Facilitating student engagement with external organisations through credit-bearing placements

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The challenge of providing work-related learning within the confines of an undergraduate curriculum generates considerable discussion. The University of Glasgow’s BSc Environmental Science and Sustainability addresses this by offering students the opportunity to undertake a 60-credit placement in lieu of a dissertation.

Engaging employers and students in this way has proved not only to enhance dialogue between the two organisations, but further benefits:

• THE STUDENT: through enhanced employability, real work experience, linking graduate attributes with work, employment offers, putting theory into practice, networking;

• THE EXTERNAL ORGANISATION: through recognition of the student's transferable skills and up-to-date knowledge, employee recruitment, opportunity to utilise the student's skills e.g. social media, academic writing, computing;

• THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW: through enhanced organisation engagement, voluntary/paid work offers to students, requests to have another student, field class/visit opportunities, internationalisation of the curriculum.

Embedding a placement within the curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 courses</td>
<td>3 courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 courses</td>
<td>3 courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 courses</td>
<td>Dissertation, or Placement (UK), or Placement (International)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 courses plus 60 credit Honours Project</td>
<td></td>
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Students (sometimes staff) contact possible placement providers for projects:
• Greater range of organisations contacted: International to local;
• Although possible issue of organisations ignoring student’s email or request;
• Staff contacted by organisations each year about hosting a student.

Staff finalise insurance and project with organisation.

Assessment

Summative Assessment:
1. Initial Report (1500 words – 15%)
2. Work-based Journal (6000 words – 30%)
3. Dissertation (4000 words – 55%)

Formative Assessment:
1. First week’s journal entry formatively assessed.
2. Guidance given on dissertation on content for dissertation themes:
   Theory and Reality, Past and Present, Ethics, Future and Sustainability, Routine and Creativity.

Benefits

• Work-related learning; employability enhancement;
• Real work experience – sometimes not what expected;
• Theory into practice; linking to graduate attributes;
• Internationalisation of curriculum;
• Enhanced engagement with employers; training opportunities;
• Team work and group work; career choice exposure;
• Support and assistance with organisation work;
• Increased scope of work in organisation;
• Social media input from student.

Challenges

• Administration burden on staff;
• Steep learning curve for student;
• Balancing work and life during placement;
• Training the students – dependent upon abilities;
• Supervising students – taking staff time;
• Few opportunities for creativity – set routines.