

**Title:** "The swings and roundabouts of placement learning." (The erosion and enhancement of skills and knowledge)

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**Abstract:**

As Educational Developers one of our main remits is to embed good practice within the curriculum, and encourage those that deliver 'content' to be exemplars of this practice. Key skills, professional subject skills and the movement of these from one environment to another, the so called transferable skills, are an important area for developers to engage with. There is no better place to develop these skills than in a professional work-based training placement. Our research into placement practice was conducted over a two year cycle to investigate the erosion and enhancement of all types of skills and subject content knowledge within Science undergraduates compared to their full time equivalents. Through a range of problem based learning and standard testing *via* a V.L.E. these changes could be quantitatively gauged and calculated. This along with interviews, and questionnaires gave supporting qualitative data. Comparison of these data with summative and formative assessment marks prior to and post placement were then analysed.

This investigation has shown that cognitive ability is somewhat linked to academic capability. Nevertheless, it also revealed that completion of a professional work-based training placement year does appear to increase certain Key and Professional skills e.g. problem solving capacity and organisational skills within students. However, there also appears to be an erosion of other Key Skills and in particular core subject knowledge following such a period of intensive vocational study compared to similar ability students on full time programmes of study.

Our research in this area over the past year has suggested that in order to redress these environment dependent deficiencies one has to provide a suite of blended learning resources that allow for students out on placement to become meta aware of their own learning. Hence to move to see if it were possible to establish a 'win-win' situation where subject knowledge and skills are retained and enhanced during their time away on placement. These resources help to drive the learning and allow for learners to 'plan several moves ahead and thus see the consequents of their actions in true PDP fashion. The key is to make sure that those supporting placement students are aware of this and thus departmental and institutional strategies adjusted accordingly.

This interactive workshop will not give a detailed overview of all the pedagogical research work undertaken in this study as time is limited, instead it will focus deeply on problem solving skills and certificate level knowledge retention, development and assessment. Thus giving a clear model of how such work can be extended into other subject areas and used by Educational Developers in informing teaching staff.