



Alex Langhorn

## Project: Enhancing employability: Making an impact at interview

**School:** MLP, Careers & Employability

**Course:** Career Management Skills

**No. of students:** 150 **Level:** UG/PG

**Themes:** Assessment, Multimedia, Interactivity

### TESS 2012

#### Teaching Enhancement and Student Success

TESS is a University-wide initiative, funded by the Faculty of Humanities. Working with the Faculty eLearning Teams, academics set up projects aimed at developing course content specific to their needs, through eLearning tools and skills development.

### What was the problem?

"In the competitive graduate jobs market, students need to be aware of skills that employers are looking for and be able confidently to articulate evidence of these skills during the recruitment process. The University, through the Careers and Employability Division and in partnership with all Faculties runs a number of Career Management Skills (CMS) course modules, each including input and involvement by graduate recruiters to give Manchester students an advantage against the competition.

Within the Faculty of Humanities, nine CMS course units run each year to enhance the employability of approximately 500 Humanities students. However, with a yearly cohort of around 6000, this still leaves up to 5500 students each year unaccounted for in terms of career planning and development (though some access services at the Careers & Employability Division individually). We sought a facility that would be available to all students at any time to help improve their employability."



### How successful was the solution?

"The eLearning product succeeds in providing practical insight into the interview process and how best to succeed at interview. It features a good level of user interactivity and is supported by high quality video material which is invaluable in conveying key messages.

As a collaborative partnership between the Faculty eLearning Team and the centralised Careers & Employability Division, each with different peak and ebb working times, we anticipated challenges. Good communication would be a key factor in the project's success. Revision to the initial project specification and some unforeseen circumstances both contributed to delays in completing.

There can be no doubting the quality of the finished product. The Humanities eLearning team produced a high specification Flash tool underpinned by XML markup and ActionScript code – a template framework that can be reused in other Humanities contexts. The video material produced by the Careers & Employability division is of a professional standard and conveys key messages appropriately. These combine to give a very strong interactive tool for enhancing students' employability."

The Humanities eLearning Team are on-hand to provide advice, guidance and demonstrations to academic staff on the opportunities for using technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

### How was the problem solved?

"Through this TESS project we examined how the application of eLearning technology could improve a student's employability, focusing on one key element of the employment process: how to succeed at interviews. An interactive tool could highlight the four principle elements of the interview process:

- Conveying motivation for the role
- Providing evidence of competency skills
- Asking relevant questions
- Using appropriate body language

These four topics represent the cornerstones of the interview process; by addressing these, students would be more fully prepared for work placement interviews. To reach as many students as possible, we wanted the product to sit on a dedicated website and be linked to both from course units within Blackboard and from Faculty intranet pages. The tool itself would consist of six separate elements: an introductory chapter, a chapter for each of the four cornerstones and a conclusion chapter. It was decided that symmetry in design and structure would be key, each chapter to consist of the same methods and mechanisms for progression and completion. Users would work through a number of staged video clips of interviews that we filmed with students from the drama school and with CMS partner organisations The Cooperative Group and Teach First. They would use a slider tool to score how well they thought the mock candidate did within each clip and be able to add notes to serve as a revision tool later. After completing all of the clips within a chapter, users could download the notes they had written before continuing to the next section."

### What did the students think?

"Due to seen and unforeseen problems that this TESS project faced during its duration, launch of the product was understandably delayed. The revised launch date of October 2012 was planned to coincide with the Career Management Skills modules in semester 01 of the 2012/13 academic year, as well as a number of other events such as the recruitment fairs which are run by the Careers & Employability division.

Testing amongst small focus groups of recent graduates and current undergraduate students has been on the whole highly positive, with significant praise being paid to the innovative use of video, especially when combined with the dynamically appearing supporting textual content that reinforces the key messages. Some students have identified that perhaps some of the video segments were quite lengthy, a matter which is to be addressed prior to launch. Staff of the Careers and Employability Division who also tested the product have commented positively on the ability to download the user's notes in an HTML format which can then be saved or printed; this was considered a valuable asset in the tool's expected success. This praise has also been mirrored in student reflections, highlighting it as a great tool for students who are keen to keep digitalised notes."

