Project Aims and Objectives

Students of level 3 vocationally related Computing/IT courses often enter the course with very little idea of what it means to work in the IT industry. Students can suffer from low levels of motivation, which may be caused by an inability to see the purpose of their learning in relation to a career path. Their learning is focused in one area, whose relevance may not be apparent or appreciated. This is not learning for the sake of furthering a general education, neither is it training for a specific job. It is somewhere in between.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a shortage of suitably skilled employees in the IT industry and, therefore, an increase in employer input and support is highly desirable. There is a growing involvement in computing from major employers such as Google, O2 and others, which is aimed mostly at schools, but for many colleges, local employers are mostly SMEs with little time and without the staff to take on an education liaison role.

This project aimed to *study the effect on motivation of using assessment material in the form of a competition, which will follow a brief agreed and set by employers and college staff*. The assessment brief was delivered to two groups of students on the second year of a BTEC Level 3 course in IT.

Motivation was measured by examining the proportion of students who met deadlines on non-employer-led assignments and employer-led, competitive assignments and by collating and recording attitudes towards exercises before and after the activity. It is anticipated that a learning/assessment activity for all students, such as an employer set and supported competition, due to its link to the real world, would raise motivation levels for students and would be manageable, inclusive and attractive to employers. It was not within the scope of this project to assess employer attitudes towards this type of activity as it would only be possible involve one or two employers, as brief setters and as competition judges. However, the views of the employers involved do form part of the project evaluation.

Activities of this type have been used before and students, especially high achievers, have expressed a liking for this type of assessment. However, the effects on all students in a cohort have not been measured and, in particular, the effect on those with low motivation levels has not yet been considered. This project *aims to study the effect on motivation levels of all students in a cohort in terms of meeting deadlines and attempting all parts of the activity*.