

2. Enquiry- based assessment in a Business Intelligence module at the University of Sheffield: Developing a Business Report

The final- year undergraduate module in Business Intelligence offered by the University of Sheffield Information School is assessed through an innovative, enquiry- based collaborative business report combined with two pieces of reflective writing, one about their experiences of working as a group and one reflecting on their information literacy development. The module focuses on the ways in which business people use information and on how external information is used to inform business strategy and create competitive advantage. It can be difficult to understand these information activities in organisations, particularly if students lack work experience. The coursework enables them to understand at a much deeper level the information gathering, evaluation, synthesis and presentation activities that business people undertake. The collaborative, enquiry- based activity involves students working in small teams to investigate the business information needs of a Business Partner – a ‘real life’ information problem. I work with

University of Sheffield Enterprise to source local business people who want to work with students. Because of this many of the business partners are recent startups or social enterprises.

Students form self- selecting groups of three to five members. This flexibility with group size allows students to take control over who they choose to work with; this seems to improve group functionality. In addition, students receive support sessions to discuss group- working protocols, the value of group working for skills development, communication, group roles and positive outcomes from group work.

Students are provided with a very short project brief before they have the opportunity to interview their business partner about their information needs. The experience of meeting business people outside of the context of a job interview is very powerful and many groups go on to produce excellent, well- researched business reports for their partners. The two reflective assignments (20 per cent each of the module mark) mitigate the potentially negative effect of having group work in the final, important year of undergraduate studies. Through the reflective writing students become more aware of their own roles in groups and can more easily identify what they could do in the future to improve communication, collaboration and problem solving. Their information literacy development, a key skill for lifelong learning, becomes explicit through the reflective process. The business report requires students to collaborate on presenting findings to a specific audience, focusing their attention on appropriate modes of communication as well as developing their information literacy.

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