



newsletter

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ASET ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1997

The major event in 1997, for our Universities, was the publication of the Dearing Report – 'Higher Education in the Learning Society'. Although the ASET Annual Conference in April of this year preceded that report much of the event was influenced by the anticipated outcomes or issues which it was thought it would raise.

A stimulating and challenging keynote address by Leslie Wagner, Vice Chancellor of Leeds Metropolitan University and Chair of the CVCP Employment Skills Overview Group set both the scene and the tone for many of the workshops which followed.

It is clear that the CVCP have a commitment to enhance the employability of students and work experience and sandwich courses help achieve this but the many different models of work based learning will need thorough examination in order to make the higher education experience as effective as possible.

This address has been reproduced in its entirety along with summaries of all eleven of the workshops and the other two plenary sessions in the Proceedings which are available from the ASET office for £10.



Edwin Kerr & Leslie Wagner

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The workshops addressed a range of issues including Good Practice, Necessary Practice, Work Based Learning in Masters Degrees and Technology Transfer as well as providing important advice on Health & Safety, International Placements, Equal Opportunities and Obtaining Placements. As a consequence topics for workshops at future conferences were identified as were issues which ASET, and others, need to address during the year.

Fiona Davies, Policy Adviser, Learning and Skills Groups, CBI, gave a very well argued presentation about the need for quality of provision of work based learning and her summary of the CBI comments to Dearing was particularly interesting to delegates.

The final plenary session was addressed by Sue Moon, Centre for Research into Quality at the University of Central England. Sue is one of Lee Harvey's team and following on from their 'Graduates' Work' project they are currently undertaking one which aims to make proposals to increase the quantity, quality and relevance of work experience in its various forms. A good number of delegates accepted Sue's invitation to provide input into the research.

York University continues to provide a delightful and convenient location enhanced by good food and accommodation and the excellent weather which we experienced this year.

A COMMENTARY ON THE DEARING PROPOSALS as they impact on sandwich courses and work placements

The last issue of the ASET newsletter outlined ASET's submission to the Dearing Committee, in respect of the value of Sandwich Education. This current article reviews the Committee's responses, and considers their implications in conjunction with the political moves so far, though of course a more complete picture should emerge with the publication of the Government White Paper expected later in 1997.

Direct quotes from the Dearing report are shown here in *italics*.

The strongest single message which we received from employers was the value of work experience. This is particularly emphasised by small and medium-sized companies who need new employees to be able to operate effectively in the workplace from the first day. Further development of work experience requires action by both employers and institutions. [Summary par. 39]

No doubt all employers would like employees to be able to contribute from day 1, and it is good to see that the value of previous experience is recognised. But SMEs must not expect larger companies to do all their pre-employment training. In any case, as a general rule, placement students from a properly-integrated sandwich course give excellent value for money during their placements, not just in later employment.

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