

## “Connections” Pilot Project Final Report

### Development of Transnational Work-Based Learning in the Curriculum - An Approach Informed by the Student Experience

#### Introduction

This report covers primarily the initiation, outcomes and recommendations of this pilot project undertaken mainly from March to June 2012 and collaboratively by:



The report abstracts from, and refers to, the Open Educational Resource (OER)<sup>1</sup> ebook-format output from the project. This contains considerably more detail including all the underpinning employer & student survey data and interview transcripts of 7 transnational work placement students (6 b.i.b. students in the Hampshire region and 1 Solent student in Munich) and their respective employers.

#### Initiation and Context

##### *Aims of the project*

There is convincing evidence that transnational work-based learning (WBL) enhances employability. However, Erasmus statistics show that engagement with international<sup>2</sup> WBL in the curriculum is relatively low, particularly in STEM<sup>3</sup> disciplines in the UK. The aim of the project is therefore to develop transnational WBL in the curriculum by developing transnational work placements and internationalised learning activities for developing graduate employability skills.

<sup>1</sup> The OER is available on the HEA web site. It is written to be as applicable as possible to other institutions, although there is inevitably some content specific to the collaborating institutions.

<sup>2</sup> The terms transnational and international are used rather loosely in this report, although a distinction can be drawn. Transnational tends to imply a sense of flow across borders, eg working in another national context. International tends to imply a sense of interaction, eg companies from different nations working collaboratively.

<sup>3</sup> STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

### ***Institutional context and history/rationale for the initiative***

The project was undertaken collaboratively by the Technology School of Southampton Solent University, the b.i.b. International College<sup>4</sup> (Germany), EISC Ltd<sup>5</sup> and the SSU Solent Students Union (represented by a School computing student). It extends the “transnational employability” theme of related strategic University and EU Leonardo Mobility funded projects involving the Technology School, b.i.b. and EISC Ltd. An overview of these projects and their relationship is provided in the OER.

### ***Management of the project***

A project team, plan, resources and methodology were established in line with the project proposal and agreed with senior management of the partner institutions. Details of institutional and team roles are provided in the OER. The project was monitored and controlled by the project lead throughout. The project process and product were evaluated by applying an adaption of Kirkpatrick’s [1] 4 levels of reaction, learning, behaviour and organisation.

### ***Timescales***

The plan (detailed in the OER and consistent with the proposal) was completed broadly as follows:  
*Interviews and surveys of transnational placement students and employers – March/April 2012*  
*Social media experiment to attract students – April/May 2012*  
*Analysis and design for the curriculum, OER draft and main dissemination event – May/June 2012*

## **Outcomes and Evaluation**

### ***Key Outcomes***

Outcomes from the project, which reflect the proposed intended outcomes, include:

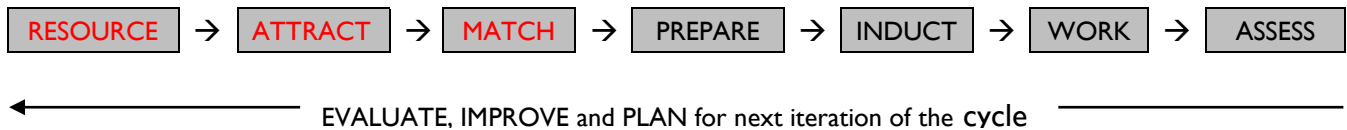
- a proposed life-cycle model for supporting transnational work placement in the curriculum
- a first attempt to attract students to work placement using social media
- a brief analysis of perspectives of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to work globally with reference to a published “graduate attributes” framework [2]
- example internationalised learning activities for developing graduate employability skills

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<sup>4</sup>b.i.b. is the “Bildungszentrum fuer Informationverarbeitende Berufe” – translated as the “Educational Centre for Information Processing Professions”. The English section on their web site at [www.bib.de](http://www.bib.de) describes who they are, what they do, their links with employers etc.

<sup>5</sup> EISC Ltd - European Information Service Centre (an Enterprise Europe Network company) located in offices at the Southampton & Fareham Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Southampton.

The model below, abstracted from the OER, shows stages in the life-cycle of developing transnational placements. This includes specific institutional, student and company responsibilities (not shown). The red indicates stages additional for transnational over national placements.



Essentially, the **reaction** of all the stakeholders, including students, employers and placement tutors, to this process and experience was entirely positive as evidenced by the interviews and surveys in the OER. It is also clear the **learning** of the stakeholders in how to benefit from and improve this process, particularly with respect to the PREPARE stage. There is also encouraging evidence of the **behaviour** of the stakeholders in continuing to “spread the word” and develop the transnational work placement programme more deeply and widely. However, it remains an open question as to the extent of impact of this work on the partner institutions at the **organisation** level - more specifically, whether it results in the development of a fully supported transnational work placement programme across the institutions with the potential to attract new students. So far though, two 2<sup>nd</sup> year Solent IT students “attracted, matched and prepared” through April to June are now working their placement year at Roland Berger Strategy Consultants in Munich and Hamburg respectively – a 100% increase on last year!

The example internationalised learning activities in the OER should be established straightforwardly in the next academic year on a level 5 20 credit point Graduate Development module that is taught across the School. Although the **reaction** of stakeholders at the main dissemination event was very positive, it is the intention to evaluate the impact fully next year.

### ***Challenges that have been overcome***

The very strength of the project in terms of the many (including international) employers, students, services and other stakeholders and the multi-faceted project team created a big coordination and communication challenge. The incremental development of the OER ebook as a common repository of plans and information helped, but ultimately many individual “messages” to make sure things happened proved an effective way forward. Furthermore, informing and briefing more widely, including attracting 35 attendees to the main dissemination event, was also a time-consuming challenge overcome in a similar manner.

### ***Connecting stakeholders***

This project and its events illustrate the value of a significant work placement programme, whether transnational or national, in connecting institutions, employers, students, faculties and services. In particular, forging ongoing mutually beneficial collaborations with employers has been a significant additional benefit from these projects. The photos below show networking at the main

dissemination event on the 28<sup>th</sup> June and an event on the 19<sup>th</sup> April at which employers and students were interviewed (and where other key employability colleagues networked). The main event, apart from presentations by the project team, included informal contributions from employers<sup>6</sup>, students, tutors and support staff participating in the work placement programme. Attendees came from across and beyond the University including members of the University's senior management team.



Networking – 28<sup>th</sup> June



Students Interview – 19<sup>th</sup> April



Employers & Tutors – 19<sup>th</sup> April

## Reflections and the Future?

### ***Sustainability***

Continuing to develop the transnational work placement programme remains a challenge. For example, maintaining Erasmus/Leonardo Mobility funding, upgrading the University's new online placement application system for transnational placements, attracting students and identifying more transnational employers. This is discussed further in the OER.

Developing internationalised learning activities related to graduate employability skills (as illustrated in the OER) for all students at home should be sustainable in a normal module development cycle because no significant additional resources should normally be necessary.

### ***Reflection on learning***

It was not apparent just how critical the contribution of key team members to the project would actually be in achieving its success. Do things differently? - not significantly, although it was probably too ambitious with the time resource available. However, with the sheer hard work (additional to normal commitments) of the project team we got away with it!

<sup>6</sup> This included an inspirational video about the value of work placements and working globally by one of the employers available on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9yS6Yw3ONQ>

It was not a challenge to engage students, and the Students Union, with the project whether on the project team or contributing to the surveys and interviews. This perhaps reflects growing recognition that international issues are important, and contributing to projects whilst at University is good for the CV. Finding time early on to inform students about the project was key.

Furthermore, it was not a challenge to connect with and engage service colleagues from across the institution. This included staff from the University's employability, placements and international teams. Reasons for this? – perhaps simply the enthusiasm to provide support for a curriculum enhancement project that sourced from the academics. Again, it paid dividends to find time early on to inform potential contributors about the project. Engaging employers was not a problem having established a key link with the Enterprise Europe network and early identification of potential mutual benefit.

### **Potential further work**

As discussed earlier, it is the intention to improve all the stages of the lifecycle model next year. For example, the 2 students who have now started their placements at Roland Berger Strategy Consultants in Germany, and the student who will be continuing to work at Roland Berger (and study the final year at a distance) have agreed to run the social media trial again to attract student using the established blog infrastructure but this time from the beginning of next year.

There is considerable potential to research and draw upon developments in this employability field including, for example, the European University Enterprise Network (EUE - NET): *The EUE-Net - European University-Enterprise Network - is an initiative to create a European Cooperation Network able to assemble and to coordinate the efforts towards a better collaboration between universities and enterprises at European level, to disseminate cooperation models and to promote best practices of collaboration in Europe, totally oriented to support the new European initiative "New skills for new jobs"*[3]

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations to institutions include:

#### *Developing Transnational WBL in the Curriculum*

1. Include, particularly in courses with little international curriculum content, relatively “quick-win” international learning activities (eg about working in international project teams or simply creating a Europass CV) that should enhance graduate employability.
2. Support a transnational placement programme for at least 2 years to fully test the potential to attract students and the viability of the proposed life-cycle model in the particular institutional context.
3. Establish or extend work placement programmes and work-based learning, whether national or transnational, across the institution to enhance the employability of students, and to derive mutual benefit for tutors and employers.

*Implementing Curriculum Development Projects*

4. Find time early on to inform and identify from the often willing pool of students, employers, tutors, service colleagues and other stakeholders (both internal and external) that can bring real value to “connected” development projects of this nature.
5. Adopt an efficient and effective approach to communications (a necessary consequence of 4.).

The OER draws conclusions under *Transnational Work Placements*, *Internationalising the Curriculum* and *Connecting Potential Stakeholders* in that this might also help colleagues draw up further recommendation relating to internationalising the WBL curriculum in their particular institutional context. However, all the interview transcripts (which have been checked and approved for publication by the participants) and survey data are provided for others to draw their own conclusions underpinning further recommendations.

**Further information**

The OER and video are available as indicated by the footnotes on pages 1 and 4 respectively.

**References**

1. KIRKPATRICK PARTNERS, 2012. Training Evaluation Model. <http://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com> (accessed August 2012).
2. OLIVER, 2012. Assuring Graduate Capabilities. <http://boliver.ning.com> (accessed May 2012).
3. EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ENTERPRISE NETWORK (EUE - NET), 2012. <http://www.eue-net.org> (accessed August 2012).