

CASE STUDY 3 – LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

“THE USE OF A BUSINESS SIMULATION TO DEVELOP CAPABILITIES IN UK/CHINA-BASED ACCOUNTING STUDENTS”

In 2011, Helen Lumb became involved in a pilot project for Leeds Metropolitan University, to use non-formal blended learning techniques applied by a business simulation. The objective was to provide second year undergraduates studying Finance and Accountancy at Leeds Metropolitan University and Sino-British College in Shanghai with a global outlook. The course challenges the mind-set of students who feel that all accountancy learning is around the skill of numbers.

The business simulation was an original creation about a UK company making a positive decision to outsource selected manufacturing processes to Malaysia. The simulation consisted of an authentic company website, video podcasts, weekly screencast interviews and knowledge and skills workshops.

The innovative approach originated from 3 key drivers:

- Bring 'real-world' business experiences into the classroom
- Embed 3 graduate attributes with the Leeds Met curriculum – enterprising, digitally literate and have a global outlook
- Challenge students to explore changes in their mental maps and theories

The simulation was an original creation between the course leader, an assessment learning and teaching specialist and Helen Lumb.

The simulation consisted of:

- A virtual learning environment that included a 'company' website
- Students took the role of new graduate-entry employees that were allocated to 'project teams'
- A video podcast by Helen Lumb playing the part of an interim FD, tasked the project teams to investigate the issues emerging from the suggested organisational proposals.
- Helen Lumb as FD addressed key questions in a series of filmed briefings
- Students attended weekly knowledge and skills workshops
- There was a weekly screencast interview between the course leader and Helen Lumb

The impact of the business simulation was very powerful and some students believed the organisation was real.

Some student evaluations:

- Enjoyment of the learning experience increased
- It felt like a 'real-world' activity

The simulation is now seen as best practice and is still being successfully delivered. Indeed, the quality of a student's experience is an increasingly important aspect of University teaching in the UK. This business simulation improved student feedback and experience and it becomes clear that this type of learning and assessment increases.

Testimonial by Michelle Blackburn BSc(Hons), PGCHE, MSc, MBPsS, FHEA, Chartered FCIPD

Senior Lecturer, Leeds Metropolitan University

"As a senior lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University I was tasked with developing a module for second year undergraduate accounting students based in both the UK and China. The objective of the module was to get these students to engage in the 'people' side of business and to develop an awareness of subjects including motivation, leadership, team working etc. The majority of students had joined the course because they were good at numbers but had limited knowledge/exposure to the broader facets of their future careers where they would be required to interact appropriately with a great range of stakeholders and to make decisions based on numbers and a wider people-driven perspective. I wanted to develop a learning experience and assessment that would raise awareness of the broader role that the finance professional needs to undertake and I wanted to make it engaging as the module lacked the all too familiar numbers!

To make this happen I approached Helen as I knew she was incredibly passionate about this subject: addressing the behavioural gaps that some finance professionals have when trying to develop productive and dynamic working relationships across a business. She also had credibility for the students (Ernst and Young trained, international work with Pirelli and a Finance Director job title!) Helen came on board immediately as she saw the contribution she could make to the careers of these students and the finance profession in general.

Helen's role on our project was wide ranging - she helped us to develop an in-depth case study (indeed she took the time to read our core text book to make sure that what we produced supported the student's needs - a thoroughness that was really appreciated). She developed learning resources including recording a number of video briefings to the students that were released during module delivery to support learning. What was also wonderful was Helen taking the time and trouble to deliver the launch lecture as the 'interim Finance Director' of the case study company. This meant she had to stand up in a lecture theatre of 200 accounting students and get them to engage in this people based module. This she did incredibly well - the students were sufficiently intrigued that they asked questions when invited to do so, something very rare in a lecture room of this size. I have to say though I wasn't surprised, Helen was able to clearly articulate the future of her profession, the need for finance professionals to partner the business (and not sit in an ivory tower). She made it very clear that current systems did an awful lot of the processing for accountants these days (she was speaking from experience having developed and implemented systems in the past) and that today accountants needed to add value and the only way they could do that was by actively engaging with the business and the people therein.

Throughout this entire process Helen was incredibly supportive, giving of her time and fully utilising her deep passion for the subject to develop a learning experience and academic assessment that both engaged the students and sufficiently stretched them. She offered us appropriate challenge, was able to articulate financial issues so that we clearly understood the dynamics involved and above all brought focus, insight and a genuine desire to get it right for all of the stakeholders involved.

This module has been delivered successfully now for 3 years. Indeed, it was seen as best practice, and a journal article about the development and delivery process of this business simulation was subsequently written up as: Blackburn, M. and Finnigan, V. (2013) 'Evaluating the use of a business simulation to develop a global outlook capability within both UK/China-based accounting students' Journal Advances in Higher Education, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 64 - 71. This could not have happened without Helen's help and it is in this capacity that I offer this endorsement of her work."