

A pilot study: strengthening university business engagement through staff secondments



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Executive summary

A common theme across the four nations' approaches to policy and funding for higher education is the need to ensure that graduates are prepared for and able to contribute to the economy and society through the provision of knowledge, skills and creativity in new business environments. The development of graduates with relevant attributes, skills and knowledge has placed graduate employability at the centre of the HE agenda.

Engaging with employers is crucial to supporting the employability of graduates. The Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration (2012)¹ stressed the importance of business university collaboration to the development of key skills and knowledge for employment. It acknowledged that universities have a central role in providing “*high-level skills, a world-class research base and a culture of inquiry and innovation*” and that they were “*an integral part of the supply chain to business - a supply chain that has the capability to support business growth and therefore economic prosperity*”. The importance of work experience in enhancing graduate skills and ensuring smooth transition between university and business environments was emphasised and a recommendation made to increase the number of opportunities. Providing access to quality work-based and work-related learning opportunities, engaging students with these and developing effective links with employers (particularly SMEs) remains challenging but is essential to the enhancement of graduate employability.

The university sector has made considerable progress in business and community engagement in recent years, taking cognisance of the recommendations of the Wilson Review (2012) and the BIS report 'Following up the Wilson Review' (2012)² which emphasise the resulting benefits to student employability of such engagement. Support has been provided by The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) set up as a result of the Wilson Review (2012) to promote and support quality business-university collaboration.

One means of strengthening university-business engagement is through university secondment programmes, supporting staff from across the university to engage with business and integrate that experiential learning into the curriculum and professional support activities.

The HEA funded a pilot programme of activity with Aston, Edinburgh and Nottingham Universities in response to recommendations from the HEA feasibility study (2013) into engaging academics with employers through industrial scholarships³. Direct funding from the HEA contributed to the added value of the projects to release secondees from core duties with the participating Universities providing staffing support and expertise from across the organisation to co-ordinate and deliver the secondment activity.

This review of the pilot programme has examined key issues affecting the area of research, curriculum design and relationship-building related to both the internal and external environment. In many areas across the pilot programme, the customisation of existing procedures, monitoring and recording secondment activity has a significant effect upon delivering and enhancing staff secondments. Overall, there is a real willingness to adapt and to change practices to support employer engagement through staff secondments.

Based on the findings of the pilot programme, this report makes a series of recommendations which are intended to strengthen the university-business engagement opportunities in the areas of relationship building, teaching and learning quality enhancement and graduate employability.

¹ Wilson, T., February 2012, *A Review of Business–University Collaboration*, <http://www.wilsonreview.co.uk/review>

² BIS, June 2012, *Following up on the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32399/12-903-following-up-wilson-business-university-collaboration-next-steps.pdf

³ HEA, July 2103, *Feasibility study - engaging academics with employers through industrial scholarships*

Recommendations

The substantive recommendations reflect a clear line of guidance based on strong evidence and would suggest a strong case for early implementation. A further set of recommendations have been made that require further reflection by senior management and involve issues that would benefit from being revisited and re-examined.

Substantive recommendations

1. Externally facing projects should be supported and championed by senior staff of the university to ensure both strategic fit and operationalisation of initiatives.
2. Administration of the secondment cycle should be run over a full calendar year. Posts should be advertised and applications sought in the Spring of the preceding academic year to promote opportunities across the organisation.
3. There should be a dedicated member of staff to co-ordinate the recruitment and selection for the secondments and a named member of the host organisation to co-ordinate the secondment.
4. Quantitative and qualitative measures should be developed to assess the impact on the teaching and learning offer and the benefits to the university.
5. More individuals should be encouraged to access secondments in order to support relationship building, future collaboration and sustainability.
6. There should be defined opportunities for the dissemination of staff activity as part of a managed knowledge exchange around the secondment experience.
7. There should be a dedicated resource of curriculum development materials for secondees from all institutions to access.

Reflective recommendations

Consideration should be given to:

1. planning capacity for staff to undertake secondments matching closely the timing of secondment activity, including the capacity of the host to monitor activity.
2. formally including employer engagement activity within professional development review activity.
3. a reciprocal exchange with employers, offering where possible a micro-secondment within the university.
4. how the development of the learning gained from the secondment is to be made sustainable.
5. ensuring that appropriate stakeholder systems are in place to mitigate the risk of staff role changes, often associated with discretely funded projects, and that processes are in place to facilitate knowledge transfer.
6. managing the expectation of stakeholders, the need for flexibility and the time commitment for effective collaborative practice.

I. Context

I.1 Collaborative activity

In 2011, the report on the HEA Flexible Learning Summit identified collaborative and strategic alliances between higher education institutions and employers as enabling closer linkages between HEIs and their local communities. Both the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration (2012)⁴ and the BIS report 'Following up the Wilson Review' (2012)⁵ emphasise the resulting benefits to student employability of such engagement.

Most recently, the Lord Young Report (2014) highlights the challenge in Higher Education to embed enterprise within the curriculum and support employer engagement: *“The challenge now for universities is to respond to a rapidly increasing cohort of students with strong aspirations to do something entrepreneurial in all types of business, including social enterprise ventures. This requires all parts of the university to collaborate on their enterprise outputs and this should include stronger partnerships with small businesses and the wider business community.”*⁶

One means of strengthening university-business engagement is through university secondment programmes, supporting staff from across the university to engage with business and integrate that experiential learning into the curriculum and professional support activities.

The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) was set up as result of the Wilson Review 2012 to promote and support university-business collaboration. It has been working with universities, government and businesses to explore how work experience and student placements can close the gap between employer expectations and university experience. However, this remains a significant challenge given the scope and scale of the student market (2,340,275 students studying in UK higher education⁷).

Staff placement and secondment activity is not a new concept, and opportunities exist for HE staff to undertake business/industry placement activity. However, this varies tremendously across institutions. If there is to be further enhancement of student enterprise and employability, there also a concomitant need for HEIs to understand and develop substantive and sustainable relationships with business.

The 2012 report prepared by Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) for HEFCE stated that: *“Staff exchanges are also thought to greatly aid the dialogue between academics and users. However, while it appears that such initiatives are on the increase, and where they exist, HEIs are emphasising both the inward and outward exchange of staff, it still remains a minority activity in the sector.”*⁸

This pilot project reflects these recommendations for further focused staff exchange activity. The pilot project comprises three strands of collaborative work with separate HEIs across the UK. An evaluation of the pilot work and impact on curriculum development are reported with recommendations for further university-business staff secondment activity.

⁴ Wilson, T., February 2012, *A Review of Business–University Collaboration*, <http://www.wilsonreview.co.uk/review>

⁵ BIS, June 2012, *Following up on the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32399/12-903-following-up-wilson-business-university-collaboration-next-steps.pdf

⁶ Young, D., June 2014, *Enterprise for All*, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338749/EnterpriseforAll-lowres-200614.pdf

⁷ NCUB, April 2014, *State of the Relationship 2014*, <http://www.ncub.co.uk/reports.html>

⁸ PACEC, April 2012, *Strengthening the Contribution of English Higher Education Institutions to the Innovation System: Knowledge Exchange and HEIF Funding*, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/whatwedo/knowledgeexchangeandskills/heif/HEIF11-15-FullReport.pdf>

1.2 Project aims and objectives

The aim of this project was to conduct a pilot study which strengthens university-business engagement through staff secondment. There is a range of terminology around learning in the workplace activity. For the purpose of this project, no distinction is made between secondment, staff work placements and academic or industrial scholarships.

Objectives:

1. To work collaboratively with HEIs across the UK to provide secondments for academic and professional service staff.
2. To set up and manage a programme of activity with three HEI partners.
Each project is managed by a project team from the individual HEI for the recruitment and selection of staff to undertake secondment activity.
3. To increase the understanding of employer engagement for curriculum development.
4. To generate case studies reflecting experience from staff secondments.
5. To report outcomes and impact of project to key stakeholders.

1.3 Project methodology

The pilot project was a collaborative programme of work, running from November 2013 to July 2014 through a complete project lifecycle. There were three partner HEIs working to deliver the staff secondment programmes, funded directly through HEA Grant Awards (employability). Direct grant funding was matched by 'contribution in kind' by the universities. The total value of the pilot programme was estimated to be approximately £108,000.

The universities involved in the pilot were Aston University, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Nottingham. Each of the partner universities delivered to a separate project plan including setting up a project team and reporting through the HEA Project Manager. In addition, the projects were delivered across the universities but managed through differing university departments; Academic Development; Human Resources, and Research and Technology Transfer.

Each of the universities has responsibility for:

- The recruitment and selection of the colleague(s) for the secondment.
- Collaboration with the university Careers Service/Faculty/School of study to identify and co-ordinate appropriate secondment opportunities for colleagues.
- Negotiating a working 'contract' with the employer, colleague and department/college.
- Monitoring the colleague whilst on secondment.
- Working with the staff colleague post secondment to feedback experiential learning from the activity. to inform the curriculum and/or enhance the learner experience.

The secondment activity was focussed on :

- Curriculum development
- Identifying market need within the discipline area to inform curriculum development opportunities
- Enhancing stakeholder relationships to build collaborative learning.

"I suggested a staff placement scheme in the Wilson Review and was very impressed that the HEA took up the baton to introduce it. Support and academic staff from across the University have shown interest and the pilot is leading to longer term relationships with industry. Well done HEA"

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Aston University

2. The pilot programmes

2.1 Purpose

2.1.1 The purpose of the secondments was to inform curriculum development in relation to the discipline specific interpretation of employability. While the specific nature of the secondment activity was not prescribed, it was guided by: employability enhancement themes, identifying market needs and current practices within the discipline, enhancing stakeholder relationships to build collaborative learning, creating and strengthening networks, external organisation input and/or delivery for teaching and learning.

2.1.2 Project teams were convened to plan the projects and oversee its rollout. The teams, including senior managers and academics, and directors of professional services staff, not only ensured the strategic relevance of the project but gave it the necessary support and profile required from executive sponsors. **It is recommended that externally facing projects are supported and championed by senior staff of the university to ensure both strategic fit and the co-ordinated support of initiatives.**

2.1.3 Importantly, the staff secondments offer an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the attributes required of graduates to successfully transition into the workplace with a view to embedding these within the curriculum. The exact format of the activity was flexible, encouraging staff to construct their own outputs but steered by the overarching aim of the project to develop employability within the curricula. This allowed the staff undertaking a secondment and the host organisation the freedom to co-create the format and the activities together so offering mutually beneficial outcomes.

2.2 Aston University *Work placement scheme* Human Resources: Staff & Graduate Development

The scheme was designed to directly support Aston's strategic aims by further building links with industry to maximise the number of students taking up placement opportunities, creating a larger pool of staff with first-hand experience of potential student placement organisations and leading to better informed placement choices and an improved student experience. It was aimed that staff would further contribute to the University's enhancement of graduate employment and be better at preparing students for their placement year.

2.3 University of Edinburgh: *Edinburgh Connections* Institute for Academic Development

The University of Edinburgh supports employer engagement through many different routes including the Edinburgh Research Initiative⁹, Development and Alumni Links, the Edinburgh Award¹⁰ and via the Careers Service's programme of employer engagement activities. In addition, the University has supported work-based learning within the curriculum as part of the Scottish Funding Council's Learning to Work 2 strategic project, Making the Most of Masters (MMM),¹¹ by facilitating students to work on real world problems that can become part of a Masters dissertation. The staff secondment programme branded as 'Edinburgh Connections' was viewed as a further avenue to interact with business and industry while allowing the learning from the placements to enhance employability in the curriculum.

⁹ <http://www.research-innovation.ed.ac.uk/>

¹⁰ <http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/Student/EdinburghAward/>

¹¹ <http://www.mastersprojects.ac.uk/>

2.4 University of Nottingham: Effectiveness in international intercultural collaboration and negotiation

Research and Transfer Office

The University of Nottingham encourages academics to undertake secondments into relevant industrial or collaborative partners through its Hermes Fellowship Scheme¹², a cross-disciplinary umbrella award scheme to cover activity strands of innovation, engagement, and outreach. The use of placements in industry has perhaps been more visible in STEM, particularly in applied science, and the staff secondment programmes encouraged both early career academics and those involved in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to undertake external placements. With the potential for scientific placements more likely to be met through the translation of novel technologies or processes, Nottingham wished to encourage applicants to consider a broader perspective of mutual knowledge transfer; a win-win situation where the hosting institution would benefit from the most up-to-date academic knowledge, and the secondee by understanding the most pressing and current issues for the company. This would hopefully be reflected in building a stronger relationship between the two, and by directing future areas of research, informing teaching, and therefore benefiting the University.

3. Findings

3.1 Recruiting to the Pilot Scheme

3.1.1 A co-ordination team was set up by each of the three pilot projects to manage the administration and day-to-day running of the project. Project work included handling queries from members of staff and processing application forms to other aspects of the secondment logistics including arranging transport and accommodation for staff and processing their expenses. **It is recommended that there is a dedicated member of staff, whose role it is to co-ordinate the recruitment and selection for the secondments, and a named member of the host organisation to co-ordinate the secondment.**

3.1.2 The secondment opportunities were advertised across the universities using email shots, project webpages, staff newsletters and university wikis. The response to the advertisements was immediate and significant and in some cases the demand for secondments outstripped the number of directly funded places. It was noted that respondents were particularly interested in the level of competition for places and provided verbal feedback that they considered this a highly desirable opportunity.

Across the three universities, there were 29 applications, with 14 staff secondments completed within the six month timescale of the pilot programme. In a minority of cases, the timing constraints of the pilot (ending July) resulted in the recruitment process and transparency becoming self-selecting in part. Applications were ranked by multi-disciplinary internal panels, coupled with a strategic 'sense check' at the end of the process.

Selection processes were in place in order to ensure equality and transparency. It is important to note that there are 15 applicants for potential secondments that were not able to be delivered within the pilot lifecycle but are being taken forward by the universities during the start of the academic year 2014/15 and are awaiting secondment opportunities.

¹² Hermes Fellowships, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/fabs/beis/technologytransferandcommercialisation/hermes-fellowships.aspx>

3.1.4 The selected staff reflected a range of roles across the universities.

3.1.4 Applicant Job Titles			
Student Professional Development Manager	Community Engagement Developer	Senior Teaching Fellow	Senior/Lecturer
Postgraduate Team Leader	Project Manager	Reader	Head of Placement

3.2 Secondment design

3.2.1 For each of the three projects, the format of the secondment differed. Across the projects more than 50% of staff identified their own host. Staff who had no personal or professional contacts available worked with the University Careers Service to determine potential host organisations and broker secondments. Duration varied from 2-10 consecutive and non-consecutive days to one day per week over six months and included large corporate organisations, SMEs, and public, private and Third Sector organisations (Table 3.2.3). In a few instances, an external employer engagement role had been formally identified through the university's internal professional development process.

3.2.2 The secondment design was determined through discussions with the host and the internal university department and reflected the resourcing model offered, including capacity issues such as time away from the core job role. Consideration should be given to planning capacity for staff to undertake secondments, matching closely the timing of activity, including the capacity of the host to monitor the activity.

3.2.3 Host placements			
Baillie Gifford	Skyscanner	Nanoforce Technology Ltd	Library of Birmingham
Photonic Solutions	Acivico	Challenges Worldwide	The Melting Pot
Prospects Soft	Magpie Communications	Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution	

“The academic will take on a placement tutor role from September 2014 and I fully support this secondment in visiting several companies to help develop placement schemes for our School”

Head of Electrical, Electronic and Power Engineering, Aston University

3.3 Staff support

3.3.1 There was a strong response to the announcement of the opportunity to undertake staff secondments. Queries were handled about the type of activities permissible, the level of funding available, and the timing. The most common query was whether or not a secondment could fall outside the pilot timescale with most interest in participation during the coming academic year (2014/15).

3.3.2 The three projects all included a form of learner contract, some formalised through memoranda of understanding, all with agreed aims and objectives for the placement. Some examples are detailed below (section 3.4). Providing pre-prepared support material/resources for the secondment ensured that staff undertaking secondments were in a position to fully engage during the project. The seconded staff were encouraged to reflect on their experiences; documents were also provided to encourage staff to devote time to considering the learning experience and the possible impact on curriculum.

3.3.3 Selected staff reported feeling ‘supported and confident in the process’, from initial meetings, constructing what the secondment may look like, working with departments across the university to source host organisations and arrange the actual activity. The universities were able to draw on the careers experience across the university in arranging student opportunities and employer engagement to underpin the staff secondments. Staff members reported having been ‘fully engaged’ and ‘extremely grateful’ for the opportunity to be involved in such a scheme.

Given the level of project co-ordination and administration required to offer and support staff secondments **it is recommended that both quantitative and qualitative measures are developed to assess the impact on the teaching and learning offer and the benefits to the university.**

3.4 Placement activity

Each university delivered separate project plans meeting institutional strategic objectives and those of the pilot programme. The case studies 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 given below highlight the range of objectives and intended outcomes for some of the differing secondment activity, and the importance to the universities.

“Through our knowledge exchange strategy we are always looking to build relationships with people, companies and organisations where we can both add value to each other. The movement of people between organisation, in to and out of the University, is an increasingly important element of this. We see the ability to provide support for secondments, placements and people exchange as a key tool in helping to instigate and develop university-business relationships to mutual benefit.”

Head of Business and Local Partnerships Team, University of Nottingham

3.4.1 Case Study

Job title Community Engagement Developer

Placement host The Melting Pot

Duration Four days, non-consecutive

Aims of secondment and intended outcomes:

Activity

- The Melting Pot is an open-plan office-sharing space in the centre of Edinburgh which is used by over 150 members from across the Third Sector, social enterprises and other areas.
- Work with The Melting Pot's Research Assistant who is interested in establishing social innovation/enterprise links with the four universities based in Edinburgh.
- Carry out benchmarking in other UK universities and established a few ideas which might be used at the University of Edinburgh.

Aims

- to broaden my network in the Third Sector
- to understand better the challenges faced by the Third Sector and to establish the role which students could play in supporting them
- to understand the environment that students undertaking service learning would be part of to make contact with key stakeholders across the sector
- to consider the opportunity for collaborative social enterprise work in the future between The Melting Pot, the University of Edinburgh and other local universities.

Intended Outcomes

- Further discussion taking place about future events in social enterprise with students and colleagues.

“This project has demonstrated an additional means to support the embedding of employability within Edinburgh’s diverse curriculum. Positive benefits to our staff, real levels of employer engagement and a sustainable model for future development”

Director, Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh

3.4.2 Case Study

Job title Student Professional Development Manager

Placement host Skyscanner

Duration Three days, consecutive

Aims of secondment and intended outcomes:

Activity

- Job shadowing / overview of the company / induction process; learning from the opportunity will be developed within the University of Edinburgh Business School focussing on the professional and personal development of PGT students in preparation for the workplace.
- Over the three days I spent time with various different parts of the business: Induction: participated in a staff induction event for new starts. Graduate recruitment: graduate programme, internships. Learning and culture: Skyscanner University, Skyscanner's values. Communications: Skyspace (internal communications system), TED talks, actionable issues committee, CxO lunches.

Aims

- Get an insight into how Skyscanner fosters a positive learning and development culture and think about how the University of Edinburgh Business School can do this for MSc students.
- Find out about what skills Skyscanner are looking for in graduates and their process for graduate recruitment. Reflect on how UEBS can develop these skills in our graduates.
- Through finding out a bit more about Skyscanner, see if there are further future potential opportunities for collaboration.
- Will take best practices and desired attributes back to business school and look at embedding those within three programmes for academic year 2014/15.

Intended outcomes

- We currently organise career treks to Aberdeen and London once a year. This experience initiated the idea of local treks, which can be done on a much more regular basis. We've already begun approaching local companies to implement this in 2014/15.
- Speaking with the graduate recruitment manager emphasised the importance for students to hear messages 'from the horse's mouth'. As a result, delivery of many skills sessions next year will be done in collaboration with employers.
- In terms of skills development: communication, ability to work in teams, self-awareness and adaptability are all key competencies. This has been fed into our skills matrix for next year.
- I was really impressed by the Skyscanner University concept and am thinking of ways we can replicate it with MSc programmes to provide a means for students to track the progress of their own professional development.
- The School is currently conducting a project into its induction process. Based on my reflections, the Skyscanner model was used as an example of good practice to benchmark against.
- The Head of Marketing, Student Recruitment and Admissions has initiated a new project to look at the School's values.
- A vodcast project is being trialled to enhance communications in the School, which began a video about the School's vision and achievements from the Dean.

3.4.3 Case Study

Job title	Senior Lecturer
Placement host	Library of Birmingham
Duration	Five days, non-consecutive

Aims of secondment and intended outcomes

I intend to learn how Library of Birmingham can be used to promote educational opportunities relating to employability and business development in the city region. This will be achieved through:

- selecting specific image based archive and textual information resources relating to the future of work with a view to establishing a mobile communication/display point in Library of Birmingham
- explore possibilities for student placement activity in the field of business development and creative problem solving.
- learning how business advice and guidance is currently offered by Library of Birmingham with view to enhancing the way in which Library of Birmingham contributes to the public understanding of HE business education
- identify opportunities for business and community engagement in the creative problem solving space – ‘the brainbox’ situated in the business section of Library of Birmingham.

What activities were carried out?

Job shadowing and collaborative work with the Library of Birmingham Director, Brian Gambles, the Business Information and Guidance officer responsible for ‘the brainbox’, Yvonne Barker, and the image/photo archivist, Peter James. This work shadowing focusses essentially on the communication and facilitative practices employed by the library in terms of both general communication and specific personal interaction.

“I am interested in the way Library of Birmingham evaluates the success or otherwise of its interactions with the general public and how its relationship with education institutions – schools, academies, colleges and universities – are managed”

Head of Group, Aston Business School, Aston University

4. Project outputs

4.1 Meeting project objectives

4.1.1 Secondment objectives were in line with the overall pilot programme objectives and supported the universities' strategic aims. This is important for the governance of the programme of work, to create buy-in from stakeholders and creating sustainability for staff placement activity.

4.1.2 The secondment brings knowledge and specialist skills back to the universities while establishing new and expanding existing links with industry. In one case it was reported that the secondment experience has impacted positively in focusing on one particular area of research where industrial knowledge is weak.

4.1.3 An important benefit of the scheme is the contribution to continuing professional development. Engaging in work placement activity in a new, challenging environment not only expands that individual's horizons, but equips them with new skills, grows their network and gives them valuable new experiences to share with others. Consideration should be given to formally including employer engagement activity within professional development review activity.

4.1.4 In all cases, the staff reported that they benefited from their secondments; undertaking collaborative working practice; submitting joint funding bids with the industrial partner; developing a ready-market knowledge of the current challenges facing the industry sector; and providing an insight as to where the dissemination of knowledge and appropriate format would be welcomed professionally by the sector.

4.2 Project cycle (secondment activity)

Both applicants and some host organisations expressed a preference for secondments to occur in August/September months. **It is recommended that the administration of the secondment cycle runs over a full calendar year. Posts should be advertised and applications sought in the Spring of the preceding academic year to promote opportunities to be taken up across the organisation.** This extended timescale would also allow time for those members of staff who do not typically engage in external activity to consider taking part and make the necessary contacts in industry. A significant number of staff involved in this pilot project had either sourced their own opportunity, or were already experienced at engaging with industry, and an extended preparation time may encourage less experienced staff to apply for secondment.

4.3 Employer engagement

Employers were keen to host a placement, but again the timing and scheduling of this is critical. In this pilot, the short time frame impacted on the level of engagement. Smaller organisations offered less capacity to accommodate a secondment and wished to see clear benefits to them which is difficult due to the short duration of the engagement. Larger organisations appeared to accommodate this process more easily due to the resources available, but in some instances were restricted by their own timescales (for example, yearly graduate intakes and budgeting periods). These larger-sized organisations did not request specific outputs from the staff secondees, rather they deemed the benefit was the engagement with academia and building sustainable relationships.

Knowledge of the capability of academia and the challenges facing industry is one area that may be improved for economic benefit, but is often an area where the major factor in success is due to people; strong inter-personal relationships between individuals set down foundations that allow the exchange of knowledge and mutually beneficial collaboration. **It is recommended that more individuals are encouraged to access secondments in order to support relationship building, future collaboration and sustainability.**

Building corporate relationships is not a short term activity, but should be managed as a longer term strategic goal. Consideration should be given to ensuring that appropriate stakeholder systems are in place to mitigate the risk of staff role changes, often associated with discretely funded projects, and that processes are in place to facilitate knowledge transfer.

5. Sustainability

As the staff work placements ended, staff involved were interviewed and feedback gained to disseminate to the wider university. Those who have yet to complete their secondments continue to receive support from the universities. It is viewed important by the universities that the aims and objectives of the pilot project are realised as they so closely align with a university's strategic aims.

The case studies (pg 17-19) from the staff who undertook the secondments highlight their experiences including the impact on the project outcomes for the University.

All three of the pilot programmes intended to further encourage staff to undertake placements in organisations as the experiences, knowledge and networks gained are perceived as core to maintaining the universities' position for graduate employability, for business and the professions, and developing internationally sought-after graduates.

All three projects felt that having the capability to support secondments is a useful tool for the universities' knowledge exchange capacity. It was found that support for secondments can be achieved relatively inexpensively particularly where core duties can be flexible to facilitate a regular, routine time to undertake the secondment.

Consideration should be given to the timing of secondments, matching with an individual's teaching commitments, ideally so as to allow a regular, routine attendance at the host organisation: this is beneficial to all parties; the host organisation, the member of staff and the university.

“Giving academics the chance to work in an environment where they can apply, and see the benefits of their knowledge, whilst at the same time learning from the experience is really beneficial. Students are looking for courses that are grounded in up-to-date research and professional practice. Academic secondment into industry is a good way of ensuring the currency of our teaching”

Head of the Department of Culture, Film and Media, University of Nottingham

Case Study: University of Nottingham

Working with CEDR: Effectiveness in international intercultural collaboration and negotiation

Overview

I am an Associate Professor in the School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies, and have been working with the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) for two years. I was on secondment with the CEDR on a one-day per week basis for six months. We have been working on a project investigating how best to achieve effective collaborations between organisations, with my specific contribution to develop a module on cultural challenges, particularly East-West, incorporating case studies.

Aims and objectives

- To continue to develop ongoing working relationships with the industry
- To lead on joint funding bids and research projects on international dispute resolution, using interpretation in mediation, effective interpersonal communication in dispute resolution
- To enhance teaching by offering students first-hand experience and knowledge from industry, such as how to translate and interpret for conflict resolution, professional competence of an interpreter in international dispute resolution, intercultural mediation in translation and interpreting, effective interpersonal communication with colleagues from other cultures, effective management skills in a multi-national organisation, how to manage conflicts with others
- To develop Continuous Professional Development programmes for industry

Activity

- Giving talks and training to professionals on intercultural competence in mediation and use of interpreters in mediation.
- Leading a survey on Collaboration, investigating Chinese and British companies' attitudes towards intercultural collaboration, and effective mechanisms for resolving disputes.
- Developing modules on cultural challenges in professional contexts, tailored for CEDR courses on collaboration and advanced negotiation.

Outcome

The initiative aimed to allow me to build strong links and collaborations with the leading organisation on dispute resolution in the EU. Through observing, learning, and understanding industry practice, I have been able to bring such knowledge and skills, which cannot be acquired through pure academic research activities, into the classroom for the benefit of the students, helping them develop skills demanded by the industry and effectively prepare themselves for work.

Impact

- I have strengthened relationships with CEDR and have been able to contribute to their courses and enhance the knowledge and skills of their in-house mediators.
- I am able to update my teaching notes with some real, current case studies that will benefit my students
- The secondment has highlighted to the University the opportunities that exist to undertake knowledge exchange through a third party route.. This has impacted positively on the faculty's plans for dissemination of research findings, and an active programme of CPD modules is in preparation.

Next steps

To develop independent training programmes for lawyers, executives, and HR managers.

Dr Xiaohui Yuan, Lecturer and Course Director, School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies
The University of Nottingham

Case Study: Aston University

Work placement scheme

Overview

I am a researcher in the Aston Institute of Photonic Technologies and visited *Photonic Solutions*, a hi-tech company specialising in the development of high-powered laser manufacture.

The placement lasted for 15 days in July 2014 and had the following aims and objectives:

Aims and objectives

- Gain industrial experience and understand industrial needs.
- Disseminate the results at Aston University.
- Improve industrial collaboration at Aston University with the view of expanding Aston's student industrial placement opportunities.

Activity

- Shadowing project managers and colleagues responsible for hi-tech marketing and planning.
- Apply my knowledge and experience in an industrial environment. This will also help to disseminate the results and improve Aston-industry collaboration links.
- Learning about the sales process of lasers in the marketplace.
- Gaining new skills and experience around sales and management.
- General exposure to industry.

Outcome

- Photonic Solutions are the main provider of lasers in the UK. Working with such a market leader was essential in terms of gauging what technology is already on the market and, more importantly, what is needed in the future.
- This placement impacts directly on the relevance of current research at Aston University and has helped identify market trends.
- I have established a new network of experts in their field. Everyone that I shadowed could not have been more accommodating and enthusiastic about having me on board. Even though they are a relatively small business (10 people), they would be very happy to host Aston University photonics placement students in the future, now that formal contact with the company has been established.
- The company showed a high level of trust in me and included me (and sought my opinion) in confidential and high-powered meetings.
- The company is young and dynamic, hiring recent graduates as employees; another potential avenue for Aston University students seeking employment in the industry.

Impact

The students at Aston University will benefit the most from any collaboration with an industry-leading organisation, both in the increased knowledge of Aston staff and the potential exposure to industry for the students.

My placement at Photonic Solutions was an invaluable experience, including great training activities kindly provided by the staff of the company, and was very useful also for career progression.

Dr Tatiana Habruseva, Marie Curie Fellow, Aston Institute of Photonic Technologies
Aston University

Case Study: University of Edinburgh

Edinburgh Connections

Overview

As a postgraduate Team Leader as part of the Edinburgh Connections project, I took a work placement with Challenges Worldwide <http://challengesworldwide.com/> to understand the processes they use when placing students out with the UK (WBPs).

Aims and objectives

To understand the process that Challenges Worldwide use in the selection, running and evaluation of international student projects. The hope was to share best practices in order that students undertaking a work-based project could have a full and coherent package of care.

Activity

Prior to placement we had an introductory Skype session and also a visit from my Challenges key contact to my Department/School where we discussed what we do and what Challenges does. Following this, over the course of three weeks I spent three days with Challenges looking at their processes and sharing best practices. The first day was spent sharing best practices and processes from challenges and my department/school that surround WBPs, such as academic quality, placement procedures and the dissertation element of Masters projects. The second day was used to review materials that were used to engage students and facilitate the process (such as field research project outlines, application forms and memorandum of understanding). The third day I sat in on their selection process to gain a better understanding of how they choose a student for an international placement.

Outcome

My School/Department will be looking at ways to improve the student transition into an international project. This will involve pre-departure preparation training workshops for students that will include input from the schools academics and from Challenges Worldwide in the next academic year. In addition when students return from their project we will look at providing support by facilitating reflection of their experience. Challenges have asked that in the future they would like to understand the actual dissertation that students would undertake and have asked to be allowed to view these – i.e. academic input/awareness.

Impact

- As mentioned above, we will be looking to improve in the next academic year our package of care for our students taking an international placement; both pre and post project.
- We will be also considering how this learning can relate to our field work sessions that are a key element to the curriculum of many programmes within Geosciences.
- Challenges have expressed that this experience has been extremely valuable to them and the now have greater insight in to the workings of academia, academics and students.
- The placement has had a personal impact on role, I now have a wider breadth of knowledge that can be used to improve the student experience on projects.

Next steps

As mentioned above we will be looking to improve our package of care for international projects next academic year and implement a framework of support.

I have been invited by Challenges to receive their training package for student selectors.

Olivia Eaddie, Programme Team Leader, School of Geosciences
The University of Edinburgh

6. Conclusions

It is clear from this project that there is desire by staff to undertake secondments. In order to satisfy this demand, consideration should be given to scaling up the number of opportunities available.

Staff who undertook a secondment, reported that they aimed to undertake another secondment in the future. In addition to the initial demand, participation of staff in placements generated further interest from their colleagues. Dissemination of their experiences to their Departmental or School colleagues has resulted in increased awareness of placements and the benefits which has resulted in their colleagues wishing to pursue secondment opportunities.

Across the pilot projects, there was a recognition that participants should be further encouraged from a wider subject discipline. In some instances although there were expressions of interest in the scheme, work placements did not materialise. Further work needs to be done to support staff in all subject disciplines to build appropriate links with industry and access external opportunities.

Applicants drawn from across the university should be encouraged to consider a broader perspective of mutual knowledge transfer, whereby there is a win-win situation where the host institution benefits from the most up to date academic knowledge, and the expertise of University staff and the secondee by understanding the most relevant and current issues for the company. Outcomes would reflect relationship building, but also by directing future areas of research, and informing teaching.

With regard to the governance arrangements for staff secondments, it is necessary to manage expectations of what can, and what cannot, be delivered during the period of the secondment. This particularly relates to the sharing of knowledge that is not yet in the public domain, or the creation of new IP. This can be managed by ensuring that there is a framework agreement in place to help clarify the position and avoid confusion for all parties.

The placement activity supports strategic outcomes for HEIs around employer engagement and teaching and learning quality enhancement themes. The staff secondment activity offers a practitioner experience that can directly inform curriculum design and support sustainable stakeholder relationships.

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