

CRAC's new Insight Plus programme for undergraduates

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Introduction

Insight Plus is a structured learning programme to match student casual work experience to employer requirements for key skills competencies. It will provide a framework for the accreditation of different types of work experience, including involvement in clubs and societies and volunteering in the community, as well as part-time paid work.

Why has Insight Plus been developed?

Employers are looking for potential graduate recruits with a strong academic track record, and a good degree; but they also want more. Leadership, the ability to work in teams, effective communication and an understanding of how organisations work are just a few of the competencies required to succeed in today's graduate labour market.

Whilst many universities are moving towards making these key skills an integral part of their degree programmes, many students develop important attributes and experience away from the lecture theatre.

Over 40% of students are now working between 12^o and 40 hours per week in term time; and extra-curricular activities, such as sport, clubs and societies and volunteer work in the community are no longer seen as simply enjoyable recreational pursuits, but a valuable opportunity for students to develop their skills.

Yet, despite the fact that many students are spending more time on these activities than their studies, most receive neither structured support to enable them to maximise the learning potential of their casual work experience, nor formal recognition for the skills they develop.

Objectives

- To give employers greater insight into the experience and competencies of potential recruits
- To provide a standard or 'kitemark' for the skills developed through extra-curricular activities
- To give students the opportunity to optimise the value of their extra-curricular learning and provide a framework for career management by giving them the chance to demonstrate what they have learnt and to have that learning accredited

Outcomes of the programme

For each student, the programme seeks to identify:

- career management and development skills
- interests and aptitudes
- aspirations
- personal value system and motivational drives
- identification of transferable skills from previous work experience
- opportunities for further skill development

It also:

- makes the link between work experience, transferable skills and employability
- helps students to develop action plans and present themselves electronically, on paper and verbally
- better equips undergraduates to find an appropriate and challenging graduate job
- gives the opportunity for full and thorough reflection
- gives a broad overview of how organisations work
- offers the chance to demonstrate learning
- provides the opportunity for feedback

How long will the programme take?

Accreditation is based on around 200 hours of work experience which could be the sum of a variety of activities - for example voluntary and paid work. This figure equates to ten hours per week over the twenty weeks of the programme, an amount we know is already exceeded by the vast majority of students.

Participants will also need to show evidence of at least 10 hours of related private study - around half an hour per week - which will be facilitated through the Insight Plus learning resource (see below).

Structure

The programme is delivered via students' unions, jobshops and careers services. It has three key elements:

I. Workshops

Two separate workshops will mark the beginning and end of the Insight Plus programme. Each is managed by CRAC, utilising its successful *Insight* methodology, being delivered with the help of a team of facilitators drawn from participating universities and employers.

2. Website

The Insight Plus website comprises:

- a reflective learning log
- a virtual support manual
- chat areas, in which students can discuss their personal development with their peers
- online events, such as presentations from graduate employers
- a search facility enabling students to source paid and unpaid work experience opportunities at their local university

3. Mentoring

Each student on the programme has a personal mentor, to provide a support service for students during the main period of the programme. Mentors receive training at a full day workshop delivered by the National Mentoring Consortium. This mechanism provides the added benefit of a development opportunity for the mentors themselves.

The mentoring itself consists of:

- regular email communication between mentor and mentee
- online tutorials, in which mentors facilitate discussion with their mentees

Mentors are drawn from two distinct groups:

- Staff working for commercial, public and private sector organisations
- Mature students with some workplace experience

Target audience

There are two distinct target audiences: UK undergraduates and graduate employers. In phase one of the project (September 2001 – May 2002) we will be concentrating on 14 HE institutions and approximately 700 students, with up to 60 HE institutions and 12,000 students participating in year two (from September 2002). We also aim to involve at least ten graduate employers during the initial two phases.

Evaluating success

The following criteria will be used:

- greater numbers of students participating in personal development planning
- establishment of IP as nationally recognised standard
- involvement of employers of students on casual work experience in the project
- reduction in the pressure of the need for work placements
- employer recognition of IP as part of the graduate recruitment sifting process

Various methods will be used to test these criteria:

- participant numbers
- retention rates
- recruitment focus group
- written survey of participants and employers
- workshop evaluation forms

Benefits

For students

- The opportunity to optimise the value of their extra-curricular learning and provide a career management framework
- The chance to demonstrate what they have learnt and to have that learning accredited
- Delivers what they need by exploiting the potential of activities in which they are already engaged

For universities

- The opportunity to be part of a groundbreaking new national initiative
- Provides an excellent product to add genuine value to students' experience of Higher Education
- Draws together all the student development initiatives across an institution towards one cohesive goal
- Develop links with industry
- Develop links with a variety of national networks

For employers

- Gives a greater insight into the experience and competencies of potential recruits
- Provides a standard or 'kitemark' for the skills developed through casual work experience

For employer partners

- National exposure to the key undergraduate audience
- The opportunity to get to know the cream of today's undergraduates in an informal setting
- Staff development through mentoring
- The opportunity to contribute to a key government priority

For mentors

- An excellent staff development opportunity, especially for staff without direct line management responsibilities
- Improvements to self image and self esteem
- Learn more about their own organisation in order to answer questions from mentees
- The mentoring scheme links well to other staff development programmes
- The high quality training provided by the National Mentoring Consortium has widespread application outside this programme

About the project partners

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) is providing overall project management and co-ordination for the Insight Plus programme. Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Mars and Consignia are founder employer partners. The project is also being supported by Independent News & Media, activate.co.uk, NEBS Management, National Union of Students (NUS) and the National Association of Student Employment Staff.

Getting involved

CRAC are now recruiting universities for phase two of the programme from September 2002 as well as mentors from across the country. Please contact Adam Nichols, Programme Manager if you are interested in either of these opportunities at adam.nichols@crac.org.uk or on 01223 448514.