers, students and HE / FE staff in the production of the case studies
  - To evaluate the effectiveness of these critical incidents in enhancing skills for employment

Identifying the skills gap
Scoping exercise- one example

	Importance Rating	Satisfaction Rating	Gap
Commercial awareness	13	33	-20
Communication skills	1	16	-15
Planning & organisational skills	7	17	-10
Analysis and decision making skills	10	26	-16

(Archer and Davison, 2008:10)

Interviews- skills and critical incidents

- **employers**-exploring their perceptions and inviting them to describe specific incidents which exemplify the required skills and the consequences of their absence

- **lecturers** in the respective disciplines to illuminate their perceptions of what students need to equip themselves for their chosen profession

- **current students** re their expectations for the skills they would need for the respective labour market

- new and recent graduates re their experiences of their preparedness for graduate employment-also analysing previous research

Findings

- **Employers** identified the following key skills as difficult to develop in their sectors:
  - Housing: organisational culture and society factors, help-seeking, good communication skills and providing relevant answers;
  - Music: networking, understanding the sector and its "unstructured" nature as a profession
  - Law: Commercial Awareness; finding practical solutions to problems

Our solutions

Skills Gap

- Cultural awareness
- Providing relevant answers
- Professional ethics
- Networking and social confidence
- Unexpected and extreme emotions and reactions
- Social responsibility
- Research skills
- Bullying and the misuse of power

Resource Created

- No Offence Meant
- Too Much Information
- Ethical Dilemmas
- The Networking Game
- Expecting the Unexpected

- Stone Soup
- Who, What, Where
- Getting on with it

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Creating the Resources

- Each skill/attitude was developed into a resource that could be embedded in the curriculum or used as a stand alone activity to reinforce learning.

- For each area we identified a "critical incident" that could act as a trigger for the resource

Providing relevant answers
aka TMI – Too Much Information

- A range of employers noted problems weaning new graduates from behaviours instilled in them by typical assessment processes.

- When such graduates are asked to give professional advice, information is usually correct but goes beyond what is needed by the client.

- In this resource, students put themselves in the place of the client to explore differences between 'textbook' responses and more relevant advice.

- Presented as audio-visual strip cartoons from different contexts (housing, health, IT and education).

- http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/tmi
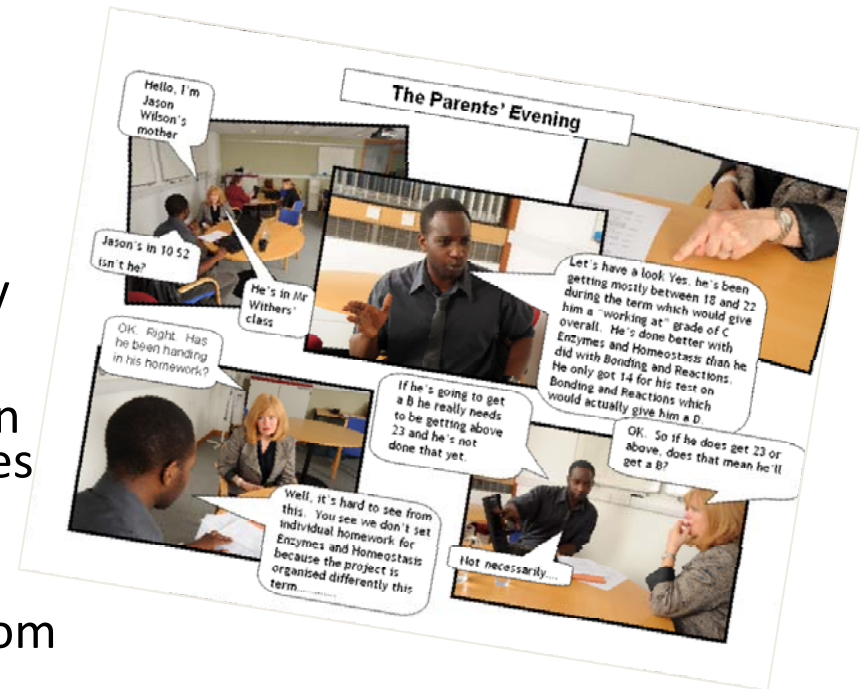
Research skills
aka Who, What, Where

- Both national research and project team interviews showed that applicants for graduate jobs often do inadequate research, as revealed by their answers to interview questions.

- This Web 2.0 based resource is designed to encourage students to connect the actions required for a search for employment to the searches and research required for academic attainment.

- It supports the process of searching for a job, researching the company and its background, and investigating the graduate market / sector.

- http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/whowhatwhere

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Getting On With It
aka The Misuse of Power

- When does assertive behaviour by people in positions of power become bullying? What is appropriate behaviour and how should we react to perceived misuse of power?

- A director in a play gives way to a stressful situation, one junior actor bears the brunt of his anger.

- Four colleagues faced with the risk of losing a steady job to realise their group's ambition persuade a peer to follow their wishes.

- Old work colleagues are reunited after a two year gap, and in their enthusiasm to catch up with each other unintentionally exclude someone.

- A young singer is tutored through a performance, but by the end feels dispirited by receiving only negative comments.

- http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/unaccacceptable

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Social responsibility
aka Stone Soup

- Reworks the Brothers Grimm story, where a stranger encourages villagers to produce a nourishing soup by offering to make the meal using nothing more than a stone.

- By encouraging the villagers to contribute seemingly inconsequential additions such as an onion or a carrot, the whole community is soon enjoying a meal together.

- The animation is used to trigger discussion of social responsibility in relation to contemporary workplaces.

- It also develops understanding of story telling in modern society, and encourages contextualisation of team work and social responsibility beyond the classroom.

- http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/stonesoup

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Professional ethics
aka Ethical Dilemmas

- In this scenario an employee overhears someone sharing commercially sensitive information.

- The incident is written in a deliberately ambiguous way to prompt debate regarding the best course of action to take, and reflection upon what constitutes professional and ethical behaviour.

- Supporting the scenario, a series of 'talking heads' give conflicting advice on the actions the graduate might take.

- The DVD might be used as a classroom activity or as part of an assessment, with the 'talking heads' being used as a tool for opening up additional avenues of debate.

- http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/ethical-dilemmas

Unexpected and extreme emotions and reactions
aka Expecting the Unexpected

- Many graduates struggle to translate theoretical models learned during their course into practice – e.g. when dealing with unexpected reactions in the workplace, such as emotional or angry clients or work colleagues.

- This resource consists of a DVD with actors role playing a range of difficult simulated situations.

- In using the DVD in class, one group of students might be asked to deal with the difficult situation, whilst another acts as "coaches" building self confidence, or as "reporters" analysing what happened in the session.

- http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/expecting-the-unexpected
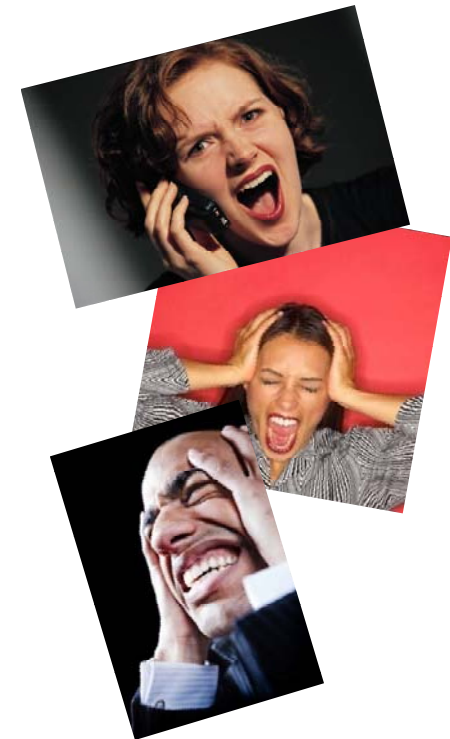
Cultural Awareness aka
No Offence Meant

- Employers felt that new graduates had little appreciation of the various aspects of "culture" in it's widest definition
- Using the Gillian Gibbons "naming the teddy bear Mohammed" incident, we put together a web based resource with a range of activities both for the classroom and for independent study.

Cultural Awareness was divided into four main aspects
- Personal Culture
- National Culture
- Professional Culture
- Organisational

http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/no-offence-meant

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Networking and social confidence
aka The Networking Game

- A survey of graduates undertaken at the University (UCE Birmingham, 2005/6) included a 'things you wished you had known' question – 16% of respondents cited networking/social confidence as being essential skills not covered in the curriculum.

- This skill set also came up in interviews with the employers.

- The resource is a board game which includes interactive tasks whereby participants experience various aspects of social confidence.

http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof/resources/network

Students at Kingston University created a floor version of the game

Resources - evaluation to date indicates:

- Resources **well received and valued** by the students
- All elements have been rated as **useful** by students
- **Highest value** - most active elements such as role play and discussion
- **Confidence** – biggest increase in confidence seen in full time undergraduates with limited work experience

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Resources - fitness for purpose of the materials created

Evaluation so far

- "learnt a lot. Not something that I would usually think about until the day before the event"
- "the structure of the session enabled a progression through my understanding. I could explore my pre-conceived ideas and then experience other possibilities"

- the board game added in the element of randomness that might be experienced in a networking situation - having to think on the spot'"

- "I found the video and script useful as it gave a clear example of a poor meeting"

- "very useful I saw different ways of dealing with people"

- "I feel that I have gained confidence in my own abilities but there is still need for improvement. This workshop gave me the experience and the tools and information that I needed to understand what I need to work on in my own confidence and effectiveness"

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Evaluation – academics (nationally)

Feedback includes:

- I am so impressed with how you have taken the original inspiration and turned out such diverse stimulating and attractive resource material

- Think they are great to use, can also be adopted easily to suit individual institutions needs

- Much potential for developing professional attitudes and cultural awareness.

- Great range of different media love the flexibility

- Very useful interactive, fun resources which students should enjoy using

- A very mature and sophisticated approach to developing and creating resources

Students at Kingston University created a floor version of the networking game

A colleague at Surrey has adapted the Ethical Dilemmas resource – now collaborating to jointly publish

Have a go

How could you use these resources?

- Which resources?

- Where / how?

- When?

- With whom?

Have a go

- Find them all at www.bcu.ac.uk/futureproof

- Feedback sheets – when you use these resources with your students – feedback forms are available on the website or just write and tell us about your experiences

- Try out our resources, consider where can *you* use the resources, what ideas do **you** have?