Embedding employability into the Marketing curriculum- the case of a mock assessment centre

Employability is becoming increasingly important within the University curriculum. The global pandemic severely impacted graduate recruitment. However, recent indications suggest that the number of graduates recruited in 2021 is higher than expected with an increase of 9.4%, compared with graduate recruitment in 2020 (High Fliers, 2022). As the labour market opens up further in a post-COVID era, there is now a greater emphasis than perhaps ever before on embedding employability into the University curriculum. University directives sector wide are driving University courses to better connect student employability and help ensure readiness for the labour market post-graduation.

Over the past few years, we set out to embed a ‘mock’ assessment centre (AC) as part of a second year Branding module (part of a BA Marketing course). ACs consist of a number of exercises designed to assess the full range of skills and personal attributes required for a job or a graduate training programme. They are becoming increasingly common, particularly amongst larger employers and indeed, their popularity has grown internationally and therefore, they are important for our growing and diverse student body.

We partnered up with a key international employer (The Hut Group) to design and assist in the delivery of a ‘live branding brief’ which students had to answer over the course of several hours. This opportunity was developed to help mimic a real world assessment centre. Given the success of the AC over the course of the global pandemic, once restrictions eased and since this academic year, we were able to fully embed the AC as a 10% assessment component of the module. The feedback was very positive and attendance was at over 98% (cohort size was 106 students). The below student comment is typical of many others:

“Very well taught module, I enjoyed the face to face lectures and the opportunity to take part in assessment centres and listen to guest speakers. I especially like how the lecturers made effort to update us on the careers and job section of the module, as a lot of us are looking for placements.

Students had to submit a digital group infographic covering the key findings from the brief. This involved using digital software such as Adobe Creative Cloud.

Key skills that students developed include creativity, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, working under pressure, and many others. The best groups were shortlisted for informal job interviews with THG and all students received a certificate of participation.

We offer our AC framework and would love to share our ideas with colleagues in line with attempting to revolutionise marketing education.