

The Team Development Programme

Building a learning community with students from across the world. 2009/10

Background

The highly successful Team Development programme has been run at the University of Exeter for the past twelve years. Initially sponsored by BP, it is now funded centrally by the University, and delivered to each subject area at the start of the academic year (ie late September/early October). The programme takes the form of a half-day series of teamwork activities consisting of mostly outdoor problem-solving tasks, each of which is followed by a review of group processes. Students are divided into groups of eight to twelve within their discipline area and stay within this group for all the tasks.

The programme is generally used as a precursor to subject-related activities in order to:

- Create awareness of the power of working collaboratively
- Foster good working relationships between students
- Enable students to evaluate their personal strengths and weaknesses

It also strongly supports the Employability agenda and is a good starting point for understanding the processes of Personal Development Planning (as continued within BSD1000)

Monitoring and Evaluation

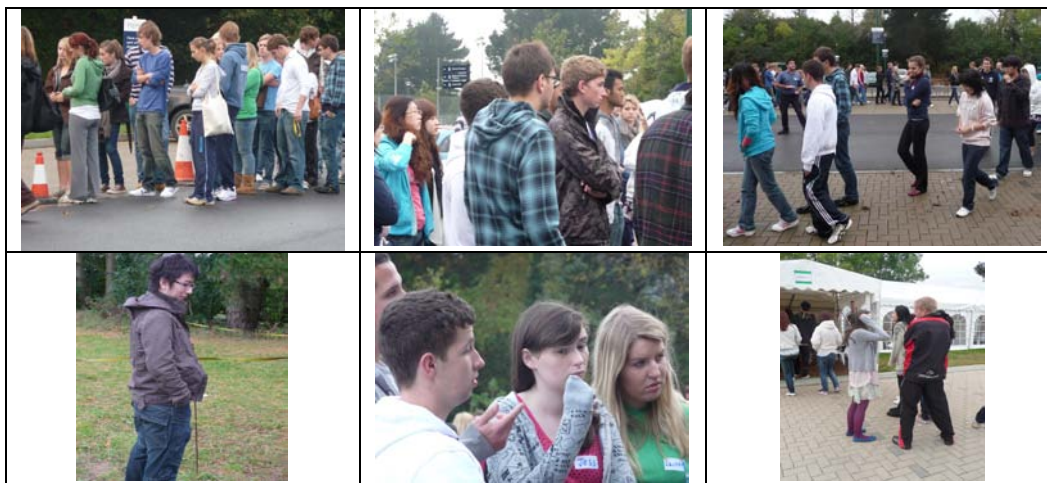
Many thousands of students have now participated, and feedback consistently highlights its benefits in terms of building friendships, developing confidence, understanding that people learn and interact in different ways, beginning to develop skills for working in groups, or even that it is perfectly OK to offer different views and opinions and not necessarily feel the need to be led by a tutor. Academic staff and postgraduates who volunteer to run groups comment on the noticeable impact on new undergraduates and the way in which, over a very short period of time, students relax, fully engage with the programme and feel more comfortable about communicating with each other.

Student comments include:

- “I learnt how to work with people from different backgrounds and learnt a great deal while having fun – it was a positive experience”.
- “The activities were very engaging and pulled everyone together to complete a common task. I would say I am now more prepared to work in diverse groups”.
- “I feel so much more prepared”.
- “I think it had a lot of value and taught us the importance of teamwork”.
- “AWESOME! Loved it!”
- “It definitely improved my personal and communication skills”.
- “Very useful, helped me realise the diverse nature of the people I will be working with and how to find a common way of communicating”.
- “It was very productive in that we got to know a lot of people. I felt very welcome and was very happy that my team did quite well. The communication within the team was quite good and only got better as the day progressed”.
- “The event was a fantastic way to meet new friends – being the only mature student, it had been difficult to integrate – It also made me address my team skills and be more assertive”.
- “Brilliant. A lot of fun, I really felt I got to know my team. Activities were challenging but everyone got involved. I’m less conscious about voicing ideas”.

In terms of the Business School, the programme has particular significance since the undergraduate cohorts are larger than for other subject areas in the University, as well as having a very broad population of home and international students from across the world, many of whom will never have undertaken this kind of activity and are not used to taking responsibility for practical problem-solving. Hence the programme is high impact and extremely important for the beginnings of task-related and social relationships, helping students to collaborate together and learn about each other no matter their background, and to recognise that each and everyone of them is unique but is also a member of a special learning environment, or community of learners, who will develop and grow - in the company of their peers - during the course of their degree. Overall the Team Development programme provides students with a positive beginning to degree study, with an emphasis on individual identity as well as collaboration, and potentially avoiding the kinds of cultural stereotyping that have a tendency to occur in such large groups. They are also slightly better prepared for some of the technology-led group work activities that they are expected to undertake in the first year, such as video-recording group presentations

Photo Gallery: Team Development



The Business School students arrive at the Team Development programme looking suspicious or fearful, cold or tired, and rarely communicating with anyone.



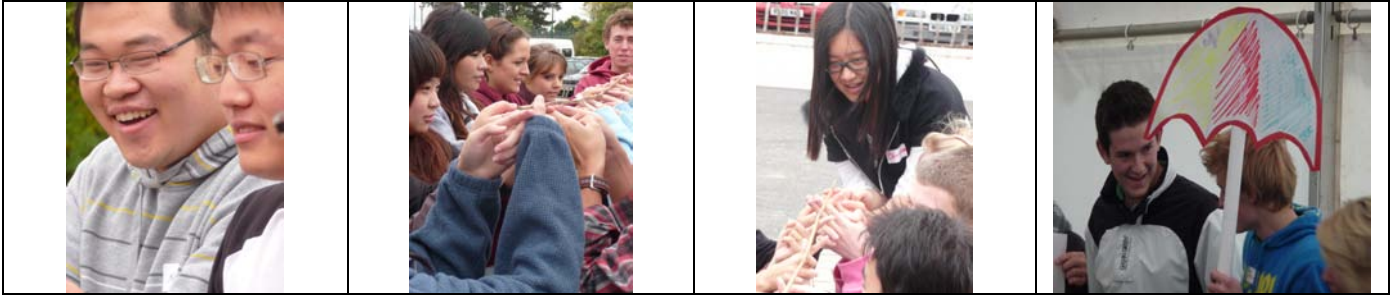


Academic staff from the Business School (who undertakes training on the philosophy and activities of the programme) work alongside specialist trainers to gain the interest and trust of the students.



The students gradually become involved. They clearly become engaged with the tasks, often with extreme concentration.





The concentration continues, but there is often more humour. Body language begins to change and there is far more physical proximity between students.



Students demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to their group and to individuals within it, and show a great deal of pleasure in having been involved in the programme.