

SUBMISSION TO LAMBERT REVIEW

LINKING EMPLOYERS AND HEIs: THE CASE FOR WORK EXPERIENCE

Set against a background of a need to improve links between Employers and Higher Education, NCWE would submit that work experience/placements can be one fairly straightforward mechanism for enabling such links to be made where there has been no previous contact on the part of either employer or institution. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that where an employer has offered work experience opportunities for the first time, and provided all has gone well, further links can be developed within the HEI based on the trust that has been established from that first encounter.

Much is being done on the work experience front around the country, but, like the curate's egg, it is good in parts. Given the growing awareness that a period of work experience can:

- a) be an effective means of recruitment for employers
- b) enable graduates who have done some form of it to get a better job on graduation

there is a need to engage more employers in this debate so that they make their contribution to ensuring they recruit graduates with the skills they continue to say they are looking for.

In response to the questions posed for consultation, NCWE would put forward the following:

1. Best Practice in Work Experience

There is much going on both within universities and outside and successful programmes include STEP, Cymru Prosper Wales, Business Bridge in Merseyside and the whole array of sandwich placement linked to individual courses. In all of these there is an induction for the student, the employer thinks through the task/project they want undertaken, there is support for the student during the placement period and an evaluation at the end so that both sides get the maximum benefit from the experience.

More could be done and NCWE believes it is now necessary to develop standards for all forms of work experience which would send signals to employers that this is now an important issue which needs to be taken seriously.

2. Strengthening Relationships

Employers, particularly SMEs, find it difficult to know how to make contact with HEIs. Some may also feel intimidated since the two sides tend to speak different languages. There is a need for both sides to have a better understanding of what each has to offer if relationships are to be strengthened.

3. How can Businesses attract the best graduates?

Students need to be made more aware of the kinds of jobs that are now available. Unless they have a particular ambition, many have little idea of where they would like to work. By offering work experience, employers can:

- Demonstrate the range of job opportunities in their sector in a practical way
- Make links with Course Tutors and Careers Services and so keep them abreast of developments in their sector
- Make a contribution to the skills development of their future workforce

and thus attract more committed graduates who have a better understanding of what employers require.

As an example of this, NCWE is working in partnership with GSK UK Chemistry to develop a set of criteria for a Kitemark that would lead to:

- Establishing a national standard for undergraduate Chemistry placements
- A model of good practice appropriate for the needs of the Company.

The outcomes of this project will include a set of materials or 'Placement Toolkit' which will enable GSK UK Chemistry to:

- take the lead in developing a Kitemark for Employers offering good quality Chemistry work experience opportunities.
- address recruitment and retention issues
- address the company's skills needs
- be visible in making a positive contribution to the student employability debate and reinforce their reputation for executing quality science and providing excellent training

An additional partner in this project is the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) who it is hoped will accredit the standard.

4. Financial Considerations

Given the need to encourage more employers to offer work experience opportunities in response to the growing demand by students, ways need to be found of making them aware that it is in their interests to do so. While there are arguments for the business case, i.e. the positive effect of the project or task on the bottom line, perhaps Tax Credits might encourage more to become involved?

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