**LTSE Research Paper (1,000 words maximum)**

* **Title\***

**Graduating from the Classroom to the Boardroom: Supporting HE Students’ Employability**

**  Abstract\***

The Get on Board (GOB) extra-curriculum programme started at Edinburgh Napier University’s Business School in 2013. Its goal is to prepare students to take up board level opportunities in local charities, voluntary sector organisations or public bodies. GOB provides students with the opportunity to develop key skills for employment, networking and have an opportunity to be instrumental in taking decisions that affect their communities. Over a hundred students have taken the GOB Programme since it was first launched. Recently, the Programme team carried out research into the value of the GOB learning experience by interviewing a selection of students who have taken the programme and trustees who support the students on the Programme. The research has highlighted the good practice in the current Programme but also noted key areas to further augment students’ transitions to employment and support board “readiness”. This short paper will outline the best practice in our GOB Programme and the areas that we established needed further enhancement.

**Please outline your research and explain how it links to the conference theme.**

**  Main findings (if known)\***

Our research into the educational value of the GOB Programme allowed us to establish what key employability skills were being developed through the students’ time on this extra-curriculum Programme.  Four areas were highlighted – the development of professional practice skills in real world situations; the ability to apply Governance Theory into practice and the opportunity to extend networks and improve their networking skills. Furthermore, existing trustees noted that having students on their boards supported the opportunity for bonding and bridging of social capital.

1. **Supporting the Development of Professional Practice Skills in Real World Situations.** The-benefit of the GOB to support the development or-improvement of-professional practice skills in situ is-reflected-in the comments of the interviewed students. For example, one student noted “*I thought this would be a good opportunity-to-really-learn the tools-and-how you-should do it”. (Participant-8).* This echoes Paull et al’s (2015) argument that some work-based skills are not effectively taught in the classroom and that allowing access to-real-world-circumstances the students can sharpen-their-workplace-skills-further-by engaging with-complex-situations-and problems that are multi-faceted.

1. **Providing an Opportunity to Apply Governance Theory into Practice.** The GOB Programme is-intended to-empower students to explore and debate the main theories of board governance with their peers. This was commented on by the students’ during the research and they noted the opportunity GOB afforded to apply theory into practice. One participant also noted thatnot only could they now apply theory into practice, but they also realised when the practice they observed did not match*-*the*-*theory*-*being*-*taught*-*on the Programme. The -programme -therefore -provides -the -students -with -an -opportunity -to -become -better informed, and more able to meet the demand for ‘active’ citizenship expressed in the literature (Paull -et al, -2015). –

1. **Facilitating an Extension of**-**Networks and**-**Networking Skills.** The students positively interviewed noted the opportunity to grow their network*-*and practice their networking skills through both undertaking the programme and undergoing board experience. *-*Participant 9’s comments also-resonated this point: *“GOB*-*organised-a few events*- *so that we*-*can*-*meet*-*the*-*chairs of*-*committees,* -*chairs of third sector organisations, board members… directors for third sector organisations”.(Participant 9)*

These community of practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991), that the students now feel linked to-offer the-possibility of-accessing collective-‘resources’, including ‘stories’ and methods-to-overcome-common-problems that (young) trustees may encounter.

 **4. Expert View: Enabling the Bonding and Bridging of Social Capital.** The experts interviewed identified that there was additional creativity, an inflow of new ideas and new connections to stakeholders through student involvement in boards. As noted by expert 1: *“I'm hugely keen on this whole process and…I would envisage a student, supplying* *this vital link to younger people and possible being creative as to how to develop that link”.* This point relates to Dezure & Holland (2002)’s argument of both bonding and bridging of social capital through volunteering with community partners.

**Recommendations\***

Although our qualitative research sample was limited to 9 students, based on our findings, some recommendations have emerged for further development of the GOB Programme. Firstly, more board/committee shadowing opportunities were recommended by the interviewees to provide an opportunity for the students to participate in even more-practical experiences during their studies (Munck, 2010). Additional-support between the GOB workshop-sessions was also highlighted, as well as more frequent mentoring through the-appointment of a *‘mentor’* or “*someone to talk to*”. Furthermore, extra community of practice activities (Lave and Wenger, 1991) were also identified to enhance the student experience. Opportunities to come together and bond and connect were highlighted by students. Likewise, one student identified the potential of GOB to be rolled-out even further than University wide: *“I think…the support that the Uni. gives us…needs to be taken to more Universities, and the more Universities have it the better.” (Participant 5).*

Reflecting on the research findings has also allowed the GOB team to identify a need for a more coherent framework to govern and recognise the skills, knowledge and attitudes developed and demonstrated by the GOB students. This Get on Board Framework (which we have recently finalised), provides a clear and structured approach to formally acknowledging the extra-curriculum activities the GOB students undertake. The framework has an emphasis on ‘Open architecture’ to enable GOB students to-experience development opportunities-external to the University. This open architecture is now being utilised in the ‘Charities Board initiative’, we are running with our corporate partners Santander and RSM and a selection of charities throughout Scotland.

**References\***

Dezure, D., & Holland, B. A. (2002). Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 75–78.

Munck, R. (2010). Civic Engagement and Global Citizenship in a University Context: Core business or desirable add-on? Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 9, 31–41.
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Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

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