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Placement Podcasts – The University of Huddersfield Experience

BACKGROUND

The University of Huddersfield is “top for teaching quality among all the new universities in the North of England” (THES League Table, 2005) [1] and “top new university in the UK for customer satisfaction among its students” (THES student satisfaction survey, 2006) [2]. It is also one of the top five providers of sandwich education in the UK [3]. The University comprises seven Schools of study:

- Four Schools widely involved in Sandwich Education. This normally means a four year undergraduate degree, with the entire third year spent in industry or commerce:
 - School of Computing and Engineering
 - Huddersfield University Business School
 - School of Applied Sciences
 - School of Art and Design
- Two Schools with integral / professional work placements. This is normally where students are training for a profession such as nursing, teaching or social work. Each subject area has its own clearly defined objectives for work related placement experiences:
 - School of Human and Health Sciences. (This school also pioneered the first UK work placements in Politics and History.)
 - School of Education and Professional Development
- School of Music, Humanities and Media.
 - Mixture: Music Technology Sandwich Course, History Work Placements.

The University of Huddersfield and its predecessor institution Huddersfield Polytechnic has always had a strong reputation for providing high quality sandwich education. However in recent years it has become apparent that students are not taking up the opportunities offered for sandwich placements. In line with UK wide trends, an average of only 50% of students who are enrolled on sandwich courses are taking up a work placement. Anecdotal evidence gained from delegates at ASET (Association for Sandwich Education and Training) would indicate that this is a national issue, that has grown considerably since the beginning of the 1990's. Research into this area, carried out by Little and Harvey [4] shows that the reasons are complex and varied. These include:

- Financial, students unwilling to 'add' an extra year to their degree courses feeling that they just want to get the qualification and then find permanent employment on completion.
- 'Peer pressure', if friends have decided against taking a placement individuals don't want to be left behind.
- More students living at the family home whilst studying and being reluctant to work away from home.

Research has been carried out by the author [5] at the University of Huddersfield and presented at a joint Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) Conference in June 2006. It showed that our students who complete a one-year work placement as part of their degree tend to get better jobs, better degrees and slightly higher salaries than their counterparts who study full-time. With this in mind it is important that as a University we do everything that we can to support our students who go on work placements.

A strategic decision was taken by the University's most senior managers, that from the start of the new fee regime in October, 2006 Huddersfield University would lead the way in promoting work placements, by not charging course fees to our third year undergraduates on sandwich placements.

AIM OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the project is to provide resources in a variety of formats that can be accessed by all students to encourage them to go on placement. A core 'film' has been made to emphasise the benefits of placements. This is complemented by twelve individual case studies, which students can watch at their own leisure.

THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Using case studies has long been established as an effective method for encouraging students to go on placements. Examples exist at most Universities of this approach. In recent years the advent of the Internet and specifically of the 'blog' has increased the range of materials available for students to learn more about the placement experience.

A UNIVERSITY WIDE RESOURCE

Each of the Schools of study hosts their own events to encourage students to go on placement. This often involves asking previous students to come and talk to others. The returning students are generally very positive about their experiences, and recommend that others go on placement. However, due to time constraints normally no more than three students are asked to speak at such events. This may mean that only limited parts of the placement experience are explored. This project has provided a bank of placements resources which can be used by a variety of people:

- Students choosing to/or deciding whether to go on placement.
- Placement tutors and staff in placement offices wanting to encourage students to go on placement can point students to the resources as and when the need arises.
- Staff organising student placement events or open days can use the resources as part of the event.
- International students can use the resources either for choosing the University or for help with placements.

RESOURCE FORMATS

The resources are being provided in a variety of formats in order to capture as large an audience as possible, in particular:

- A DVD distributed to placement offices, the Careers Service and other departments within the University which have an interest in encouraging students to undertake placements.
- A sample of the resources are being formatted for inclusion on the University website and/or Intranet e.g. as part of an e-prospectus
- The resources can be made available in the appropriate format via the University website, Intranet and/or the University's virtual learning environment for students to download to mobile phone or similar device.

Placement Podcasts: Our Film



Lisa Ward TQEF Project Manager (Student Employability and Good Practice in Placement Provision)

Placement Podcasts: Film for Mobile Device



Lisa Ward TQEF Project Manager (Student Employability and Good Practice in Placement Provision)

Placement Podcasts: Website



The Value of Placement Experience

Student Pod Casts: Why go on Placement?

 Alia Ashraf: Applied Sciences	 Lee Ishenwood: Art, Design & Architecture	 Bhrod Acharya: Applied Sciences	 Jennifer Boning: HUBS
 Alex Jolly: Music, Humanities & Media	 Nicola Geisler: Applied Sciences	 Kate Jackson: Art Design & Architecture	 Joan Brown: SEED
 Hannah Speed: Music, Humanities & Media	 Maysoon Shafiq: muso	 Helen Green: Human & Health Sciences	 Andrew Pollard: Human & Health Sciences

Students share their thoughts on the value of their individual work placement experiences, including how they found the placement, what support was available, what they learnt and how it affected their future career paths.

Lisa Ward TQEF Project Manager (Student Employability and Good Practice in Placement Provision)

PRODUCTION STAGES

Stage 1: Selection

Initially students interested in participating in the project were invited to submit a short form providing details of their placement role, what advice they would give to other students and why we should choose them. We received a good response and selected students from all over the University to talk about their placement experience. To ensure as wide a cohort as possible, we chose students from different schools of study, different backgrounds and with differing forms of work experience. We also chose students for whom English was not their first language. It was felt it was important to pick a representative sample and not just those who could be considered to be 'high flyers'.

Stage 2: Filming

Video and audio recordings were made of each student, answering a set of pre-prepared questions. The questions were carefully formulated in order to elicit a positive response from the students. For example they were asked what were the 'challenges and highlights'. This was to support the aim of the project to encourage students to go on placement. It was felt that it was important for the students to come across as naturally as possible; so an informal setting was chosen and the interview and filming itself was relatively low-key. Students were encouraged to express themselves in their own words. Our initial estimate was that each interview would last around 5 minutes, however this proved to be misjudged with most taking 10 minutes and some longer.

Stage 3: Editing

An initial edit was produced of each student's interview with any repetition being removed and salient points being emphasised in text. Due to the length of the initial films this proved to be a fairly time consuming undertaking. Individual films have been made of each case study, thereby allowing students to focus their viewing on their areas of interest.

A composite film has been made, covering the following questions:

- What was your reason for doing a placement and how did you obtain the placement?
- What did you learn; can you tell us about the challenges and highlights?
- Did your placement experience influence your future career plans/final year and has it increased your chances of securing employment?
- What advice would you give to other students considering going on placement?

The purpose of the composite film is to showcase the placement experience and can be used as a standalone film. We are now transferring the above resources to formats which are suitable for viewing and downloading via the web. This technology is currently being investigated; we are aware that video files are large and will need to be compressed appropriately. The editing is also being considered – it is likely we will produce much smaller chunks of content. Due to file size there is bandwidth issues associated with streaming video (where video is continuously received by the viewer whilst being delivered by the provider). Audio files are much smaller so one possibility is to offer audio versions over the web with the option to download (rather than stream) the video clips. These could be provided in formats suitable for display on a variety of devices as well as a PC.

Stage 4: Feedback and Evaluation

An initial viewing has been held with participating students, staff from the School based Placement Units, Careers Service and other interested parties. We asked for their feedback and evaluation, which has been incorporated where feasible.

Stage 5: Future Directions

Once this first phase of the project is complete we plan to undertake a second round of student interviews. We are also investigating the possibility of filming and interviewing a small sample of student's currently on placement along with their employers. We feel that showcasing the employer's perspective would add an extra dimension. This additional material could be used to make a second DVD and also be hosted on the web.

CONFERENCE PAPER

We will present the following at the conference.

- A short paper depicting the work of the project so far.
- Two short films: part of the composite film, and an individual case study played on a mobile phone.

REFERENCES

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