Welcome -

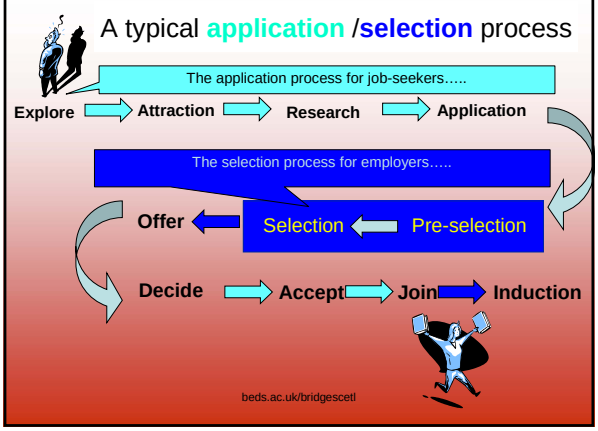
Developing students' professional behaviours using Assessment Centre approaches

Arti Kumar
CETL Associate Director &
National Teaching Fellow

Take-aways from this session

- Insights into employers' Assessment Centre (AC) practices
- Making key professional competencies visible as behaviours and actions
- Setting up AC-related activities within curricula, with observation and feedback

A typical application /selection process



Why do employers use Assessment Centres?

'The Assessment Centre is a series of integrated simulations designed to generate the behaviours similar to those required for success in the target role. It enables candidates' performance to be measured objectively against specific criteria'

Association of Graduate Recruiters (2008)

How do employers try to get it right?

	1990s	*2000s*
• **Interviews**	99%	99%
• **References**	96%	96%
• **Personality tests**	35%	64%
• **Cognitive tests**	30%	70%
• **Assessment centres**	21%	59%

[Source :University of Liverpool - c. 2000]

Note: *The AGR Graduate Recruitment Survey 2006* found that 91% of their respondents use final round ACs or selection events.

Assessment Centres in context

Apply online/ on paper

Employer sifts applications

Initial interview (by phone or in person)

Invite to assessment day

Assessment Centre →

Offer

(Typical activities, not necessarily in this order)

- **Tour / introduction to the company**
- **Group discussion**
- **Group exercise or tasks**
- **Presentations**
- **Written exercise**
- **In-tray or e-tray exercise**
- **Psychometric tests**
- **Second interview**
- **Social activities**

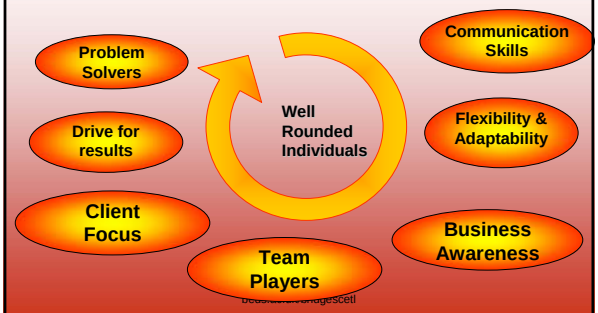
Assessment Centres Video/DVD (AGCAS)

What activities do you see being assessed?	How do employers assess these? What criteria do they use?	What skills/ behaviours are they looking for? Which of these are also important in HE?	Do you develop these skills and behaviours through the curriculum ?	What benefits could you gain by experiencing this type of activity and assessment - and how could it be done?
		▶		

ACs contain a number of elements

What did you see?
What lessons can be learned?
How might ACs open up new ways of teaching, learning, assessing and providing feedback?

What do employers look for? (Logica)



What makes a Fast Streamer in the Civil Service?

- Drive for results
- Learning and improving
- Decision-making
- Constructive thinking
- Building productive relationships
- Communicating with impact
- an inquisitive mind
- adaptability
- robustness
- impartiality
- the ability to challenge
- collaborative attitude
- decisiveness
- lucidity

Skills that students need to demonstrate

- Time management
  - ensure they complete the task in the allocated time
- Communication
  - express their views, allow others to speak, be supportive, use whiteboards, present effectively
- Drive for results
  - keep the group focussed to achieve the goals
- Creative thinking /problem solving
- Adaptability
  - tackling problems that may not be from their area of expertise, and without all the required information

This helped us get a good insight into the actual skills requested by employers when looking for suitable candidates for roles. It was interesting to see how many different skills are expected of potential employees and that employers are looking for more rounded individuals instead of just those with only technical ability. I learnt about performance and mastery goals/skills which are both needed to become a rounded, multi-talented individual. I see myself more as a performance goal person so am looking to develop and set myself more mastery goals.

Extract from a student's blog, Computing Year 1

Observing a group exercise

- Group discussions are the most frequently assessed AC activities
- For developmental reasons, we need to observe and provide formative feedback
- Ideally one observer per participant
- Make detailed observations relevant to the competencies of interest
- Can use structured observation checklist

Giving and receiving feedback

- **Owned**
  - Ask the recipient of feedback: *How did you feel? What worked well? What didn't?* Discuss rather than tell.
  - e.g. self-assessment: 'I talked too much'
- **Specific**
  - describe specific observations
  - 'during the brainstorm I noticed you interrupted when Jon was trying to talk '
- **Constructive**
  - say how it could have been done better
  - 'you could try and listen to others more, and draw them into the discussion'

To make this a success

- Room should be arranged so that candidates (4-6) sit at small tables, with plenty of room around the outside for observers
- Ideally groups spread round a room - noise from other groups is distracting
- Discuss and set ground rules for giving and receiving feedback
- Take time to share the feedback collectively

Example of a student brief for experiencing a group exercise

- You will be allocated roles as participants and observers of a group discussion
- You will be given written candidate and assessor briefs and time to read/prepare
- Assessors will provide constructive feedback after the exercise
- This should be a fun learning opportunity! (before you experience the real thing!)

Example: *Discuss this proposition – and generate 5 statements to support it*

PDP, career development learning and employability complement good academic learning – they need not be rivals for curriculum space.

Remember feedback should be
- Owned
- Specific
- Constructive

Ask students: "How did it feel….

- To do the exercise?
- To observe the exercise?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- What might you do differently as a result?
- What questions do you still have about it?"

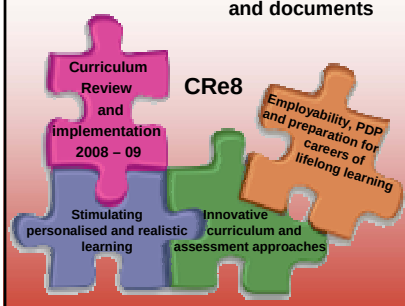
At University of Bedfordshire

- Group activities integrated into curricula
- Encourage and enable students to self assess and peer assess
- Set personal objectives for each following week – establish a habit of self evaluation and goal setting
- Explicitly expect and motivate students' development of competencies

Bridges Experience

University of Bedfordshire

Embedding concepts in curriculum design, strategies and documents



SOAR framework

Book: Kumar, A (2007) **Routledge, London & New York**

Atlay, M et al (2008)

Explicit expectations of skills-development

SOAR

as a 'meta-model' :
- students understand, identify and develop effective behaviours
- move from student to graduate to professional identity

How captured
- (e)-portfolio?
-HE Achievement Report? (HEAR – Burgess, 2007)

An example of a self-audit: '*Drive for Results*' (© Arti Kumar)

Allocate ratings to each statement below, along a four-point scale, where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = frequently, 4 = always:	Ratings 1 - 4
1. I am prepared to go that extra mile to get the best results of which I am capable	
2. I achieve my objectives and goals	
3. My friends would describe me as enthusiastic	
4. I experiment with new and different approaches to improve my personal performance and productivity	
5. I set targets that will deliver required outcomes for myself	
6. I set targets that will deliver desired outcomes for others	
7. I can realign my goals to alternative outcomes in the light of changing circumstances and needs	
8. I am determined and do not give up easily despite setbacks	
9. I use support appropriately to overcome obstacles	
10. I review my performance against high standards, in order to improve	
11. I can streamline approaches to save time, energy and other resources	
12. I believe in my ability to find better ways of doing things.	

ACs open up possibilities…

- Make key competencies/professional behaviours easier for staff and students to understand, observe, accredit and assess – for both formative and summative purposes (leading to the new HEAR)
- 'Behavioural self-audits' can enable learners to diagnose, develop and evaluate their personal possession of the requisite attributes
- Challenge *and* motivate students to develop professionalism and employability

Conclusions

- Students need to get better at AC activities for employability *and* entry to employment
- Competencies developed are transferable
- Recruitment provides a practical incentive
- Process of participating in and observing group exercises is beneficial as a developmental activity
- Materials are available for you to adapt

References

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