

ASET Viewpoints

Alumni Mentoring for Employability Development

The benefits of working with alumni are many, varied and far-reaching, potentially, for all of the parties involved in the relationship. Helping students and alumni to connect can be hugely beneficial for placements and employability development. Benefits may include:

For the HEI:

- Opportunities to develop stronger and more effective relationships with organisations
- Opportunities to develop work placements, internships, and other work based learning models
- Potential to engage with a broad base of activities which may include Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, research, work placements, work based learning opportunities and internships
- Receiving support from business and professional organisations in communicating to students a shared message about the world of work e.g. interview techniques, or how to write an effective CV
- Enhancement of employability of students and graduates

For the Alumni:

- Giving something back to their University or College
- Connecting with their University or College on behalf of their current organisation, to establish and develop a relationship which may become broader and deeper as a result of their involvement
- Putting to use their mentoring or coaching skills, which is good development for them
- Acting as ambassadors - for their organisations, for the University, and for their profession/professional body

For the Students/Graduates:

- Learning from those who have had similar experiences
- Pairing with a mentor outside their immediate world, but close enough to it to both support and challenge with developmental activities
- Working with a professional who has experience in their field of interest
- Seeing their employability improved by the opportunity to learn from alumni experiences, and receive encouragement to engage with skills workshops, mentoring partnerships, internships, work placements and so forth

Any alumni relation activity which is centred on developing and strengthening work based learning and placement opportunities, as well as improving employability outcomes, will require both careful consideration and planning, along with the allocation of appropriate resources when budgeting.



Alumni mentoring programmes offer a way to connect with alumni and their organisations, and link them with undergraduates, placement students, finalists or recent graduates. Staff overseeing these programmes should:

- Consider who will recruit the student participants, and by what method
- Consider who will recruit the alumni and again, by what method
- Devise guidelines, or a set of guiding principles to be used by each party. These should include how much time per week/per month they will need to give
- Clarify and confirm how organisations involved will resource this activity

Involving alumni as student mentors can be a useful way for staff to improve and expand services to students. Alumni could be invited to get involved in employability support, directly through mock interviews, career talks and seminars, or supporting workshops and panel events. Support might also be provided indirectly through online engagement through social media or networking platforms. This might include writing an article for LinkedIn, to engage discussion or provoke input from students on an employability topic, acting as a guest blogger, or hosting a chat on Twitter. The use of social media to support the connection between alumni and employability activity is increasing in popularity, through LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, amongst others, and is likely to continue to increase. However, social media will not manage itself, and requires the allocation of appropriate resources to enable the creation of thoughtful and meaningful dialogue amongst users.

Things to Remember:

- Invest at the start to reap the rewards; resources put into establishing a project or scheme with clear communication and processes, will run much more smoothly and have tangible benefits. It is a good idea to set up an agreement all parties sign up to, so there is a shared understanding of expectations and goals
- Develop a set of easy to use criteria to support matching alumni and student participants, to make it quicker to get people networking and benefiting from the relationship. Think about disciplines and sectors, and try to ensure the mentor has something to gain from the relationship, as well as the student
- Establish clear points of contact and processes to pick up on any issues quickly. It is important the University or College has oversight of the relationship, can intervene if need be, and can start to identify support mechanisms for those who need it
- Be flexible in expected outcomes by balancing the need to provide a framework for supporting the mentoring relationship, but allowing those in it to shape the mentoring around their own personal needs, interests and expertise

Remember to evaluate the impact of any alumni interventions which are put into place; as with any initiative that could become core activity, there needs to be a cost benefit analysis to persuade resource managers to keep funding the work. Collecting impact data, whether quantitative in terms of outcomes and feedback, or qualitative in terms of how those involved feel they have benefited from the process, is essential to understanding what is to be gained from an alumni mentoring scheme in your institution.

ASET is the Work Based and Placement Learning Association, and our aim is to advance the prevalence, effectiveness and quality of work based and placement learning in Higher Education by promoting research into that system of education and publishing the useful results thereof. Work based and placement learning is that which is part of the Higher Education experience, an integrated part of a programme of study, and that is structured to appropriate learning outcomes and assessment.

2015/004/01

For more information please contact: