

CASE STUDY: Vacation Work, University of Western Sydney

Description

In the mid 1990's, the initial drivers for this project were the lack of industry awareness of the quality of UWS students, and graduating students with a lack of professional experiences, where many will be the first in their family to experience professional work roles.

Originally targeted at Biological Science students, the program is now open to all disciplines, with a preference given to students near the conclusion of their studies (from penultimate year on). Approximately 150 students complete the placement each year, where the start time is flexible but often across Winter and Summer vacation periods.

Individual projects are identified by host employers. Students receive payment, originally industry and the UWS covered 50% each, now solely covered by the host employer.

UWS Careers & Co-operative Education secures the host employers and has established a competitive selection process, which takes place at the conclusion of a Professional Development Day, where students are exposed to workplace communication, ethics, behaviour, dress, business report writing and project planning and career development processes.

A variety of procedures and guidelines are presented in a handbook which contain templates on how the student reports should be constructed, as well as responsibilities on behalf of the student, the employer and the university.

Students prepare a 'scoping statement' in week 1 of the project, which the employer agrees to. The employer then 'signs off' on the student report at the end of the project, as well as an Evaluation Report - which results in their payment. The student also prepares a Business report - which contains reflective elements which connect with career development processes

Career Development Learning Elements

CDL elements (such as self awareness and career decision making and job seeking) are incorporated within the Professional Development Day. The reporting/reflective Business Report facilitates self awareness post project. The Co-op Alumni Network (CAN) stages events which promote knowledge of the world of work and enhanced employment seeking activities.

Critical Success Factors

Increasing student awareness of the range of opportunities available within the Vacation Projects program, and conversely securing sufficient places from employer hosts.