

Workshop Sessions

Day 2 – Wednesday 8 September

Workshop 2:1:1

Title: The Demand for Placement Students and Interns from SMEs in the East Midlands
Presenter(s): Tom Fletcher (CFE) and Jenny Jones (Loughborough University)
Time: 9:00 – 9:45
Room: 1
Abstract:

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vast in their number and broad in their scope, potentially offering a rich and challenging placement or internship experience for university students and graduates. As the ASET Conference 2010 comes to the East Midlands, CFE – Leicester-based research and consultancy specialists in employment and skills – and Loughborough University will host a workshop exploring the extent and nature of demand for placement students and interns from SMEs, and the university response to this demand.

CFE has undertaken a survey of 502 SMEs in the East Midlands to assess their demand both for recent graduates and for placement students. The survey resulted in the publication of, *Generation Crunch: the demand for recent graduates from SMEs*. This original report included a brief chapter on the demand for placement students and interns, and, for the purposes of the ASET Conference, we will expand on that analysis through further interrogation of our data and discussion of questions that did not make it into the final *Generation Crunch* report.

Through the survey, we asked SMEs about:

- > their recruitment of placement students and interns in the previous 12 months and their plans for the coming 12 months;
- > the nature of their placement and internship activities including: the stage of education of the recruits, the types of placements and internships offered, and the average salaries of placement students and interns;
- > the main benefits derived from the recruitment of placement students or interns; and,
- > the barriers to the recruitment of placement students and interns.

Meanwhile, the Careers Centre at Loughborough University is busy developing the day-to-day business of engaging with SMEs in the East Midlands, promoting the value of work placements, in particular, as one route to SME recruitment of student or graduate skills. Loughborough University will provide insight into the challenges of engaging with SMEs from their recent experiences of doing so on this agenda.

This workshop will present a snapshot of the demand for placement students from SMEs, providing participants with some much-needed market intelligence in this under-researched domain. Participants will also hear practical advice from the experiences of an institution which is using placements as a key mechanism for engaging with SMEs. The intention is that CFE will present the market-level, employer perspective while Loughborough University will contribute the institutional perspective in an interactive and practical workshop. Participants will be encouraged to share their reflections on this issue and, importantly, will head back to their host institutions with some practical recommendations to discuss and implement.

Workshop 2:1:2

Title: Expectations and Perceptions: the rhetoric and reality of the Aston Business School placement programme – support service and placement year
Presenter(s): Nicola Bullivant and Helen Higson (Aston University)
Time: 9:00 – 9:45
Room: 2
Abstract:

In the move from elite Higher Education in the UK to a mass system (coupled with the introduction of a revised fee structure), students' expectations of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as service providers have increased. These expectations permeate HEIs support structures but create questions including how can we better manage students' expectations and how can we meet students' expectations?

The view of expectations is discussed by authors, including Barnett (1992, p34) who talks of some students having "a dependency orientation, suffering from an overestimate of what can be done for them...in these consumer-oriented times, many quite rightly want their money's worth out of their attendance".

Zeithaml et al (2006, p34) talk of the expectations which customers bring with them into service encounters, with perceptions being those "subjective assessments of actual service experiences". According to Johnston and Clark (2005, p109), "there are some customers who have quite unrealistic expectations of some service organisations and can cause a great deal of aggravation and nuisance as a result". Slack et al (2004, p596) emphasise the need to understand quality from the customer's perspective as "to the customer, the quality of a particular product or service is whatever he or she perceives it to be". The Service Quality Model (Figure 1), developed by Parasuraman et al (1985), offers a framework for understanding this and for exposing the "gaps" between what is expected to be delivered and what is received in reality.

Research was undertaken on aspects of service quality within the Placement Programme, Aston Business School. The key findings were:

1. The *espoused* service process type and the *actual* service process are different (as perceived by staff)
2. The *ideal* service process type is different to the service which is available to students (as perceived by staff).
3. There are no formal mechanisms in place to gain insights into students' expectations of the service.
4. There is no understanding of the potential gaps in the students' expectations of the service and the perceived service.

This research follows the key findings above. Data has been collected/analysed (point 3) using the SERVQUAL tool, which was also used to ascertain students' perceptions. SERVQUAL is designed around the five service quality dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. According to Johnston and Clark (2005, p125), "repeated administration allows an understanding as to how customers' perceived service quality with each of the dimensions is changing over time". O'Neill (2003) supports the need for longitudinal studies of service quality within HEIs. Additional analysis has been undertaken to identify the gaps between the expected service and perceived service (point 4).

Focus groups were held to attempt to more deeply understand student responses.

This session aims to present the findings of the research and allow participants to discuss their experiences of service quality within the field of work-based learning.

Workshop 2:1:3

Title: The Impact of a Work Placement (or Internship) Year on Student Final Performance: An Empirical Study
Presenter(s): Peter Green (University of Ulster)
Time: 9:00 – 9:45
Room: 3
Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of students taking a work placement (internship) year upon the final year degree mark and hence classifications achieved by a cohort of students on an undergraduate degree in business studies. In addition, evidence on the impact of total tariff points on entry, the prior study of A-level business studies, gender, prior year degree performance and the relationship between placement achievement and final degree mark is presented. The results suggest that the completion of a placement year, prior tertiary level performance and the prior study of A-level business studies, contribute positively and in a statistically significant way in explaining the final degree mark achieved. Further, whilst placement marks on this programme of study do not contribute mathematically towards the final degree mark, they are positively and significantly related to the final degree mark achieved. The evidence presented suggests that the completion of a placement year on average, improves the final classification award achieved by students from 2.2 to 2.1.

Workshop 2:1:4

Title: Enhancing the Student Experience through Work Based and Placement Learning: The student's perspective
Presenter(s): Edward Mosley and Rajinder Bhui (University of Leicester)
Time: 9:00 – 9:45
Room: 4
Abstract:

The Confederation of British Industry Higher Education report (Future fit) acknowledges activities such as internships and enterprise learning as valuable provisions that aid the development of students' employability skills; thus creating more well-rounded graduates. A substantial number of universities share this viewpoint and are increasingly aware of the need to improve the 'student experience'. Many institutions attempt to achieve this goal by providing a suite of placement learning provisions for their students. Whilst the links between work based and placement learning activities and students' personal/employability development has been comprehensively explored, less common is the exploration into students' views to gauge exactly what they believe they are gaining when they engage in these activities.

This workshop takes a look at a selection of work based and placement learning programmes, focussing in particular on, equal opportunities for work placements and enterprise and entrepreneurship that we are running at the University of Leicester. Featuring video footage, the workshop will show students giving their perspectives on their learning experiences to enable attendees to grasp the full spectrum of learning gained. From this, we will explore what can be done to encourage further participation.

The aims of this workshop are to:

- explore the specific work based and placement learning programmes provided by the University of Leicester;
- explore the views of students who have participated to gauge and evaluate what types of learning is taking place;

discuss ways in which practitioners can evaluate and encourage the student experience.

Workshop 2:1:5

Title: The Challenges of Setting Up a Teaching and Learning Institute to Inspire Tomorrows' Professionals
Presenter(s): Lisa Ward and Jane Gaffikin (University of Huddersfield)
Time: 9:00 – 9:45
Room: 5
Abstract:

The University of Huddersfield is one of the Top Ten providers of Sandwich Education (one year work placement as part of a four year degree) in the UK. Our strategy aims 'to produce employable and enterprising graduates'. We are committed to work placements to such an extent that they are 'fee free'. We have a huge range of vocational courses and our scholarly courses also contain strong work integrated learning components. Our strapline is 'inspiring tomorrow's professionals.'

The University's Teaching and Learning Institute was formed in 2010 to develop inspiring and innovative teaching. The Institute's prime focus is to enhance and nurture cross disciplinary teaching and learning activities and consequently raise student aspirations. Work integrated learning whether via placement, enterprise or business partnerships is an important feature in preparing students for their future careers and an aspect of practice which the Institute will encourage. Raising the profile of the existing best practice both within the University and the wider community is crucial to the Institute's success.

Aims and Objectives

The paper will explore:

- The background to the institute and why it was formed
- How the Institute has been set up and the challenges it faces
- How the Institute is supporting 'inspiring tomorrow's professionals'
 - The University's continuous commitment to and culture of work placements.
 - Completed Teaching and Learning projects that support the employability of students
 - Current and future Teaching and Learning projects to support the employability of students
 - Working in partnership with the Research and Enterprise agenda
 - Delivering effective staff development for academic and academic related support staff.
 - Recognising, celebrating and disseminating success, within the institution, nationally and internationally.

Experiences covered and Issues Addressed

The Institute's key themes are: co-ordination, evaluation and dissemination. The paper will discuss the first few months of the Institute's inception and the groundwork undertaken to ensure relationships and processes are in place to fully engage with the University community with the ultimate aim of enhancing the experience of our student population, as they become tomorrow's professionals.

Workshop 2:2:1

Title: Engaging with Employers in Economic Downturn
Presenter(s): Lyndsey El Amoud and Joan Buckley (University College Cork)
Time: 9:55 – 10:40
Room: 1
Abstract:

There has been an increasing focus on personal transferable skills by universities (Albrecht and Sack 2000). This has led to considerable growth in the number of placement programmes in undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). As noted by Paisey and Paisey (2009) relatively little research has been carried out in this domain. This paper explores the state of non-clinical placement programmes in third level institutes in Ireland. It presents the results of the first comprehensive survey of placement in Irish. The survey reveals the scale and scope of work placement programmes in undergraduate courses in Ireland. With more than three hundred courses incorporated into this survey, it is one of the most wide-ranging studies to ever have been conducted in this field.

This paper's discussion will present contextual information on the number of third level students involved in placement programmes across the country and the types of courses in Irish HEIs (by level and discipline) which include a work placement element in their core structure. It presents several of the key obstacles facing undergraduate work placement programmes and their managers as a result of the current changes in the global economic environment. The paper presents and considers the conflicting imperatives facing employers who may previously have been enthusiastic partners in work placement programmes. It also considers the impact and likely trajectory of the paid/non-paid placement debate, and examines some of the combination models being considered at present.

The paper draws on international comparators, in particular internship programmes in HEIs in the United States, to examine the learning of institutions who have been engaged in this area for a considerable period of time. Finally, this paper will demonstrate how this form of engagement between education and industry can be mutually beneficial for all key stakeholders involved in work placement programmes, including employers, HEIs and third level students (Richardson and Blakeney 1998). The wide range of benefits – in particular benefits to teaching and learning - which placement programmes can generate for each of these stakeholders will be analysed using comparative data from stakeholder interviews and testimonials.

Workshop 2:2:2

Title: Managing Placements with Greater Efficiency
Presenter(s): Tim Bergmeier, Guthrie White and Aaron White (QuantumIT)
Time: 9:55 – 10:40
Room: 2
Abstract:

Recent government spending cuts have resulted in Higher Education Institutes (HEI's) needing to find ways to manage lean. QuantumIT, in partnership with LaTrobe university (Australia), has developed InPlace, a fully integrated web based student placement tool. This presentation will be a use case on how InPlace allows HEI's to manage leaner and with greater efficiency.

Workshop 2:2:3

Title: Learning Spaces for Enhancing Employability Skills Using the Blackboard VLE
Presenter(s): Alistair McKinna and Ruth Brooks (University of Huddersfield)
Time: 9.55 – 10:40
Room: 3
Abstract:

This paper describes a pilot project at the UoH to develop and enhance personal development planning (pdp) and employability skills amongst final year undergraduates on a BA Business Management degree. Developed in conjunction with students, the Careers and Employability service and Academic Skills, a Personal Development and Employability Workbook has been generated and student learning from this tool embedded through the creation of an e-portfolio in the campus-wide Blackboard VLE system. In addition to this package of employability skills, a psychometric test and careers advice have been added to assist students in career planning. The package has maintained a simple approach to support student engagement.

The literature around employability skills in the higher education sector is vast with many examples of best practice. The work described here builds on the approaches first laid down by Knight & Yorke (2002), Yorke (2005) and Brown & Drew (2005)

The purpose of the project was to enhance current PDP schemes that focused upon employability as well as ensuring strong academic progress in the final year. By integrating Academic Skills delivered through specialist advisors, the Careers service and final year academic and personal tutors the project brings together the range of support mechanisms available. Students stressed the need for tools that took a simple but effective approach to help organise their career routes. Student Focus Groups were established and Training Sessions have begun. Awareness raising among academic staff is an on-going activity through Teaching and Learning seminars.

At the outset of this project a series of objectives were agreed:

- A review of final year PDP practice across internal and external programmes:
- An integrated PDP resource to use with students to include personal analysis, careers analysis, psychometric/ aptitude testing, job application and interview techniques, guest speakers from employers and past graduates and progress files:
- An initial qualitative evaluation of participation rates and effectiveness:
- Quantitative assessment via degree classification and destinations statistics

The quantitative assessment remains to be completed. All other objectives have been achieved

An innovative approach has been taken in order to engage students working in conjunction with the Careers and Employability Service. An initial evaluation of the tool has demonstrated that there has been an increased attendance at Careers sessions

The aim of presenting this project is to demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating all aspects of final year support to ensure academic progress as well as structured first step career planning. The integrated learning tools will be demonstrated through the e-portfolio and discussion generated through workshop activity as to how the project could be further developed, potentially working back through the earlier years of the course which includes a placement.

Workshop 2:2:4

Title: A Statistical Analysis of the Effects of Career Oriented Education on Academic Performance and Employment Outcome – A study based on KSU students' data
Presenter(s): Yasushi Tanaka (Kyoto Sangyo University)
Time: 9.55 – 10:40
Room: 4
Abstract:

The Centre of Research and Development for Cooperative Education at Kyoto Sangyo University has gathered the data of all 5473 students who graduated in 2008 and 2009, through which we can trace how each student entered our university, how well he/she performed academically, whether he/she took Work-Integrated-Learning and other career-oriented education programmes, and how he/she managed the job hunting. This paper is an attempt to verify the causal relationships among these factors by using a statistical analysis on the KSU students' data and thus to suggest to academics and practitioners concerned one way to assess the career-oriented education programmes.

Based on this huge and detailed set of data on individual students, we performed a regression analysis with Linear Probability Model, Logit Model, and Probit Model to test following three hypotheses; Hypothesis 1: "Career-oriented education helps to obtain a good job," Hypothesis 2: "Career-oriented education raises academic performance," Hypothesis 3: "Good students do well at university, anyway." Our data showed a set of statistical results in favour of all of the three hypotheses.

The main purpose of the presentation is to introduce the methodology of assessing career-oriented education programmes to the educational institutions concerned as one way of objective assessment. It is hoped that the rest of the workshop is used to discuss how this approach can be adjusted to and implemented in the UK's higher education environment, e.g. how large the sample size should be, how to measure pre-university academic performance, what variables to use for career-oriented education, what is the definition of employment outcome.

There have been countless attempts to evaluate career-oriented education programmes and yet they tend to be qualitative than quantitative in nature. Yet the latter approach is so crucial in order to earn popular support for the programmes. At the same time we consider this to be the first step to form an international collaboration on the statistical assessment of the effectiveness of career-oriented education programmes.

Workshop 2:2:5

Title: 'International Internships' Search and Preparation: the importance of student peer-to-peer interaction
Presenter(s): Carolina Salinas (Aston University)
Time: 9:55 – 10:40
Room: 5
Abstract:

Peer-to-peer interaction is an essential part of Aston Business School's international internship programme. This takes many different forms: a placement event whereby final year students share experiences with students who are seeking a placement; a Facebook group established as a platform for students to communicate to each other and a shared resources room where placement reports from previous years are made available to future interns looking for an international placement.

Learning Outcomes:

In this session, participants will learn how Aston Business School's Placement Office encourage final year students to share their experience of the international internship search process and the internship itself, with second year students facing the task of choosing and securing a placement overseas. The various platforms in which the peer-to-peer interaction and sharing takes place, will be explored in detail. Participants will also learn about both the successes and the issues we have encountered along the way. We will share the journey we have travelled to get to where we are today.

Outline of the Presentation:

Close to one third of Aston Business School's (ABS) undergraduate internships must take place overseas. Over 120 students take 12-month compulsory internships in various locations worldwide during the third year of their degree. International internships take the form of 'real' jobs within real organisations. They are normally paid, are always assessed and they carry credits which amount to a contribution of 10% towards the students' final degree.

Peer-to-peer interaction in a variety of different forms is used throughout the international internship programme at ABS, including:

- A placement event whereby finalists along with first and second year students get together to share experiences
- An international placement fair whereby, as above, finalists and future interns get together to share experiences
- A placement report is set as part of the assessed placement work. These are made available to students looking for a placement via a resources room and an intranet
- A Facebook group established for international placements as a platform for students to communicate to each other
- Students' placement year profiles are available on the intranet and used in marketing materials
- The Placement Office's pro-active support bringing students with similar international internship interests together and putting them in touch with each other

Workshop 2:3:1

Title: Interactive Work Based Learning Environment (iWoBLE)
Presenter(s): Magdalena Slowinska and Jacqueline Steinmetz (University of Westminster)
Time: 11:00 – 11:45
Room: 1
Abstract:

The presentation aims to introduce the essential aspects of the use of technology to support work-based learning within the academic and workplace environment. Educating for professional life and supporting research into employability as well as the practice of work-based learning is one of the main activities of the University of Westminster. In April 2009, the Westminster Business School and its Business Experience and International Unit (BEIU) launched a Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) funded two-year pilot project called 'Interactive Work-Based Learning Environments' (iWoBLE), whereby the one year Undergraduate Placements, summer Postgraduate Internships and semester-long Postgraduate Mentoring Scheme would be coordinated using the University's virtual learning environment, Blackboard. In addition the same software – Blackboard, which is an existing in-house technology, enables students to communicate with not only their tutors, but also with programme coordination staff, employers and fellow students on similar work-based learning programmes. The project is also re-invigorating levels of support provided to placement students, employers and tutors. iWoBLE is important to the University because it is enhancing the ways employability officers and academics manage and support students and employers during the above mentioned employability programmes. Several courses across the University include work placements as part of the student experience; therefore, the outcomes of iWoBLE could inform on how placements, internships, mentoring and other employability programmes are rolled out in the future. This presentation outlines how iWoBLE can benefit users by providing them with virtual tools and resources which can be shared with other Schools and with other institutions in Further and Higher Education. Placements, Mentoring and Internships students as well as Instructors are using blogs, wikis, Wimba, discussion boards and e-portfolios in order to enhance the management of the information flow and to support the work-based learning process. The presentation also considers the potential value of an online work-based learning environment in comparison to the traditional learning and communication paradigm. Current evaluation findings are reported and issues considering wider adoption are raised. Evidences of virtual interaction linked with the work-based learning experience are highlighted and can be presented as valuable outcomes if the users are accurately skilled in utilizing Internet technology to their advantage (Carpenter, 2003). Through the iWoBLE experience, the University of Westminster can create a framework for other Schools and institutions to consider and apply.

Workshop 2:3:2

Title: International Volunteering as an Employability Enhancement Strategy: Raleigh International
Presenter(s): Andrew Rothwell (De Montfort University) and Brandon Charleston (Raleigh International)
Time: 11:00 – 11:45
Room: 2
Abstract:

This paper presents the findings of a pilot project undertaken between Raleigh and De Montfort University's Department of Human Resource Management, which aimed to investigate the perceived employability enhancement gained by individual 'venturers', in India, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and Borneo prior to the end of the expedition experience. Results

indicated that there were no significant differences in employability attributable to gender, age, qualification level, how the individuals on the expedition were supported financially, or whether individuals were graduates or not. There was a statistically significant difference across all scales except employability according to the country visited, Costa Rica and Nicaragua scoring highest. Respondents were found to value a range of significant factors as the perceived benefits from participation. These included 'expedition skills' relating to leadership and teamwork; a high value placed on the expedition experience itself; a global citizenship perspective; skills related to cultural awareness, with (somewhat unexpectedly) perceptions of employability enhancement rated less highly. The paper discusses possible reasons for these results and planned enhancements to the research design.

Workshop 2:3:3

Title: Successful Engagement of Small Businesses in Graduate Internships: a case study
Presenter(s): Maggie Westgarth, Colette Percival and Linda Pick (University of the West of England)
Time: 11:00 – 11:45
Room: 3
Abstract:

Aims and objectives of the workshop will be to share the experiences our team had in:

- developing the concept of the graduate internship scheme at UWE (on the back of a very tight bid schedule from HEFCE)
- preparatory work between the bid submission and the start of the project (including the administrative work required for a wage subsidy structure to the project)
- marketing to businesses and graduates
- relationship building and connectivity with other business support

Key experiences and issues

- **Developing the concept:** while the HEFCE bid documentation and guidelines gave certain parameters in which all the graduate schemes must operate there was considerable scope for designing a concept that would be attractive to both employers and graduates, and one that would deliver on key institutional agenda's. It was recognised that due to the short time lines involved and the focus on small businesses keeping things simple in both the offer and the means of engagement, was going to be crucial. Keys to success at this stage included early consultation with relevant delivery staff, email exchanges or meetings with key stakeholders and high level management buy-in.
- **Preparatory work:** following a very short turn around for the bid application there was less than two months before the due start date of the project and then only another 8 weeks until the first substantial output deadline. Key preparatory work took place in this period, including development of administrative system, including draft contracts, marketing preparation, and engagement of key staff around the institution and externally. Key external contacts included Federation of Small Businesses and Job Centre Plus.
- **Marketing:** getting the right message initially to businesses to ensure a pool of internship vacancies, for the marketing drive with graduates, was critical at the start. A simple proposition with a clear and substantial financial incentive to employers along with relevant information on the value of the interns was prepared. A targeted list of relevant employers was drawn up from a variety of sources, including existing institutional contact lists, business directories and the use of on-line business forums. Initial emailed bulletin to 1500 small businesses produced over 300 responses.

- Targeted email-shots to unemployed graduates identified through the DLHE survey as well as additional external marketing in relevant local media.
- ***Relationship-building and Connectivity***: customer care was at the heart of the relationships with businesses that were built through this project. While initial registration and information was contained on the web, personal emails and phone contact was maintained with all companies expressing interest in the scheme. Response times to enquiries were kept under 24 hours and there was recognition in the support provided that many of the small businesses would have little experience of graduate employment or relationships with HEIs. While there was deliberate no 'hard sell' on other business services to those participating there were relevant references through the web information pages and staff were thoroughly briefed on the type of other options that might support the business. Even in the first few weeks of the programme, added value services were being taken up by companies beyond just the internship scheme.

Workshop 2:3:4

Title: The Challenges Involved in Producing a University-wide Placements Database System

Presenter(s): Stephen Gomez, Nigel Manley, Diane Stanley and Pete Watton (University of Plymouth)

Time: 11:00 – 11:45

Room: 4

Abstract:

There is no single approach to managing placements. Those involved in placement management adopt systems from predecessors or develop their own systems which are bespoke for their own particular practices. While it is agreed that a one-size-fits-all approach is neither desirable nor practical, there are numerous advantages in economy of scale and local groups having central support. At the heart of any management system is a database, which can be any system from a highly interactive Web 2.0 system to a paper-based one.

An opportunity to consider implementing a university-wide placements database system arose when it was identified that a number of local database systems were being run on out-dated Access software which was no longer going to be supported by the University. Many of the systems were built by local 'enthusiasts', either staff or students, who had either retired or graduated. 'Unpicking' these systems to see how they were constructed and then updating them would be highly time consuming. Much valuable current and legacy data were being held on desktop computers and if they malfunctioned, these data would have been lost. Being able to share information across faculties and with the business arm of the university would be valuable in avoiding multiple contacts with a particular company asking about placements.

In recognition of a possible critical situation whereby individual database systems ceased to function, a group was set up by the Student Systems and Process Management Group which confirmed that faculties had been operating their databases separately and at differing levels of sophistication and efficiency and that there was a serious threat to placement management if the situation was not addressed.

Though the topic of a placement management and database systems may seem mundane, they do enable faculties to guide students through finding placements, allocate students to placements and track and assess students on placement. Such systems also help the university discharge its duty of care to students, employers and their clients by ensuring an audit trail that certain legal requirements, such as insurances, health and safety, and child protection (where appropriate) have been met. A common database system would also allow data-mining information about number of students on placement and their distribution both geographically and by discipline.

A Placements Database Group was set up which had representatives from faculties, academic and professional support staff from across the university. Various commercial and bespoke systems were considered until it was decided that the Small Systems Team of the University would build a bespoke database.

The presentation and paper will outline the decision-making processes involved in the production of the system and some of the features of the system.

Workshop 2:3:5

Title: The Increased Importance of Work Based Learning – A Student's and Employer's View

Presenter(s): Lizzie Brock and Alana King (RateMyPlacement.co.uk)

Time: 11:00 – 11:45

Room: 5

Abstract:

- Are students becoming more interested in work experience?
- Is there a shift away from traditional graduate recruitment toward placements & internships?
- What makes a good placement scheme?
- What about the future of Graduate and Undergraduate Recruitment?

This presentation will give ASET members an insight and answers to the above questions from RateMyPlacement's unique perspective, sitting between students, universities and employers.

RateMyPlacement.co.uk, launched in 2007 by 3 Loughborough University Graduates, has quickly become the go-to website for any student interested in placements, internships or work based learning. In the 2009-10 year academic year, we attended over 65 university events and fairs and the website now has over 100 clients advertising their undergraduate opportunities on the site. It is from regular interactions with both students and employers that we have observed a series of trends that will form the basis of the presentations.

Over the course of the presentation we will explore a number of key themes from both the student and employer perspective. We will look at;

- Whether there has been a change in students' perceptions about undertaking some form of work experience. In addition we will explore the increasing demand amongst first year students and the range of work experience opportunities available.
- In the light of the recession and other market factors, how are employers positioning their undergraduate schemes in relation to their more traditional graduate recruitment?
- There can be a real variety in the quality of a student's experiences on placement and internship, but what makes a placement scheme positive? We will explore the perspectives of students and employers right from attraction through to completion of a placement.
- What is the long term impact of placement & internships on graduate recruitment? We will give our predictions on the overall student/graduate recruitment market

Day 3 – Thursday 9 September

Workshop 3:5:1

Title: Enhancing Experiences in Placements in Further Education – the challenges
Presenter(s): Ron Laird (University of Ulster) and Carolyn King (South Eastern Regional College)
Time: 10:25 – 11:05
Room: 1
Abstract:

Colleges of further education continue to deliver at post-sixteen and higher level education which is valued by the population at large. They fulfil an increasingly vital role in developing skills, educating able students and shaping successful careers. By their nature they have a huge range of study modes, courses and placement styles.

This range of challenges may be significant for any college, but for the six new regional colleges in Northern Ireland the challenges are multiplied by diverse backgrounds. Since formation in August 2007 by amalgamation of several other colleges, South Eastern Regional College (SERC) has worked to harmonise an excellent provision to its students and staff in programmes of further and higher education level located across seven campuses.

This paper characterises the nature of the challenges faced by SERC in drawing together coherent and harmonised programmes and practices fit for the education and training needs of the future. Focus will be placed on challenges emanating from amalgamation of different colleges, further- and higher-level courses, training courses, foundation degrees, day-release schemes and the vital placement styles which distinguish the uniqueness of the provision. These operational issues will be set against a background of Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) codes and duty-of-care requirements, some of which are new to SERC. The implications for staff development will be considered.

Finding effective and workable solutions to these diverse challenges will shape the success of SERC as it seeks to realise its vision of being among the top further and higher education providers of the world. The paper will point to strategies which are emerging as key components of the future plan. This will include policies, codes of practice, placements management using the University of Ulster's OPUS online placement management system and staff-related issues.

Through the processes of implementing these strategies it is argued that experiences will be enhanced for the academic and placements staff resulting in more effective and higher quality placement experiences for the students. In short, a well organised placements programme supported by able and confident staff using modern online technology will produce a second-to-none student experience. The paper addresses the challenges and points to the solutions to make this happen.

Workshop 3:5:2

Title: A New Approach to Developing Employability Skills in Mathematics Students
Presenter(s): Richard Mendez and Clive Rix (University of Leicester)
Time: 10:25 – 11:05
Room: 2
Abstract:

In their work, Atlay & Harris (2000) examine approaches to developing students' transferable skills within the context of their academic studies. However their paper raises questions about the extent to which full curriculum embedding of transferable skills occurs.

Anecdotally, the interpretation of embedding sometimes takes the form of a 'bolt-on' model of provision or a central module at institutional-level that is not discipline-specific. In either case, it would be difficult to conclude whether such efforts represent 'true embedding' of employability skills.

At the University of Leicester, the Mathematics Department has developed a radically new 10-credit module entitled "Business Applications of Mathematics", which is specifically designed to improve the employability skills of its students. Delivered in conjunction with the Work-related Learning Team and the Careers Development Team, the module aims to show students how their mathematical skills can be applied in 'real-world' contexts.

The module consists of a series of real-life business case studies, but instead of being merely vehicles for illustrating to students how to apply the mathematical techniques they have learned, these case studies concentrate on the practical aspects of real problems. As such there are no specified approaches for solving them and they incorporate many typical 'real-world' problems, such as imprecise problem formulation and missing or inadequate data. Students are shown how to consider the robustness and practicality of implementing their solutions, rather than concentrating on 'getting the right answer'. Most importantly, students work in groups and are required to give a short group presentation on their findings and write a report on their recommendations. During the presentations and reports, they are tasked with presenting complex mathematical information in a way that non-mathematicians can understand (an important transferable skill in itself).

Allied to the applied mathematical element, students also receive seminars on transferable skills development/employability based on the case studies. Following these seminars, students are assessed further via a reflective presentation and the submission of a targeted curriculum vitae. To this end, the module convenors believe that they have achieved full curriculum embedding of employability learning by closely intertwining academic content with transferable skills development.

This workshop will outline how the module works, how it engages students and importantly, how it overcomes the difficulty of merging academic content with employability. The interactive elements of this workshop will enable delegates to gain a deeper understanding about the module's objectives and the juxtapositioning of the Mathematics Department, the Work-related Learning Team and the Careers Development Team in formulating this module.

The aims of this workshop are to:

- outline the objectives of the Business Applications of Mathematics 10 credit module;
- discuss how the module works and achieves full embedding of employability learning;
- involve delegates in discussions on current issues affecting the module.

Workshop 3:5:3

Title: Recognising and Valuing Learning via the 'Learning through Experience' Certificate
Presenter(s): Clare Dowding and Claire Fellows (University of Surrey)
Time: 10:25 – 11:05
Room: 4
Abstract:

The University of Surrey is committed to education that promotes the professional and personal development of learners alongside their academic achievements through year-long professional training placements. SCEPTRe is trying to add value to this work integrated learning approach through the concepts of life-wide learning through a life-wide curriculum and the design of a university award to value and recognise learning gained through experiences in learners' lives (Jackson 2008 and in press). Using the experience gained from employing students on a full-time (placement) and part-time basis, we have designed a certificate that encourages reflection and acknowledges the learning outcomes from these experiences. We are particularly interested in how learners reveal and become aware of the integrated nature of their learning (Jackson 2009).

Aims and objectives

- To consider the role of concept mapping in student learning and reflective practices.
- To see how a student is currently using an e-portfolio to aid reflection and produce a synthesis account of her learning experience during the placement year.
- To consider how the certificate could be used in other institutions

Experiences covered

The workshop will initially present an outline of the certificate but discussion and activities will focus on the ways in which learners' reveal learning derived from their experiences through concept maps, blogs, synthesis accounts and digital stories. The activity in the workshop will focus on the use of concept mapping as a learning and reflective tool. The placement student will then present (on video) her use of an e-portfolio to gather her reflections and formulate a synthesis account using Michael Eraut's eight dimensions of work.

Issues to be addressed

The discussion will centre on the current use and design of the certificate, using 'key question' prompts such as:

- How can we encourage students to acknowledge deep learning?
- What evidence are students presenting of their learning?
- How are we assessing the learning accomplished?
- Where do we go from here? Participants will be invited to consider whether such a certificate would be relevant within their university.

Workshop 3:5:4

Title: From Work Experience to Experiencing Career
Presenter(s): Gill Frigerio (University of Warwick)
Time: 10:25 – 11:05
Room: 4
Abstract:

It is a truth universally acknowledged that one of the many benefits of work experience is the contribution that it makes to students' career development learning. That is to say that through their placements, students develop their own understanding of the world of work and the place they see for themselves within it, as well as developing the ability to make their own career decisions and transitions. Staff in the field of work based learning, are continually working with students in ways that link to their future career.

But what is a *career* anyway? We all have our own implicit assumptions and beliefs about career and how career decisions are made? Do you see career as a journey? a story? a jigsaw puzzle? a race? (How) do these implicit assumptions affect the way you work with students?

Gill Frigerio, Course Director of the postgraduate qualifications in the Management of Student Work Experience in the Careers Studies Unit at the University of Warwick (recently transferred from the University of Reading), will introduce some of the different ways of thinking about career and career development in a lively and thought provoking way, drawing on your own reflections and experiences, before we discuss the different ways these can inform our work with students. It will provide an interesting and stimulating session in itself, as well as providing some insights into the material covered on the qualifications and how they can enhance your practice.

Workshop 3:6:1

Title: Equality Issues in Higher Education Work Placements in the Arts and Cultural Sector: ensuring good placements for every student
Presenter(s): Kim Allen and Jocey Quinn (London Metropolitan University)
Time: 11:20 – 12:00
Room: 1
Abstract:

Work placements are particularly important for students seeking to enter the arts and cultural sector: employers in the sector place a premium on graduates with hands on experience rather than just qualifications, while the prevalence of informal recruitment practices within the sector, such as word-of mouth, means that work placements provide students with an essential link to industry networks which can lead to job opportunities. As such, it is common for students to do extensive (and often unpaid) work experience as a means to "get a foot in the door". The sector places high value on individual enterprise and getting a successful placement is seen as a marker of future employability. Yet research suggests that some students struggle to find and survive a work placement and this can have a significant affect on their employability and future career intentions.

This presentation will draw upon a recently completed research project into equality issues in higher education work placements in the arts and cultural sector. The research, conducted by researchers at IPSE and commissioned by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), explored how Higher Education Institutions support students from equality groups (disabled students, black and minority ethnic students and students seeking to enter a labour market sector where there are significant gender imbalances) into positive and inclusive work placement experiences which will enhance their future employment prospects in the arts and cultural sector. For this research interviews were conducted with students and key members of staff (including placement officers, careers practitioners and academic staff) in 5 case study institutions from across the country. Employers from the sector who offer work placements were also interviewed.

This presentation will present key findings from the research and introduce the practical toolkits which have been created to help assist staff and students in addressing equality issues. It will outline the key equality issues experienced by students from these key groups in accessing and surviving work placements. It will outline the practices of HEIs and host organizations in relation to these equality issues.

The practical toolkits designed on the basis of this research will be presented. The presentation will aim to foster opportunities for discussion among placement and employability professionals about how equality issues within the work placement process – both within the arts and cultural sector and beyond – can be addressed to achieve greater parity in the student experience. The session will also discuss the ways in which diversity amongst students can be promoted as an opportunity for employers in the sector, rather than a problem.

Workshop 3:6:2

Title: An Investigation on the Motivations and Barriers for Undergraduate Students to Undertake Sandwich Placements: A Case Study of Brunel Final Year Students

Presenter(s): Maria Elisavet Balta, Jane Coughlan, Peter Hobson, Michelle Kavan and Jane Standley (Brunel University)

Time: 11:20 – 12:00

Room: 2

Abstract:

In the recent past, there has been an increased interest in employability and associated skills, particularly amongst university graduates, where studies have revealed a common but worrying trend concerning the lack of 'work-ready' graduates leaving Higher Education (HE) (Bridgestock, 2009). Employers exert pressure on HE institutes to produce knowledgeable, highly skilled work - ready graduates due to the increasing gap between HE and employment. Sandwich placements play a key role in students' professional development and employability which been widely accepted amongst professionals and academics (Heaton et al, 2008). Schonfeld (2005) identified three primary motivations for students to take up placement courses: career enhancement, career switching and personal development. Page (2005) claimed that placements help students to gain confidence, learn new skills and achieve a better working life. Others (e.g. Somers and Bridges, 1982; Falconer and Pettigrew, 1993; Ryan et al., 1996) have stated that among the motivations of the students to take up a sandwich course is the need to improve employment opportunities in the future. Parilla and Hesser (1998) have identified the key expectations of the students from their work placement including career exploration, training opportunities, and gaining advantage in the graduate labour market and salary.

Previous studies have focused so far on the importance and benefits that undergraduate students gain in terms of future employability and academic achievements (e.g. Bowes and Harvey, 2000; Little and Harvey, 2006; Mayo and Jones, 1985; Davies, 2003; Mandilaras, 2004; Gomez et al., 2004). However, there is little empirical evidence on the reasons that encourage or dissuade undergraduate students to take up sandwich courses.

The purpose of the study is to identify the motivations and the barriers of undergraduate students to undertake placement courses. The study aims to address the following research objectives:

1: To explore the effect of demographic characteristics of full time students or other individuals on their decision to do a full time course.

2: To examine the reasons that influenced the decisions of students who were placed.

3: To explore the reasons that influenced placement students to change to a full time degree.

The sample of the study consists of three different groups: 152 full time students, 150 placed students and 32 students who have changed from placement to full time degree. We used a quantitative structured questionnaire as the data collection method. Structured questionnaires allowed statistical data to be collected to identify patterns and trends amongst respondents.

The findings suggest that age, gender and ethnic origin were the key reasons that influenced students to choose a full time course, whereas for placed students they were the financial incentives that the placement offered them and the fact that they did not have to relocate. Finally, students have switched to a full time degree because they were young and they fear application rejections.

The implications of the findings from theory and practice are discussed, along with possible directions for future research.

Workshop 3:6:3

Title: E-Portfolios in Cooperative Education: Do They Work?
Presenter(s): Keryn McDermott (AUT University)
Time: 11:20 – 12:00
Room: 3
Abstract:

Cooperative Education is a core paper of the School of Languages and Social Sciences at AUT University in New Zealand. This compulsory, year-long paper is considered the capstone of the Languages and Social Sciences B.A. degrees. The qualification includes majors in one or a combination of the following: Japanese, English Studies, Psychology, Chinese, Criminology, Conflict Resolution and Social Sciences. The paper prepares students for the transition to employment. It integrates the content of the students' degrees with learning through productive work experiences in a placement related to their academic, personal and career goals.

Since 2007, AUT University has been involved in a national research project exploring the use of software entitled Mahara as a tool for developing e-portfolios. Traditionally, the major assessment required students to write a 10,000 word reflective portfolio based on their Co-op experience. This was demanding and poorly timed as students simultaneously struggled to meet the requirements of multiple assessments to complete their degrees. However, the e-portfolio represents a new learning technology which provides an alternative that has been described as a "digital handbag". It is a dynamic and flexible tool for collecting and presenting information about students' learning and development. The e-portfolio has the additional benefits of portability and showcasing the students and their work to a variety of audiences such as prospective employers, friends, family and lecturers.

In 2009, several Schools in the Faculty of Applied Humanities participated in a pilot research project which monitored the implementation of e-portfolios, using Mahara as a tool. The objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the e-portfolios as a new form of assessment delivery and of the Mahara software. This paper presents the preliminary findings and documents the process from the multidisciplinary perspectives of the Schools of Languages and Social Sciences and Education. The experiences of a sample of the stakeholders in Cooperative Education will be considered. A range of some of the significant issues will be analysed regarding the use of e-portfolios such as cost, time, adequacy of training, software challenges, technical support, availability of computer laboratories, development of new methods of moderation and marking as well as the effectiveness of the communication amongst all involved. Finally, the evolution of the project to date will be evaluated and probable future developments identified.

Workshop 3:6:4

Title: Beyond Placement Extinction – coming up for air. Does a Recession Change Student's views of undertaking Work Placements?
Presenter(s): Margaret Ferguson and Francesca Walker (University of Central Lancashire)
Time: 11:20 – 12:00
Room: 4
Abstract:

In March 2009 the students of University of Central Lancashire's School of Sports Tourism and the Outdoors and the Lancashire Business School were surveyed to discover the reasons for the catastrophic decline in students undertaking work placements. The aim of the research was to discover the reasons for the decline and to put measures in place to support students in their search for an industrial placement.

The latter part of 2008 saw us entering the greatest recession since the 1920s, with the momentum growing rapidly. The team, supported by external funding from the Centre for Professional Placements Learning (CEPPL) at the University of Plymouth, are now reviewing student opinions as they have moved one year on in what can only be described as 'dire' times in terms of their future employability and a highly competitive labour market where graduates compete with professionals with over fifteen years of experience, willing to take lower salaries. Do our students think any differently now to one year ago?

Our workshop will discuss the measures that have been put into place at UCLan to assist students in their search for a placement, the effectiveness (or not) of these measures and present the findings from the latest research.

The session aims to provide delegates with:

- An understanding of the impact of the recession on student placements;
- Some key messages to those delegates working with students seeking industrial placements;
- Practical suggestions to encourage students to undertake industrial placements;
- An interactive experience in which views are shared and recorded in real-time;
- A visual tool to take away (a short YouTube clip which promotes the benefits of undertaking a work placement).

A wholly interactive experience

During the session we will be asking delegates what they think our research showed. We will also gather delegates' views on their experiences of work placements in recessionary times.

We will be using a Student Interactive Response System (SIRS); a real time system in which each delegate has their own handset to respond to a number of questions. Those responses are then shown immediately on-screen. This data will then be used to enhance the research findings.

Participants should be aware that the system we use ensures total anonymity.