

## **A student's account of the Management of Student Work Experience course**

By Christine McCann, Student Employment Coordinator, University of Portsmouth

I manage the part-time vacancy service at the University of Portsmouth and am based within the Department of Employability. I have been managing this service since 1997, initially managing the Job Shop at the Student's Union until 2009, when the part-time vacancy service became part of the Department of Employability. Over this time, the importance of student employment has greatly increased beyond its initial focus of helping students to earn some extra money.

I graduated in 1995 from the University of Portsmouth. Within a few years I realised that I missed studying, but with two school-age children, my priorities were elsewhere. As our children have now left home, the idea of returning to study for my personal development seemed to be the step to take.

When the Management of Student Work Experience (MSWE) course was discussed, it seemed an excellent opportunity for me to study on a course which covered a wide range of subjects very relevant to my role and to the management of a part-time vacancy service.

The modular structure of the MSWE course enables managers to choose the speed at which they progress and to select the modules relevant to their service. I aim to complete six modules in a few years as, with no children at home, I don't have the excuse of not having enough time, but may just need better organisational skills. Also, having once more managed to get into the routine of studying, I know that I would not want to stop and restart all over again.

I have currently completed four modules, and I am keenly waiting to enrol onto the next module as I have missed the learning experience. For all four modules so far, I have produced a range of information and guidelines that I have implemented directly back into my service.

My head of department is very supportive of my studying the MSWE course, and my manager is happy for me to allocate time in my diary for studying.

On a personal note, I have really enjoyed studying for the course modules and have learnt so much more in areas that I was already quite experienced in. The modules have been particularly relevant to my role, and I have been able to improve the service considerably with all the information I have learnt. There have been several leaflets that I produced that have been used straight away and the information that I have researched has helped me to ensure that I think about the wide range of students that we support.

I now have greater confidence in my ability to return to further study, and also for putting myself first after so many years of looking after the family. I have really enjoyed learning (and the learning curves) and gaining so much more information relating to my work in such a short time, even though at times I felt at 'brain overload'.

I have felt really enthusiastic about the course, and I am looking forward to continuing with the next module. I would encourage other NASES members to embark on this personal development.

**Turn over for Christine's top tips for MSWE students...**

## A few tips from an MSWE student

### Preparing your schedule:

- It is important that you allocate time in your diary each week – if it's not needed you can always use it for something else, but it is difficult to make time when your diary is full, especially when your assignment hand-in date is getting nearer.
- At home it is also important to allocate the best time to work. My partner goes shooting two Sundays a month and this is my course time – no shopping, no visiting family or getting the Sunday papers and having a good read for a few hours – just time to get focused on the course material with a good selection of CDs. My neighbours have already got fed up of me listening to my 'study CDs' (60s music and Abba) repeatedly.
- Ensure that you have all the main books and articles on the reading list, ready for when you need them. It is frustrating when you have some extra time to progress through the next section but can't continue because you don't have the book or article you need.
- Try to allocate a space to work. I worked on the desk in my son's room so I could get up and leave all my notes out and then start again the next evening.
- Don't only work in the evenings after a day's work. If you're tired, relax for the evening instead and then start again, refreshed, the next night. Keep a steady study schedule but don't feel guilty if you're too tired, as you won't study well.
- Be realistic of the time you're spending studying. It's easy to think that you've been working on your assignment all week, when in fact it could be only an hour each evening.
- I read through the course material sections when I first started, but initially I moved around the sections and printed off only some pages of the course material. I then realised that I didn't have all the information, so went back to the beginning and printed off each page at a time for each section, so that I had everything that was needed.

### Getting ready:

- Buy a couple of folders, plastic wallets, coloured page markers and lots of highlighters (or is it just me who likes to highlight things?).
- Aim to sort out your notes as you go along – under different sections, and then into different subject areas. Notes and information can then be filed together, all ready for when you start your first assignment.
- Put websites and articles together so they can be filed in the different sections.
- Use your coloured page markers for important notes that you'll need later and use the colours to highlight the important and less important pages.

## A few tips from an MSWE student

### Progressing through the course:

- Working through the course material, I found lots of websites and research which was very relevant to the module and my role. I would go off and find lots of relevant information, but then sometimes had too much information to work through, especially when I was writing up my assignment.
- Make sure you take down all the information required for referencing, as you will take hours (as I did) trying to find some of the important websites later on. This information is included in your course notes, and I won't forget this again! Try saving all the useful website links in a document and you can then go back to these when you have a quiet moment at work.
- When I had worked through the sections, I highlighted the OK part – very satisfying and I could see how I was progressing through the course material.
- Aim to focus on the question when writing up the assignment and not go off with too much research (yes, I did that too). The first assignment took me several weeks, but the second assignment only took a third of the time, especially as the deadline was looming.
- If you have the new version of Word, there is a very helpful tool – go to 'References' on the toolbar at the top and then 'Insert Citation' which will help with collecting all the necessary information for writing up your references and bibliography.

### IT skills:

- Web learning was a whole new learning curve before I'd even got started on the first module – e-books on your e-bookshelf (okay, showing my age here), in my degree days, you just went to the library and picked up the book from the shelf.
- Using the University Library at Portsmouth was another learning curve. After having difficulty searching the library online, I then realised that I was not in the general section and this was why I couldn't find any of the books I wanted.
- All the information is written down in the course handbook and on the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment), but with so many different sections and not having used webCT before, I think I was at overload without realising it!
- When you're writing up your assignment, save each day's amendments as a new version. Nothing is worse than having to rewrite a 'good bit' of text that you have deleted or saved over.

### MSWE course tutors

- The course tutor has been very supportive to me, especially, as such a novice. I have emailed my tutor many times about probably very simple questions, often at 11.30 p.m, when things always seemed more confusing to me.