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## Boosting confidence through technology

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# **Supporting International Students through collaboration and use of technology**

English for Career Success (E4CS) is an LSE course for international students participating in the job market which aims to improve their confidence and technique. It is delivered in partnership by the Careers Service and Language Centre and the use of innovative technology and departmental collaboration has been central to its success.

## ***Course Development***

In 2007 it was a 5-day intensive course for 10 students on improving your English in the recruitment context in response to the LSE having a large international student population. The feedback was very positive but the time commitment was found to be problematic for both staff and students. The course failed to meet its original objectives as there was no radical improvement in language skills but the students seemed to benefit in terms of confidence and technique.

## **Pilot**

A revised version was introduced in 2009 with the focus on improving confidence and technique and with a remit to accommodate larger numbers. It was piloted as a blended learning course with 24 students. There were 8 modules but only 2 face-to-face workshops, on Group Exercises and Presentations. The large number of topics & activities with associated deadlines made it a big time commitment for a course with no extra credit. The drop-out rate was high. However, the resources and technology used for delivery and feedback, underpinned the following reincarnations of the course.

Audio was used to give students plenty of listening practice. Students were shortlisted through statements recorded on a Wimba voiceboard, to hear their level of English. Students were asked to attend the regular Careers talks but we also provided recorded versions (live lecture capture or voice over PowerPoint). This had the benefit of them being archived for the students to review as often as they wished. We also included many audio and video clips in the course resources. The English tutor put together online quizzes for the students to test their learning, added notes on the language used in the recorded talks and provided language resources.

Students had the opportunity to receive audio feedback from both an adviser and a language tutor. For example, as preparation for live presentations, students could record their own voice over PowerPoint slides using ScreenToaster and received audio feedback in return. Students were recorded presenting in workshops using the lecture capture system (Echo360) so that they could watch themselves back, connecting the written feedback with the actual performance. For the interview module they could record themselves in YouTube answering questions and again receive audio feedback.

## **Revised version**

Moving forward we decided to focus on face-to-face sessions, fewer topics, and the oral skills. Two hour workshops on Interviews, Group Exercises, Presentation Skills and Networking ran over 4 weeks with a Careers Adviser and Language Tutor facilitating students carrying out peer review. Students were asked to do some course preparation using the archived resources. Much to our

relief, and our surprise, the students embraced pre course work and peer review; at the first workshop we even had some students ticking the others off for not having done their pre course work and holding the group up. Many of the students filled in the feedback forms saying that they welcomed seeing other styles in action and receiving peer feedback for example: “great opportunity to learn from the instructors but especially the other students participating.”

## ***Future***

The 4<sup>th</sup> term of E4CS has just ended with 42 students in each class and around 530 students enrolled on the VLE hopefully making use of the resources at a distance. They apply by recording a statement in Interview Stream, video practice software. Compulsory attendance has gone and students can attend just 1 or all 4 workshops. If are enrolled on the course they can receive audio feedback on their CV. If they attend 3 of the workshops they can receive additional feedback on a practice interview in Interview Stream or on a Screen Toaster presentation.

Student feedback is positive highlighting increased confidence, a chance to practice and an insight into developing a logical argument and better sentence structure. It has been a fruitful partnership for the tutors. Languages see many students with language issues around recruitment so working alongside and Adviser has been beneficial. Their input on structuring responses to interview questions, signposting and building on a conversation in a group exercise invaluable improving my students interactions.

We have debated the benefits of keeping international student workshops to build confidence as opposed to exposing them to the competition of fluent students, a situation they will encounter one day. The ideal would be separate workshops for Interviews and Presentations to build confidence and then Group Exercises open to all students for exposure to the competition. The use of technology is definitely here to stay and has been used more widely across the Service and we will continue to experiment in this area.