

Case Study 1: Employer Engagement

One of the key successes of the GEP has been the significant increase in employer engagement in the learning and skills development experiences of students. External research published in May 2014 undertaken with project and project-related staff identified a wide range of improvements in this area:

“Without a shadow of a doubt there has been more employer engagement. More expertise within the University has led to new events, more employers on campus and increased opportunities for students.”

“The number of 3rd year placements has increased this year and will again next year. This is a result of more resources at Faculty/School level.”

“Having more events for employers on campus has filled a big gap, and we’ve been able to develop other things such as work shadowing, assessment centres and begun embedding more employability within the curriculum.”

The research also concluded that staff felt that the first year of the GEP had laid the ground work in this regard and that benefits would continue to accrue over time. Based on this research and strand reports to date, the key areas of enhanced activity are:

- Increased presence of employers on campus through networking events, employer fairs, ‘careers in’ events etc.
- Maximisation of the benefits of employer knowledge for all students through the creation of ‘talking head’ online resources.
- Significantly increased variety and capacity in work-based and work-related learning.
- Greater co-ordination between staff across the institution who are working with employers.

In addition, SMEs were targeted to participate in employer events. For example, the Employer Relations team increased the number of SMEs engaged in in work-related activities by 130%. In terms of breadth and depth of employer engagement, the team have also increased the numbers of employers who take part in more than one activity – up by 167%.

The key areas of enhancement are discussed in more detail below.

1. 1 Increased employer presence on campus

The presence of employers and professionals on campus is now more visible to students than ever before. For example, there has been a 59% increase in Scottish domiciled UG students participating in centrally organised employer activity (50% increase in MD40 student participation). Similarly, faculty and professional service staff jointly ran 13 employer networking and employer fairs across all 3 campuses. Opportunities to engage with potential employers and to understand the industry perspective is welcomed by students, even when it takes them out of their comfort zone, and formal student feedback is generally very positive.

1.1.1 Employer networking events

There has been a significant increase in employer networking events, in a variety of forms, as a route to helping students develop skills in self promotion as well as industry knowledge. Networking events are generally preceded by a Confident Futures networking workshop which is designed to give students a broad range of techniques to enhance the quality and impact of their networking ability. In this workshop, students learn the principles of effective networking to create long-term benefit, identify opportunities for networking and create an action plan to develop and mobilise personal networks. Examples of employer networking events include:

- Two **employer networking events** run for the School of **Accounting, Financial Services & Law**, and one networking event for the **School of Management**. Over 50 businesses attended the events from international companies to local SMEs and across sectors including the private, public and voluntary sector. Over 200 students attended the networking events from across the Business School: 82 students were Scottish domiciled and 27 were from the MD20/40 subgroup. Student feedback demonstrated they were engaged and they found the events useful, relevant, informative and interesting. All the Business School employer networking events were run in conjunction with academic staff and within the student curriculum to create maximum interest and attendance at the events.
- a **Sport Sciences Career Information and Networking Event** took place for the first time. With the increased capacity within Careers and Employer Relations, this event was developed with input from academic colleagues. The event was attended by 17 industry professionals and 55 students, with positive feedback collected from attendees. Planning is now underway for 2014/15's event with plans to encourage more students to attend the support workshops on the run up to the event in order for them to make the most of the opportunity.
- Employers had the opportunity to meet with groups of **Computing** students at an event with a new format '**Employer Speed Networking**' to promote their companies and inform students of placement and graduate roles and to discuss job specifications in a speed format. The students received information in preparation for the event and asked questions on working for the companies and current jobs available within a relaxed setting.

1.1.2 Other Employer events

Examples of other employer events include:

- **Engineering students** gained an insight into working for a company as a new graduate at '**Meet the Graduates**' when employers came on campus with recently hired graduates who presented on their experiences of working for the companies so far. There was an opportunity to network with company staff and ask about job opportunities.
- 120 **Computing students** attended **Smart Start-where will your career take you?**

- A technology event '**Connect with Computing**' provided an opportunity to meet with academic, research and business staff. Key personnel from a range of SMEs and large companies were invited on campus to network and exchange information on skills and degree programmes and to discuss working in partnership on placement, areas of research and commercialisation.
- The launch of the inaugural **Nursing, Midwifery & Social Care Employer Fair**, with 14 participating employers including recruiting NHS Trusts/Boards, private and public sector employers. As well as exhibiting at the fair, employers were also given the opportunity to hold 1-1 interviews with final year nursing students and deliver presentations about the work that they do.
- A '**Futures Fair**' was held as part of the Scottish British Psychological Society Undergraduate Conference held at Edinburgh Napier University. With 16 employers and industry professionals from across Scotland represented to provide advice to approximately 250 third and final year students within **Psychology**.
- Employer Relations introduced new '**Careers In**' events which introduce students to opportunities in key industrial sectors. In 2013/14, the team ran 'Careers In' Logistics and 'Careers In' Energy events and, in 2014/15, 3 further 'Careers In' events in retail, teaching and smaller businesses will be introduced.

1.2 Maximising the benefits of employer knowledge for all students

The increased number of employers on campus has proved highly beneficial for those who have the opportunity and ability to attend. However, to maximise the benefit of employer knowledge for all on and off campus students, we have been developing a bank of video clips of interviews of employers from a wide range of industry and alumni.

- **The GEP Talking Heads** project is based on extending the opportunities for students to hear the 'industry' voice directly from employers and is discussed in Section 5.1. It involves creating a bank of video clips of employers and alumni (SMEs, Public, Private and Third Sector) to be incorporated into learning and promotional resources.
- **The Faculty of Health, Life & Social Sciences Employability Videos:** Piloting six videos with professionals from six disciplines of the Faculty, to provide online advice to students, graduates at the University and academic staff. Professionals engaged were the Chief Executive Scottish Life Sciences Association; Superintendent, Police Scotland; Alumni Veterinary Nurse Tutor; Midwifery Supervisory Officer; Managing Director Ipsos-Mori Scotland and Sport Centre Manager, [EN]gage.

The incorporation of these videos in workshops and online resources is intended to enhance the student preparedness for job search and widen their career ideas. At the moment of reporting, more than 300 edited employability video clips have been uploaded onto the University website.

1.3 Significantly increased variety and capacity in work-based and work-related learning

Edinburgh Napier's University's Strategy 2020 contains a commitment to deliver an excellent personalised student experience, including providing accredited, work-related experience linked to the curriculum as part of every student's experience. The GEP is

supporting this ambition by increasing the number of placements, internships and other work-related activity available to students.

1.3.1 Placements and Internships

Considerable effort has gone into increasing student access to work-based and work-related learning through placements and internships. Employers are increasingly using placements as a method of trialling students for graduate roles in terms of team and skills fit.

Efforts to increase the number of placements include the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and the Creative Industries working with the new Scottish Government CareerWISE project to recruit female students studying the STEM Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects into suitable placements. The same faculty also offers SMEs a recruitment service and support with identifying suitable candidates to assist small companies and start –up enterprises.

A number of internship schemes have been launched, creating employer engagement opportunities for students and, in some cases, permanent jobs. The Employer Relations team has developed a new portfolio of services for employers which include: internships for SMEs; a new internships portal to advertise employers' internship vacancies; the ability to interview on campus; academic introductions and sponsorship opportunities. Examples of internship schemes are:

- **The Santander Universities Internship Scheme** has enabled the Employer Relations team to build relationships with a wide range of SME companies. The team had direct and in-depth engagement with 28 SMEs, involving scoping out the internship roles with the businesses, writing the job descriptions for companies and liaising with the businesses throughout the recruitment process and during the period of the internships. This level of support has been appreciated by the companies involved, with all of them stating that they would participate in the scheme again. Throughout the year, relationships with other business support agencies have been developed, such as the Chambers of Commerce, Business Gateway and Interface. These organisations have helped to promote the Santander scheme to SME businesses across the region. Furthermore, businesses engaged with this scheme have recommended our services to other small businesses within the region.
- **The Business School Summer internship programme** was launched as a pilot in 2013/2014. The Business School in collaboration with a range of University teams and departments offered 13 structured 4 week paid summer internships. The summer internships were open to applications from current 2nd and 3rd year Business School undergraduate students from Edinburgh Napier University. As well as great work experience, the Business School provided a programme of support throughout the internship and will host a 'celebration event' for all interns and supervisors in Trimester 1, 2014/15, to celebrate the success of the internships and to capture valuable feedback from interns and supervisors.

1.3.2 Employer Mentoring

In 2013/14, 105 new employer mentors were recruited and trained (36% increase on 2012/13 figures) and 147 employer mentors matched to students. A considerable number of new mentors needed to be recruited in order to meet the needs of mentees from the new subject areas being targeted. As so many new mentors were recruited this year, it may prove unnecessary to recruit 80 new mentors in the year ahead. Unusually, as well as employers and professionals contributing to the development of students, the employer mentoring programme also develops the skills of employer mentors as they undergo training in mentoring and coaching techniques and receive ongoing support from the Employer Mentoring Co-ordinators. The employer mentors are given opportunities to network with each other and all mentors were invited to the Employer Mentoring Celebration event in May which included a presentation by Mindstore 'guru' Jack Black.

1.3.3 Other examples of work-related activity

Other examples of work-related activity include:

- In the School of Arts & Creative Industries, strong links between academic staff and industry are being leveraged to ensure students gain maximum benefits from close links with creative industries. Programme specific employability workshops and events are being embedded across all programmes of study in response to industry demands and current trends. In particular, workshops and events tailored towards freelancing skills have been introduced along with the production of learning materials and resources.
- The “**Getting Inside**” **pilot work shadowing scheme**: which offered a four day work shadowing opportunity for students from the Psychology, Social Sciences and Criminology disciplines. The pilot scheme was very positively evaluated by students and will now be scaled up for academic year 2014-15. Students were invited to apply for the scheme and had to take part in a competitive Assessment Centre. Eight placements were available including Scottish Court Service, L & B Criminal Justice Authority, Remploy, Score Scotland, Lifeline, Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council (EVOC), Nari Kallyan Shangho (NKS). This work shadowing scheme was designed and developed in coordination with the Faculty GEP team and involved the participation of the ENU Recruitment Assessment Centre.
- A bespoke ‘**Volunteering Fair**’ is being planned by Careers and Employer Relations for early in 2014/15. The event will offer students the opportunity to find out more about the different types of volunteering opportunities available in preparation for taking a FHL&SS volunteering and employability module in the second trimester. This event will also act as the launch of VBase, the student facing volunteering database which is being designed by Napier Students’ Association.
- Employer Relations have introduced new **subject specific events** which target students studying subjects with lower levels of graduate employment, using research undertaken the Employer Mentoring team. They ran subject specific events in Sport Science and English in 2013/4 and will be running similar events for Design, Biology, Accountancy and English students in 2014/15.

1.4 Greater co-ordination between staff across the institution who are working with employers and between staff and employers

Staff from all parts of the University successfully engage with employers and build employer networks. Within the faculties, this includes academic staff, placement officers, employer liaison officers, faculty careers officers, researchers and enterprise staff. The Faculty Employer Liaison Officers have successfully increased the number of employers on campus and the variety of faculty-run employer events.

The creation of a dedicated Employer Relations team as one of the central professional service teams, has added further capacity to the employer engagement work, created another channel for generating work-based and work-related opportunities and provided a mechanism for streamlining our offering to employers. Since their creation, they have engaged with 189 companies in employer liaison activity (51% SMEs) and 147 employers and professionals in employer mentoring activity (39% recruited from SMEs). To support ongoing growth, Employer Relations have developed a 3-year engagement plan influenced by interviews with academics and support requests from GEP partners. They also produce an on-line newsletter for employers which brings together relevant news from across the institution.

The establishment of an Employer Relationships Working Group has secured buy in from 19 employer engagement colleagues from across the University to work towards improving employer engagement practices and to consider how best to serve the many businesses that engage with the university on a daily basis.. The group has created a mechanism for providing new, vital and valued oversight of employer engagement which will be sustainable after the GEP finishes.

External research indicates that while communication between employer engagement staff across the institution has improved, there are still some concerns that individual employers may receive multiple approaches and there was still potential for duplication of effort. Further work is required to continue to improve communication channels.

1.5 Conclusions

The GEP has supported a major expansion in the number and variety of employers contributing to the learning experiences of students. The creation of employer relations/placement office roles both in the faculties and in the professional services and the introduction of a modified careers hub and spoke model has provided conduits for creative approaches to engaging employers. Year 2 sees the continued embedding of initiatives and the introduction of new opportunities.

Participants in the external research highlighted a number of key priorities for further developing employer engagement at the University, including:

- Developing the role of the placement office;
- Ongoing consultations with employers and academics to ensure employability is built into all curriculums;
- Increasing opportunities for academics and employers to network and share ideas as this informs curriculum development and helps employers understand graduate skills;

- Continuing to invest in employer relations work as it takes time to build and mature new employer relationships
- Continuing to build availability of placements, especially third year placements and summer placements
- Building on successful events and activities e.g. assessment centres, internships, work shadowing, subject specific events, etc.