

careers and taking advantage of all opportunities to develop their career capital. Preparing them for the possibility of periods of underemployment, so that they can gain maximum advantage from them, should form a crucial part of HEIs 'employability offer'.

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GMT in practice

Embedding Work Based Projects in Masters education: Making the Most of Masters toolkit

In this article, Wendy Rudland¹ summarises the aims and outcomes of the Making the Most of Masters project and introduces a toolkit developed to aid institutions interested in introducing Work Based Projects into their taught Masters programmes.

Introduction to Making the Most of Masters

Making the Most of Masters (MMM) set out to explore the embedding of Work Based Projects in the taught postgraduate Masters curriculum. A collaboration between the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Stirling, MMM was one of four projects funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as part of their wider Learning To Work Two (LTW2)² strategy. A key output of the project is a 'Toolkit' available to Higher Education Institutions who wish to implement Work Based Projects.

In the context of MMM a Work Based Project (WBP) is a project undertaken as an alternative to the traditional university based dissertation. The project itself would be proposed and supervised by an organisation external to the student's university. Thus, the project would reflect the reality of a 'workplace' problem, and meet the academic requirements of study at taught postgraduate level.

Across all three collaborating institutions it was found that WBP's were happening, but in pockets, sometimes highly organised, other times of a more ad-hoc nature. Often programme leaders were keen to engage with the concept of embedding WBP's as an alternative to the dissertation but lacked the resources, and even confidence, to do so.

Working as a collaboration of three institutions, each with their own set of academic regulations, local

custom and practice, was invaluable in aiding the learning of the MMM team and in the development of a process and supporting resources which potentially could be used by anyone wishing to embed WBP's. Further, while each institution has its own MMM project coordinator they were each housed in a different section of their institution, with one in academic development, one in a careers service and the third based within an academic school, bringing a broad range of academic and institutional professionalism to the project.

The Toolkit

It quickly became apparent that there was no 'one size fits all' solution to embedding WBP's in taught Masters education and that any resources developed by MMM must be designed to be flexible and adaptable so as to 'fit' any programme, yet specific enough to meet the needs of all programmes.

The toolkit developed aims to provide support and guidance to students, host organisations and staff within academic institutions who are, or would like to offer WBP's. It contains a suite of resources arranged around the five distinct stages of the WBP as detailed in figure 1, see over the page.

The resources have been developed based on the experiences of team members in supporting programmes embedding WBP's and in working with students and host organisations. All elements of the toolkit have been developed to support best practice, taking account of the ASET Code of Good Practice for Work Based and Placement learning in Higher Education³ and relevant chapters of QAA UK Code of Practice for Higher Education⁴. Having developed the resources they have been tested and refined over the life of the MMM project.

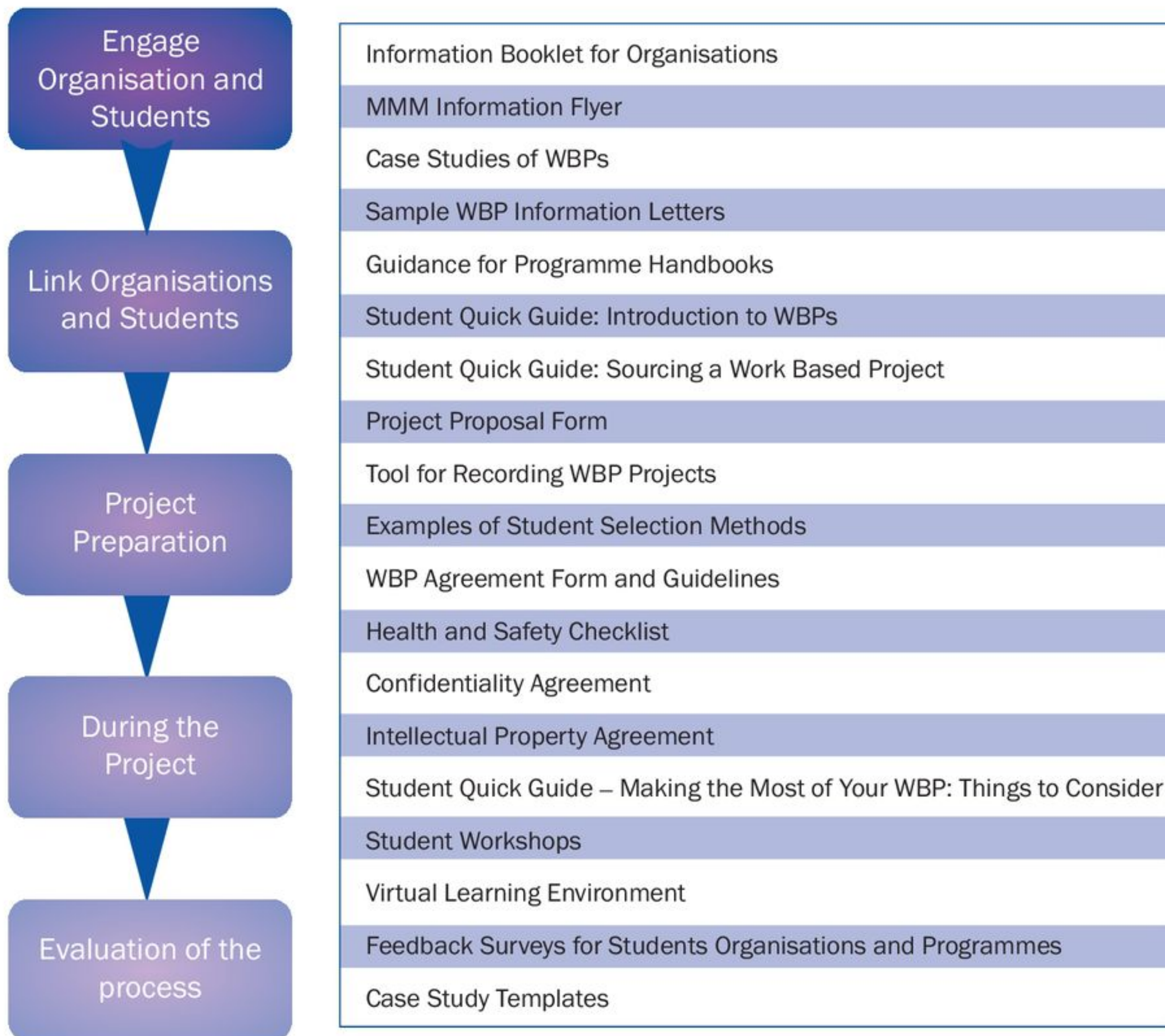
¹ Based at the University of Aberdeen, Wendy Rudland is a project coordinator for Making the Most of Masters

² More information about the Learning to Work strategy can be found at: www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/FundingOutcomes/Skills/LearningtoWork/LearningtoWork.aspx

³ A Good Practice Guide for Work based and Placement Learning in Higher Education, ASET September 2013

⁴ QAA: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx. Chapters of particular relevance are B3 Learning and Teaching, B4 Enabling student development and achievement and B10 Managing Higher Education provision with others.

Figure 1: Key stages of a WBP and resources developed by MMM



A ‘Guide to Work Based Projects for University Staff’ provides guidance on a number of aspects of the WBP lifecycle in addition to a collection of skeleton documents including the Project Agreement, intellectual property and confidentiality documentation, which can be tailored to meet specific requirements of individual programmes.

A suite of ‘Careers Education’ resources have been developed to engage and support students through their WBP journey. There are three distinct strands to this resource:

- ‘Your Masters, Your Opportunity’ developed to challenge students to think about their career development and motivations for undertaking Masters study. The WBP is introduced as a means by which they might enhance their employability.
- ‘Preparing for Your Work Based Project’ prepares students for the WBP. Practical topics such as making applications, networking and online presence are covered along with the importance of using Project Agreements.

- ‘Making the Most of your Work Based Project’ encourages students to consider professionalism, the workplace and how they can make the most of the experience before them. It includes a learning log to aid students in recording and reviewing their project experience.

These student facing resources are for delivery via a Virtual Learning Environment and workshops and are intended to be adapted to meet the needs of specific cohorts of students.

Legacy

The legacy of the MMM project extends beyond the toolkit.

MMM developed links with other industry specific organisations such as research pools and umbrella organisations. At Edinburgh a ‘Masters network’ was established for staff from across the institution.

Networking events allowing students and staff to meet and engage with external organisations were also established and are now an embedded element of the offering to Masters students.

Over the course of the project those closely involved with it have built up a wealth of experience and knowledge about embedding WBP's in taught postgraduate education. Programme leaders see us as a first point of contact as they develop new programmes with WBPs designed in right from inception. MMM has also provided support to programmes exploring alternative models of embedding WBP's, for example, as a credit-bearing course during the second semester of teaching.

Many programmes have experienced wider benefit in engaging with external organisations and offering WBP's. Organisations have hosted projects and gone on

to employ the student, resulting in positive destination data⁵ for the university and meeting a recruitment need in industry. Others have engaged in supporting programme development and delivery at all levels, through delivering guest lectures and joining employer or programme advisory boards.

The links, expertise and knowledge base developed by this collaborative project will remain, and build further still, as a resource to be tapped into as each of the three institutions now takes the MMM process, and develops it to suit their own setting.

If you would like a copy of the Toolkit please contact Dr Jon Turner, Director, Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh, email: iad.director@ed.ac.uk.

Further information on the MMM project is available at www.mastersprojects.ac.uk.

You can join MMM on LinkedIn, search for 'Making the Most of Masters' in groups or follow MMM on twitter [LTW2_MMM](#).

⁵ Destinations data refers to the collection of recent graduate destinations as part of HESAs Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey