

ASET Viewpoints

The impact of budget cuts and steps to mitigate

UK universities generate £95 billion for the country's economy and support more than 940,000 jobs across the nation, according to an analysis from Universities UK. Despite this, HEPs face uncertainty - the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, a changing demographic, pension reform and Brexit place us in challenging times.

As work-based and placement learning professionals, ASET members make a vital contribution to the HE student offer, increasing student confidence, producing employable graduates and as a result helping them move on to rewarding and fulfilling careers. There are, however, a range of challenges we face in order to meet the expectations of both senior management teams and our students, with an increasing focus on delivering activities that get the most value from reduced budgets, or the need to do more with the same resource.



Impact of Budget Cuts

- Removal of caps on student numbers in 15/16 led to an increase in student enrolment on courses with a placement element but this has not been met with a commensurate increase in resources
- Team restructures to support more disciplines or cover broader co-curricular remits. This requires both additional resource and time to develop a new knowledge base and associated systems and processes
- Increasing demands on student support have the potential to take away valuable time from employer engagement
- Teams are being encouraged to adopt new technology in order to be more efficient. However, new systems require time to build, learn and apply effectively, slowing down processes in the short term. There is also the risk that we lose the personal contact that engages our students
- Rises in student fees raise expectations, adding pressure to already stretched resources and unmet demands may lead to an increase in student complaints
- There is a general lack of understanding of the costs associated with delivering placement provision
- Increased numbers may force placement support staff to be more transactional and less holistic



Steps to mitigate

- Lobby senior managers to raise the placement agenda. Include placements in the curriculum, and support development of central resources such as administrative toolkits and learning materials. Be transparent about the costs and results
- Identify opportunities to collaborate between Schools, Faculties or Departments, e.g. running joint recruitment fairs
- Link with other professional services to streamline activity and identify creative solutions, for example apprenticeships and employer engagement staff, student records, careers, management information/data teams
- Gain confidence in the technology available to understand how it can support your work with colleagues, students, employers - be ready to clarify its limitations to senior colleagues
- Optimise time spent with students individually. Try providing reflection sheets as pre-appointment work covering predictable ground, leaving time to discuss individual needs
- Use students to 'buddy' or provide first line peer support. Offer buddy training and invite returning students to commit to a minimum level of engagement with the next cohort
- Recruit volunteers to support activities
- Optimise work flow; identify what you spend your time repeating to every student/ cohort, offer FAQs with detailed responses and refer to these where possible to make time for face to face appointments
- Identify ways in which you can personalise communication rather than sending bulk emails. Use mail merge to include appropriate, limited student data, or becoming more confident with social media. Bulk emails can save time, but only if they are effective in securing the outcome you want - if not, are there alternatives?
- Develop detailed business cases for additional resources, highlight the costs involved in placing students but also the income generated; demonstrate the impact and added value of your activities to the student experience

Thanks to those who attended the Winter 2018 ASET Regional Hubs, whose discussion and ideas informed this Viewpoint.



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.

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