

How should universities prepare information graduates for the working world?

Hazel Hall – School of Computing, Napier University
Breakout Session Notes

The session was divided into two parts. Firstly discussion was focussed on the presentation (see slides) and then the group split into two to discuss and devise an “ideal” university course of 8 units of study to prepare graduates for working as information professionals.

PART 1

Napier School of Computing runs 1 undergraduate course and 1 post-graduate course. The universities work with CILIP professionals in designing courses to ensure they can provide accredited courses to students.

Whilst many undergraduate courses are closing due to lack of demand, some new ones are starting up. Post-graduate teaching has a higher status and thus these courses are more likely to be continued. However, the lack of demand by students for courses is resulting in difficulties for the universities in attracting and retaining good tutors.

Napier moved their information professional courses to their School of Computing. It had previously been in with Media Studies, but they found this led to incorrect expectations from course applicants and poor feedback on the course relevance.

Further difficulties with post-graduate training is the funding issue. Study is part-time, but no funding is provided unless the student is sponsored by their employer.

The CILIP website provides comprehensive information on universities and the courses they have available.

The course programme at Napier is geared towards career opportunities, teaching concepts, principles and theories, rather than providing “practical” training – primarily because the practical side of the information industry is constantly changing with changes in technology, etc.

The course aims to get the students to be reflective, through the use of blogs to record their learning progress, which enables them to look back over their time on the course and consider what/how they have learned and how they have progressed.

The Librarianship & Information Management course is under review. Experience has shown that certain modules can be difficult to attract students to when they are offered as “optional”. However, when made compulsory, these modules have been highly rated by the students (in particular BIS and KM modules).

Napier is keen to work with more employers to provide placements for students which add value to their studies (ie not simply returning library books to shelves in a Library). Whilst work experience prior to a post-graduate course is sometimes required, it does not always prove to be particularly relevant or helpful to the student in their subsequent studies.

PART 2

The two groups discussed what they considered to be ideal modules for an MSc Information Services Management course, based on their own work experience. The two proposed course programmes were provided as follows:

Team 1

Evaluating Sources
Dissemination of Information
Managing Change
Leadership Skills
Business Methods
Influencing Skills
Legal Issues / Information Law
Research Methods (Compulsory module)

Team 2

Communications, Marketing and Customer Service
Finance, Budgeting and Contract Negotiation
IT Systems in Business
Offshoring and Outsourcing
Sources and Searches
Business Management and Strategic Planning
Sector specific case studies (eg Pharma, Finance, NHS)
Research Methods (Compulsory module)

The two proposed programmes were discussed and, whilst module titles differed, the general views on what was required were very similar. The merged course proposal was agreed as:

Research Methods (which is compulsory anyway)
Business Methods (to include finance/budgeting and contract negotiation)
Business Management & Strategic Planning (to include offshoring/outsourcing and managing change)
Sources and Searches (to include source evaluation)
IT Systems in Business
Communications, Marketing and Customer Service (to include influencing skills)
Legal Issues / Information Law
Sector specific case studies

The actual current course modules for the MSc Information Services Management is provided in the accompanying slides and many of the modules are similar to those identified by the teams. However, some new ideas were provided and will be discussed within the School of Computing as part of their current review of this course.