Developing an International Placements Programme for Planning and Property Students

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SUMMARY
Using China as a pilot case study, this project sought to examine the opportunities and constraints of developing an international placements programme and aimed to secure six placement opportunities for Chinese students. The project also sought to help TRP develop a more detailed understanding of international employers' expectations and of the Chinese employment markets that TRP graduates enter. This project will assist us in developing ways to enhance the employability of our Chinese graduates and in considering international placement opportunities for all students in other countries.

WHAT ISSUE WERE YOU TRYING TO ADDRESS AND WHY?
Most of our students are required to undertake placements as an integral part of their studies, so we wanted to explore the feasibility of providing placement opportunities to our increasing cohort of international students in their home countries. This is partly in response to the difficulties we have faced in securing local placement opportunities for our international students. We also want to be in a position to provide useful and relevant placements to those international students who return home upon graduation, often without work experience in their home job market. This project therefore offered us the additional opportunity to examine how we might be able to enhance international student employability and assist international students in their career and professional development.

DESCRIBE YOUR APPROACH AND METHODS USED
Our approach and methods focused on:
- Collating data on the international employment destinations of recent graduates using TUOS alumni office and careers service and TRP’s graduate network
- Creating a database of key international planning and property employers in China, using web searching
- Approaching employers via email to discuss the potential for, and arrange, international placement/internship opportunities
- Designing an international placements programme for Chinese students
- Reflecting on the impact of this project on current teaching practice beyond placements
**BENEFITS**

Based on the premise that placements provide students with added value from experiencing the worlds of planning and property ‘live’ and are a significant ingredient in enhancing their employability, the project has provided the following benefits:

- Ability to offer placement opportunities and work experience opportunities for Chinese students in their home country with 3 organisations in Beijing and 1 in Guangzhou. Each organisation is willing to take 3-5 students.
- An awareness of Chinese employer expectations, including what skills, experience and competencies Chinese students are expected to have and/or develop
- Providing opportunities for Chinese students to develop international competencies and global skills through additional work experience opportunities beyond the formal placement programme
- Increasing the international reach and relevance of TRP's degree programmes

*Describe benefits from an international competencies perspective*

- Within our existing curricula, we are able to offer Chinese students the opportunity to gain work experience that is relevant and useful for their professional and career development should they choose to return home upon graduation
- We have developed some insight into Chinese employer expectations and the Chinese TRP job market, which we can use to support our Chinese students in the transition from higher education to employment. This will be integrated into our Departmental Employability Strategy.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

- Chinese Governmental planning organisations would not offer internships
- The privately owned companies who responded positively are all eager to establish a long-term partnership of offering internship opportunities to our students
- A longer term resource is needed to help develop relations with international employers, not just establish opportunities for placements.
- Developing placement opportunities takes time and doesn't always fit within the boundaries of a funded research project
- Due to language barriers, our students will be required to arrange and organise their own placement using the contacts we have established, which might be a fairly overwhelming experience for those with no professional work experience to date
- Agreements regarding health and safety and indemnity insurance need to be considered when arranging placements

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As part of the Think Global project, we aim to provide resources to support the internationalisation of the learning and teaching environment. If you require further information, please contact us:

lets@sheffield.ac.uk