

PMI Project Working with International Graduates

Project Evaluation – ‘The Link’

The AGCAS Aim:

The Link Project was an initiative by ‘futures’ at Uclan in response to the aim by AGCAS to develop work with international alumni and graduate employers. A need to share graduate success stories and employer contacts in the UK and abroad was recognised.

AGCAS Objectives:

- To fund research, produce data, case-studies and reports on alumni employment contacts & successes.
- To disseminate findings across the sector to enable AGCAS to help all institutions improve resources & contacts available to their students.
- To encourage innovative ways to develop and share successful alumni-employer contacts and experiences.
- To enable institutions to develop closer ties with their international alumni.

AGCAS Outcomes:

- An expanded list of employer contacts to be available through the employer database currently under development by HECSU
- An enhanced resource of success stories / case-studies about international student & graduate employment to be available on the AGCAS website international community pages.

The Link – a project approach by ‘futures’ to work with international alumni

Core project activities:

- An international online event linking current students with working graduates
- The employment of international interns
- A graduate careers survey
- The production of a video to support the dissemination of findings

An evaluation of the core activities:

The international online even on March 26th 2010:

Background –

This approach was chosen as a means of developing case studies whilst allowing students to directly benefit in an interactive and accessible way. The original bid proposal evolved through several stages. Research in November and December led to a shift in thinking away from the original aim of providing a worldwide event with graduate employers offering

advice and vacancies towards a 'country specific' event linking students and graduates in a more informal manner allowing personal career experiences to be shared. This was seen as a more realistic and achievable option and goal. We choose to organise a targeted event for Chinese students and Chinese graduates. A high percentage of the International Student population at Uclan originate from China and the university has a particularly strong presence in Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Colleagues in these 3 major cities gave an agreement to get involved and they were able to liaise directly with local Chinese graduates who had returned to China to work. They acted as 3 focal points for bringing our alumni together in hotel/business centre locations for what was an evening event in China. A decision was made to hold the event using Chinese language throughout.

Outcomes:

- **Ongoing Collaboration** before, during and after the event with colleagues in China has enhanced our current working relationship. There was a shared goal and a mutual understanding. A Chinese colleague commented that there is an appreciation that careers staff in the UK are committed to supporting the employability aspect in the lives of international students whilst in the UK. This collaboration also applies to maintaining positive links with a number of graduates who are making recommendations and offering support in terms of work placements.
- **A forum for recording and retaining graduate profile material in different formats** from the creation of a Graduate Profile Handbook, popular questions and answers session via Chat Rooms and pre recorded and live Graduate Interviews via phone, video and face to face.
- **An effective use of the multiple functions of Adobe Connect** to provide students and graduates with different ways of connecting. For e.g. via web cam, chat room, pre recorded video and power point.
- **A graduate database** – retention of graduate details for future contact. A need to build on the number of UK working Chinese graduates with whom we have contact.
- **The Chat room raised a number of topics which are important to students now.** This awareness is important for Careers Advisers when planning and delivering sessions.
- **Face to Face contact with working graduates at lunchtime** was a popular aspect within the event from the informal feedback.

Recommendations:

- **Use a single location in China, to trial at the exact time period in the day and to use a business centre or hotel.** The attempt to achieve multiple broadband connections between Preston and the 3 locations in China was inconsistent during the event. Trials had been carried out in the weeks leading up to the event and we changed from a University location in Shenzhen to The Holiday Inn. A suggestion would be to use a single location in China, to trial at the exact time period in the day and to use a business centre or hotel.
- **Reposition the lunch at the end of the online event on the next occasion rather than half way through the event** The chance to speak face to face with graduates working in the UK whilst having a buffet lunch was valued by students. Not long

enough it would seem. A reminder that food and an opportunity to communicate in person should not be underestimated. One of the interns suggested a Chinese buffet next time by seeking outside catering.

- **Retain contact with current 2010 Chinese graduates who have participated in careers activities like the Link.** More likely to reply as they have used the advice and guidance themselves in the past. Recognize this as a challenge requiring innovative ways to engage on an ongoing basis with graduates who have left their studies behind.
- **Topic specific online events** e.g. Potential for an online link between postgraduates and undergraduate students.
- **Event Marketing in Chinese proved to be effective.** However, do think that conducting the online event in English would also have worked. Chinese students expect that all their learning is conducted in English.

Employment of International interns:

Background -

This was seen as an essential component in carrying out a student centred project and a valuable opportunity for a number of students to gain work experience to develop their employability skills. There were 3 paid interns, 10 volunteers and 1 postgraduate student Translator.

Outcomes:

- Amongst many other activities, the students initiated the marketing campaign; liaised with graduates and Uclan China, created a graduate database, conducted the graduate video and hosted the event
- The students evaluated their own performance and gained a work reference
- Stimulated cross cultural learning and networking for both the interns and staff members which can only help to enhance our international perspective when working with new and existing international students

Recommendations:

- Ongoing work experience opportunities for international students within careers/employability services.

Graduate Careers Survey:

Background –

A multiple choice survey carried out to generate additional graduate material for use during the online event. Assisted by the Alumni Engagement Team within the University, the questionnaire written in Chinese was sent by email to all Chinese Graduates from 2003 onwards. The offer of a 1000 RMB prize draw was given. Data from 65 completed questionnaires has been presented in the form of diagrams and graphs.

Recommendations:

- Time allocation and an appreciation that to generate effective questionnaire data plus a high response rate requires specialist skills in the formatting of questions for data analysis.

Final Comments:

By creating an interactive report in CD format in which the various elements of The Link are shown, we felt that this is an effective method to disseminate the findings to other HE colleagues as part of the international community resources section on the AGCAS website. As stated in the introductory video, this project is the start rather than the end, as it has served to open up channels of communication with graduates which should be maintained for the benefit of international students and careers staff in the future.

Special Thanks:

Plenty of hard work, creative thinking and team work was needed from a host of colleagues to make the project work. Thankfully Peter Rankin, the Careers Team allowed it to happen. Special thanks to: Gary Elliot; Jan Lee; Fiona Mathieson and Anthony Camm (futures team); Michael Ge; Victoria Tao and Cheryl Yu (Uclan China); Kevin Mao; Natalie Lin and Jacky Guo (Project Interns); Fang Zhou (Translator) and most importantly the Chinese graduates in the UK and China who very kindly shared their experiences and donated their valuable time to support students.

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