

Enhancing Student Transition from Study to Employment Through Student Driven Engagement with Alumni

Overview

Summary

The five departments in the Faculty of Science engage with alumni in a variety of ways. For example, during 2015/16 the Careers Service organised successful alumni events for M&S, Physics and Biomedical Sciences generating positive student feedback on the benefits. In January 2017, SIPBS held a similar alumni event. The Faculty would like to introduce an annual careers networking event in all five departments, creating a framework to streamline implementation. These events will be supported by staff in each Department within the Faculty of Science and colleagues in Professional Services but fundamentally will be student led.

This work was supported by Enhancement Theme funding from the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland

Context

Faculty of Science

Contact Details

Dr Debbie Willison

<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/willisondebbiedr/>

Themes

Student Transitions

Rationale

All five Departments in the Faculty of Science engage with their alumni. This can be in a variety of ways including: on a one to one basis; through work based placements; invited speakers and alumni events where students can engage with graduates now in employment. A coordinated, person-focused engagement between students and highly engaged alumni working will substantially benefit student employability and personal development as well as overall engagement between Science and Industry. The aim of this project was to establish an Alumni Club in each Department. This would be operated by current students, with support from their Department. Once a member of the Alumni Club graduates, they would remain a member and would return to their Department to take part in a careers networking event. These would be arranged on an annual basis.

A student intern began preparatory work in the summer of 2017. Initial work included:

- Engaging with Alumni & Development to gather information on best practice for communicating with alumni and planning / delivering student / alumni events
- Engaging with the Careers Service to gather information on what makes a successful professional networking event for students
- Engaging with staff from the five Departments and the Faculty Office to gather alumni contacts and establish what already happens in each Department in this area
- Summarising the approaches to and range of activities in this area across the Faculty.

Work continued into the first semester of academic year 2017/18 as follows:

- The student intern compiled a questionnaire which all students were asked to complete to gain understanding of what types of event they would most prefer and to identify those who wished to be members of the Alumni Club in their Department.
- Planning student / alumni networking events in the Faculty of Science
- Providing training for Alumni Club members
- Branding and marketing events to the wider student community.

Six initial events are planned (this includes two in the Strathclyde Institute for Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences for each of the Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences programmes). The first will take place in November 2017, four more in January 2018 and the final event will be in February 2018.

Successes

A number of successes have arisen from this project. The results of the questionnaire provided clear information about what type of event students would find most useful to them as they plan their careers. The questionnaire also resulted in around 50 students indicating an interest (all Departments being represented) in being members of the Alumni Club in their Department. All Departments in Science will now have an annual careers networking event arranged by students with the support of staff in their Department. The Alumni Club members have gained experience of team working, forward planning and project management which will be beneficial to their CVs. The student intern also gained experience in all of these areas as well as enhancing their researching and report writing skills. They have also had the opportunity to disseminate their work in a poster and presentation.

Challenges

The main challenge was engaging staff in some Departments. The way in which this was addressed was to send a weekly email to the staff member supporting the project and to hold regular meetings (one per month) asking for an update on progress on each occasion.

Lessons Learnt

At the outset of the project, the initial idea had been to have an identical event in each Department. As the project developed, however, it became clear that greater success of embedding an annual event would be achieved if Departments could build upon existing practices in their areas. There had also been a desire to have all of these events within the Consolidation week at the start of semester 2 but some Departments had preferences for other points in the academic year. A range of different types of events, at different times of the year, therefore have been developed. Our conclusions were that embedding the events in whatever way best suits the Department is the best way forward.

In some Departments, student societies already exist and we learned that gaining their support makes these events more sustainable.

At the time of writing this case study not all inaugural events have taken place and there may be further lessons to be learned as we move forward.

Scalability

As mentioned previously around 50 students expressed initial interest in being members of the Alumni Club when they responded to the questionnaire. In reality around half of those students became involved. As the Clubs become embedded and more well-known we would predict that more students will wish to be involved so there is excellent potential for scale up.

Suggestions for Transferability

There would appear to be no reason why this approach would not work in the other Faculties in the University and we would be happy to share our experiences with colleagues. The idea of student led clubs could also be used in the context of peer support networks for individual subject areas.

Student Involvement

Students were involved in a variety of ways: a student intern carried out research at the start of the project and then interacted with the 25 students who volunteered to set up the Alumni Clubs. The wider student body will then be involved in the events themselves. Those numbers will not be available until all events have taken place.

Attachments

Available below is the report completed by the student intern after discussions with the Alumni and Development Office, the Careers Service and the five Science Departments (appendix 1).

The questionnaire (appendix 2) circulated to gain an insight into what types of events students would find useful is also available below, along with the results (appendix 3).

File	Modified 
Microsoft Word Document Appendix 2 - draft Survey Questions to Students.docx	Nov 24, 2017 by Alex Buckley
Microsoft Word Document Appendix 3 - Student Transitions Qualtrics Report.docx	Nov 24, 2017 by Alex Buckley
PDF File Appendix 1 - Full Report July 2017.pdf	Nov 24, 2017 by Alex Buckley

 [Download All](#)