

Positive Action Internships - a Case Study



Lisa Foote, Project Development Manager, Careers & Enterprise, External Relations, UWE Bristol
Lisa.Foote@UWE.ac.uk

UWE Bristol celebrates having a diverse student demographic, with over 60% of students from under-represented groups and within the Widening Participation (WP)* student category.

UWE encourages the use of positive action to meet its strategic goals in the pursuit of a more inclusive organisation. A few of these initiatives delivered through the Careers and Enterprise service are shared here to promote good practice within the ASET community.

Why do our positive action initiatives exist?

One of the key strategic goals in the UWE Strategy 2030 is *“being recognised as an inclusive university that successfully supports everyone to achieve their full potential”*. Our teams routinely analyse our equality statistics to inform our Access and Participation Plan and EDI priorities. We know disadvantaged and under-represented groups face additional barriers, and we proactively take positive action to ensure all students and staff are supported and have opportunities to grow and thrive.

We deliver positive action initiatives that address student awarding gaps and progression, and are targeted at Mature, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and students with a disability.

Targetted support and communications

Work based and placement learning is an important part of the student experience and a good predictor of successful graduate outcomes. However, some groups of students are less likely to engage in these opportunities. Our Employability Bursary provides financial support to students from low-income households to ensure that finance is not a barrier to accessing opportunities. As a result of this, and a targeted communications plan to encourage WP students to participate in our internship schemes, 62.2% of students who engaged in 2021-22 were WP students – which is in line with our overall WP demographic- and 20% of interns went on to paid work with their internship provider.

The Equity Programme

The Equity Programme is another part of our approach to tackling disadvantage and focuses on supporting BAME students to realise their potential. This award-winning programme includes coaching sessions, skills development workshops, speaker events, employer mentoring and culminates in the opportunity to undertake a 4 week fully funded Equity Internship with a local employer. Equity also runs speaker events open to all students, staff, and the wider community, providing opportunities to hear from a range of successful BAME professionals.





Participant feedback

Feedback from interns show they experience a noticeable increase in confidence, and an ability to apply the skills learnt in their degree to broaden their career options, build a network of contacts, and increase their social capital. For the 2021 interns' feedback, 100% felt that the Equity internship met their expectations: *"I now know what to expect from the world of work and how it's different to studying"*

Students have also undertaken the award-winning West of England Black Interns pilot and Strive Internship scheme (delivered in partnership with UWE Bristol, Hargreaves Lansdown, and Bristol City Council) and the national 10,000 Black Interns programme.

Widening access

Responding to student feedback and developing our inclusive placement practice we have recently launched a part-time, term-time internship scheme offering employers and students an opportunity to work a 296-hour internship over 24 weeks. This accessible approach provides a more flexible option for both students and employers whilst being available to all cohorts of students, including international students and students who are unable to access full-time internships.

Current Practice Developments

As a service we are working collaboratively through a Community of Practice to address focused internships for disabled students. We are aware of the imperative to explore intersectionality and to create more targeted interventions and develop our resources and are very much committed to this ongoing, exciting and impactful work!

*At UWE a Widening Participation (WP) student is defined as belonging to any of the following groups:

- Mature (21 or above at the date they enrol on the first year of a UG programme)
- Black, Asian or any other Minority Ethnicities (BAME)
- LPN (POLAR4) Quintile 1 (Low Participation Neighbourhoods - is a generic term used to refer to areas, or people from areas, where a low proportion of young people go to university).
- Having a disability

Footnote, L. (2023) *Positive Action Internships - a Case Study*, part of the Community Knowledge Exchange series published by ASET, the Work Based and Placement Learning Association, available online to ASET members

