

Project Description

The aim of the project was to establish principles for best practice in work placements for the Masters Courses of the Modern Language Teaching Centre (MLTC) of the University of Sheffield. The purpose of the project is to achieve this aim through strengthening the link between industry and the University and through an exchange of expertise between staff.

The project was designed to enable the MLTC and industry to:

- develop a joint understanding of the needs of companies in the region with regard to receiving work placement opportunities;
- develop support materials for postgraduate students in preparation for undertaking work placements;
- devise a set of principles for placements with Sheffield companies to ensure the effectiveness of such placements for business;
- initiate a database of companies interested in taking students for placements.

Project Partners

Gripple Ltd, a local company with a multilingual work-force and expertise in highly successful work placements was chosen to work with the University on this project. The Sheffield-based Regional Languages Network has also acted as a consultant on the project to ensure the applicability of the findings to other companies in the region.

The Partners - Gripple Ltd (Phillipe Marzin, industry), the MLTC, the University of Sheffield (Jane Woodin and Marjorie Allan) and the Regional Languages Network (Sandra Potestà) have worked together, exchanging knowledge and experience to establish best practice.

Project Scope

In addition to working with Gripple Ltd, the MLTC also sought input from other local businesses in the South Yorkshire and Humberside region with language needs and/or who work in an international/intercultural context, in various sectors or industries.

Project Approach

The QAA guidelines for placement learning state that: “An effective placement learning opportunity is one in which the aims and intended learning outcomes are clearly defined and understood by all parties and where the responsibilities of the higher education institution, placement provider and the student are made explicit” (QAA guidelines on placement learning p2).

The proposed framework of the project was, therefore, a three-pronged partnership approach, which should be of mutual benefit for the University, the Student and the Placement Provider (Company). In other words, work placements should enable the University students to have access to practical learning opportunities and the Company to have access to a skilled resource and skilled potential employees.

Outputs

The University gains:

- quality, long-lasting links with local business, leading to increased opportunities for future collaboration;
- the opportunity to gain expertise of direct relevance to its taught Masters' courses from one of Sheffield's most forward-thinking companies;
- a distinct and appealing element to its Applied Taught Masters' programme which would give it an edge over competitor universities, making our staff more aware of the needs of business, our graduates more employable and increasing the numbers of taught Masters' students;
- opportunities to contribute to the retention of graduates in the region and for the creation of work-ready graduates; this is one of the FRESA (Framework for Regional Employment & Skills Action) objectives;
- opportunities to raise the profile of the University foreign languages provision within the private sector;
- contribution towards the University's Mission Statement Aims, in particular the following:
 - "to contribute to the local, national and international communities by applying its expertise for intellectual, social, economic, technological, environmental and cultural development"
 - "to engender in students a commitment to self improvement, enterprise and the development of life skills, in order to facilitate their full contribution to the society in which they live and serve"

The business gains:

- an improved understanding of the nature of applied languages teaching at Postgraduate level and the expertise of MLTC staff;
- access to highly qualified work-ready students with expertise in languages, communication & IT and the ability to apply their knowledge to the workplace;
- the opportunity to provide quality input and appropriate guidance into the Taught Masters' Programme on work placements, ensuring the needs of business are met;
- input from the University with regard to the preparation of students for work placement;
- guidelines and principles for setting up work placements;
- the opportunity to contribute to the FRESA objectives for increasing graduate retention and for creating work-ready graduates;

The Student gains:

- new opportunities in work placements to develop their skills & broaden their experience.
- a well structured and successful work placement
- access to a catalogue of information to prepare them for a placement
- an increased level of support on a placement, both from the University and the Company.
- evaluation materials to enable them to best incorporate the placement into their long-term career plan.