

ASET

*Integrating Work and Learning*

ASET

# newsletter

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## Managing IT Systems Working Group

With a number of institutions and organisations attempting to create in-house placement database/learning systems to improve on existing packages for supporting and managing students on placements, ASET is establishing a trans-institutional working party to write a 'guidelines for functionality best practice' publication where technical specifications for developers will be laid out alongside narrative and any other elements which need to be explored. This group is expected to convene shortly for a meeting in Belfast and will report back on progress and seek feedback at the Conference in September, before a final publication is produced.

The aim is to create a document which crosses the users/technical barrier so that placement staff can use it to create, or get their internal technical people to create, systems that do what they want/need them to do. The document will likely be a functionality report, containing both a generic core and a functionality flowchart. The whole project is being done as a service for ASET members.

The conference session will provide an opportunity for users to get involved as a progress report will be put forward and it is intended that this will be picked apart and made more generic in response to delegates' comments.

The working group will be headed by representatives from Queen's University Belfast, Staffordshire University, University of Plymouth and University of Ulster.

## ASET's New President

ASET is delighted to announce that from September 2006, Dr Geoffrey Copland will take over as its President. Dr Copland has been the Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of Westminster since 1996. He studied Physics at Oxford University and has a doctorate in Solid State Physics. Two years as a post-doctoral researcher at Yale University in the USA were followed by eleven years researching and lecturing in physics at Queen Mary College and Queen Elizabeth College, both of the University of London. For six years from 1981, Dr Copland was Dean of Studies at Goldsmiths' College. In 1987 he was appointed as Deputy Rector at the University of Westminster (then known as the Polytechnic of Central London). Dr Copland's current affiliations include being Vice-President of UUK, Chairman of UCEA and a trustee of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE).

The University of Westminster is the home of the 'Professional Learning from the Workplace' CETL and both the University and he firmly promote the philosophy of 'educating for professional life'. He comments, "Part of the education of young people is not only to be stretched in their specialist knowledge as far as possible but also that they should be prepared for the wider challenges of the world they are entering. We have much pressure put on us by government to respond to the employability agenda and the demands for a highly educated workforce, and most important of all, our students want it... Curricula need to be adapted to value different types of education and work-related activity. Academics, quality reviewers and course validators need to build confidence in new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, particularly work-based learning. Commentators and critics need to get beyond yearning for halcyon days long passed (if they ever were halcyon) and face up to the changed nature of the world in which we all live, learn and work."

Dr Copland will help to represent and promote ASET's 'Integrating Work and Learning' agenda to the government, DfES and other organisations such as UUK. He will be addressing the ASET Conference in September on a range of issues related to placements and employability.

ASET would also like to pay a warm tribute to outgoing President Dr Edwin Kerr. Edwin became Chairman of ASET in the late 1980s and served in that post for over a decade before becoming President. With a wealth of knowledge in the HE sector including a period as Chief Officer for CNAAB, Edwin's acute sensitivity to both educational and political implications has served ASET well on many occasions. Current Chairman John Wilson and the rest of the Executive Committee, on behalf of all ASET members, would like to thank Edwin for his invaluable contributions over the years and wish him all the best in retirement.



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# Essay Competition



Jonathan Walton

Placement students learn a lot from their placements - and the payoffs are considerable. As well as possibly contributing to the degree grade or a parallel award, they benefit from having been through the whole process of recruitment, usually get a glowing reference from their employer, are more focused on their degree and career, and thus have a head start in going for that crucial first graduate job. In addition to all this, for several years now they have been able to enter ASET's post-placement essay competition and win a prize - currently 1000 Euro. This gives the winner an impressive extra entry on their CV, and public recognition in the form of a presentation.

Many students in the final, post-placement year of their degrees naturally want to concentrate on their academic studies and this can be a factor deterring students from entering.

But in 2005 there were 38 entries and the standards were high, (a cliché, but true) and it was very clear that applicants had learned from their placement experiences, and could articulate that learning.

Entrants came from a very wide range of institutions, from Kent to Edinburgh, and from Belfast and Dublin to Plymouth, including some placements of less than a year. It was also gratifying to see an entry from mainland Europe - Budapest. All institutions are ASET members, a condition of entry.

Courses included as broad a spread as Psychology, Cancer Biology, Journalism and Modern Languages, Business with Marketing, Computer Sciences, Civil Engineering and International Culinary Arts.

The competition was judged by a panel comprising John Wilson, Chair of ASET; Ray Robinson, ex-Chair, Angela Peers, Manchester Metropolitan University, Tamsin Pyne from the University of Plymouth, and Alan Smith, who has been involved with ASET and the essay competition for many years. Each marked all 38 entries individually, and then an agreed shortlist of 6 was compiled for all to consider the final selection.

The final winner was Jonathan Walton from the University of Kent. Congratulations to Jonathan whose essay was about his placement at AMS Ltd/BAE Systems. The panel was also delighted to commend and make an award to the entry from Miklos Krajcsó from the International Business School Budapest, doubly impressive because he was writing in language other than his native one.

The criteria for the essay are designed to give ASET "quotable quotes" which promote the idea of sandwich courses and work-based learning in general, reflecting ASET's by-line "Integrating Work and Learning".

A collection of quotes has been put on the 'Latest News' page of the ASET website, not just from the winning entry, but from several that made a good case for the experience. If only it were possible to "magic" these ideas into the minds of pre-placement students! But then, perhaps, they wouldn't need the placement...

Frequently-mentioned words across all entries were communication, confidence, respect, leadership, initiative, motivation, speed of adapting, assertiveness, self-reliance, time management, team working, and the ultimate, maturity.

As Jonathan puts it, "All my initial reservations about my decision to do a year in industry proved unfounded. I greatly enjoyed the year, both the work I did and the personal experiences I gained. I am finding these experiences invaluable in my final year, both academically and in applying for graduate positions. I have no regrets about the year and would do it again in a second, and I would recommend a year in industry to anyone who is unsure about doing one. It is an invaluable opportunity which should not be missed.

# Blog Competition

[www.asetonline.org](http://www.asetonline.org)

ASET has introduced a new section to its website to follow the progress of four lucky students whilst on their placements. This was the first year of the competition to be an ASET "blog" star and interest was huge. For the uninitiated, a "blog" is a web log - an informal online diary. Students were asked to send us a piece about what they were hoping to learn from going on placement - and the team from ASET had a very enjoyable time reviewing the entries. Those successful were:



Claire



Nikki



Louise



Jim

**Claire Daly**, a BSc(Hons) European Studies with Modern Languages (French and Russian) from the University of Bath who is spending her placement year teaching English in School No. 171 in Samara, Russia. Claire is finding the cultural change challenging, but in different ways; "I'm living at the Orphanage teaching at the attached school...so many of them come from backgrounds unimaginable in my comfortable little life back in the UK.... I also expect to keep finding out things about this place that alternately confuse and entertain me... the fact that the reaction of a worrying number of older Russian ladies on meeting me is first to try and feed me, and then attempt to marry me off to any young-ish male relatives they can think of."

**Nikki Davis**, a BA(Hons) Furniture & Product Design student from Nottingham Trent University who will be spending her placement year at Bulthaup Oxford (Kitchen Architecture Ltd). Nicola talked about the difficulties of finding a placement, and relief in getting one; "I felt relief, floods and floods of relief!...Yet after the relief, reality hit...I actually had a placement! Panic - what if I don't like the work? I don't like the people? I don't like the place? I don't learn anything?"

**Louise Longman**, a BSc(Hons) Biomedical Sciences student from the University of the West of England is spending her placement year in the department of microbiology at the Frenchay Hospital in Bristol. Louise's entry showed her attitude to planning her career and getting started in a profession; "Microbiology is my real passion, and I eventually want to go into research. This placement should be a real stepping stone. The laboratory I will be working in is accredited by the Health Professions Council and during my year here at Frenchay I will be completing my state registration portfolio".

**Jim Taylor**, a BEng(Hons) Chemical Engineering student from Aston University who is spending his placement year at Basell Polyolefins in Manchester. Jim talked about understanding the value of getting some hands on experience; "I chose to do a placement year as I have always had a hands on approach to life. I think that this stems from my ever growing passion for cars and motorcycles as well as being intrigued by how things work....on placement you physically see the problem, it's not just a hypothetical situation."

Claire, Nikki, Louise and Jim have been keeping us informed and entertained throughout the year - see the website for their full competition entries and blogs.

The 2006 essay and blog competitions will both be launched in September.

# ASET Annual Conference review

ASET  
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Another year, another ASET gathering, this time at the University of York. Delegates had the chance to hear keynote addresses on employability, and health and safety. The conference was opened by the new Chair of ASET, John Wilson from the University of Central Lancashire.

Employability was a strong theme for the conference this year and delegates heard from two of the successful recipients of the Centres for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) initiative. David Bagley of the University of Central Lancashire introduced their Centre for Employability through the Humanities. At the centre of their CETL bid was a desire to set up Realistic Work Environments in publishing, theatre, museums, media and cinema to support a wide range of curriculum based employability activities. Angela Smallwood of the University of Nottingham talked about their CETL for Integrative Learning, using deep reflection and student centred, student-owned e-portfolios to record their experiences.

A high point of the conference was the presentation from Eversheds LLP about work placements and the education sector, the legal duties and the real risks. The team from Eversheds comprised James Thompson, an associate from the Regulatory Team specialising in health and safety; Helen Cookson - an associate specialising in Employment Law and Siân Jones-Davies the Head of Eversheds' Student Issues and Education Dispute Management Groups. It is fair to say that this was one of the best ever received sessions at an ASET conference and delegates reported back very favourably on this session, including asking that we could do more on the same topic - watch this space.

Unfortunately major problems on the motorways meant that our presenters from George at Asda, NCWE Placement Employer of the Year, were unable to join us. But due to technical wizardry we were about to see the presentation that Paul Jenkins, the People Resourcing Manager and Paula Wilson, the People Training and Development Manager, were hoping to deliver. A huge thanks to ASET Executive Committee member Angela Pears from Manchester Metropolitan University who works closely with the team from George at Asda for stepping into the breach.

The workshop sessions were as informative and interesting as usual - we would expect nothing less from members contributing news of their work! We heard from a wide range of institutions: Aston University, Hogeschool van Utrecht, King's College London, Leeds Metropolitan University, LEO-NET, NCWE, Queen's University Belfast, University of Salford and University of Ulster.

As ever the true success of the conference is the value that delegates get from interacting with others, hearing about good practice and taking ideas back to their own workplaces. If you were not there, you missed out, and as for the social events, well that's a whole other story! But on a serious note, ASET is there to represent and support our members; it is your conference so tell us what you would like to see this year.

## Good Practice - PWEGs (Placements and Work Experience Groups)

In feedback for ASET events it is regularly remarked that one of the most valuable aspects is the opportunity to meet fellow placement professionals. This is not just traditional networking for same subject contacts, but also the opportunity to share experiences, systems and good practice with a range of individuals working in the placement and employability field, something which is at the very heart of the ethos of ASET.

However, this exchanging of ideas and experiences need not be entirely restricted to ASET events and such fellowship could be passing untapped closer to home. It is a regular occurrence for two or more delegates from the same institution to attend an ASET event who do not know each other. A large proportion of institutions do not have a centralised placement centre and smaller teams are based in a myriad of different departments and faculties. However, this need not be a bar to expanding co-operation, sharing practice, avoiding unnecessary duplication when establishing systems and lobbying institutional management as a united front.

PWEGs have grown up in a number of our member organisations and ASET would promote such bodies as good practice. These are usually meetings of about 20 to 25 people including placement tutors, administrators, managers, academic staff with placement responsibility and representatives from marketing and communications departments and the Careers Service (although sometimes these only complement more regular executive committees). University of Bath for example has a Placement Tutors Forum for the promotion of placements and the dissemination of good practice across the institution. This body has over 40 members from all departments where placements are offered and meets twice a year, co-ordinated by a secretary in the Registrar's office. University of Ulster has a similar body organised by a Work Experience Co-ordinator in the Career Development Centre.

Bournemouth University's PDU (Placement Development Unit) similarly facilitates communication between placement staff across departments. The PDU exists to ensure equality of access and experience for all students undertaking placements and requires the commitment of everyone involved including academic staff, placement administrators and the placement development advisers who visit the students on placement. This co-ordinated network approach provides a comprehensive support mechanism for both the students and the employers which has proven to be much appreciated by both.

These are obviously just a couple of examples of the numerous institutions who undertake such schemes. Such formal meetings might be logistically very difficult in many environments, but a

More important than such a group existing however is it having a clear set of objectives and, significantly, it having a place in the overall structure of the institution so that the outcomes of committee meetings are fed upwards and acted upon. If you would like advice on setting up your own PWEG or would simply like to be made aware of ASET's other placement contacts within your own institution, please contact the ASET office.

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# Upcoming Events

## ASET Annual Conference 2006 The Placement & Employability Professionals' Conference

5-7 September 2006, Cadbury's Manor House, Birmingham

A three-day international conference exploring a range of issues relating to the practice of work-based learning. As well as plenary sessions there will be a wide selection of workshop presentations to attend.

Programme includes sessions relating to:

- QAA Review and Redrafting of Section 9 (Placement Learning)
- QAA Practitioners' Perspectives
- Health and Safety
- IT to Manage Placements
- Sandwich Placements
- Shorter Placements
- Flexible Work-Based Learning
- International Placements

Plenary sessions to be led by:

Wendy Stubbs - QAA Development Officer, author/co-ordinator of the new review.

Darren Scott - QAA review working group representative.

Geoffrey Copland - Vice-president of UUK, Chairman of UCEA and VC of University of Westminster, home of the Professional Learning from the Workplace CETL.

Eversheds LLP - Health and Safety.

ASET's placement database/learning systems software functionality publication working party - progress report.

Other happenings:

- Organised networking events.
- Organised social activities including a formal off-site dinner and a trip. (See 'Events' page of website for full details).
- En-suite rooms as standard.

## Remainder of 2006

- Foundation Degrees, run in partnership with Foundation Degree Forward - October, (Date and Venue TBC)
- An Introduction to Work Placement Management - November - Bristol (Date TBC)

## On the Horizon

Continuing web developments including the construction of a resource of material for placement professionals in the 'Advice/Info' section of,

[www.asetonline.org](http://www.asetonline.org)

An upcoming Placement Forum Message board for corresponding with and exchanging information with others working in the field. This will incorporate subsections relating to 'Administrative', 'Academic' and 'Off Topic' fields.

A new statistical report commissioned from HESA with figures on placement numbers and distribution and the quantifiable results of placements on employability and academic performance.

The transcription of the Eversheds' Health and Safety question and answer session with placement staff at the 2005 Conference.

A whole series of new staff development sessions on the 2007 programme.

A collection of abstracts of all the presentations/papers being given at the Conference in September.