

Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Embedding industry engagement to improve employability

Transition(s) the practice supports: *(the aim of this is to identify where this would sit on the transitions map. It would help to know which students it supports – eg discipline related, widening participation, those going on placement)*

This practice supports the transitions into employment of students on a taught postgraduate course

Abstract: *(a brief outline of the practice – this will allow all your institutional examples to appear on the one page of the website, linking to further information. This should be no longer than 120 words.)*

One of the key drivers for undertaking postgraduate study is for a person to improve their employment prospects, and the various routes through which we embed engagement with the energy sector within the MSc Global Energy Management course is designed to reflect the needs of students in this regard. In addition to gaining important skills and knowledge, students are also supported to begin the process of establishing their own professional networks which should provide a real advantage as they embark on their careers in the sector. In addition to hearing and learning from industry experts from across the sector, and being exposed to different and often competing arguments, students get the kind of practical and contemporary insights that will prepare them for entry into working in the sector.

Description: *(this is the information to which the abstract would link) a more detailed description of the practice with an indication what led to its development, how long it has been in place, and why it benefits students. This could be written, in a multimedia form or presented as a poster (PowerPoint slide or PDF).*

Industry engagement is at the heart of the MSc in Global Energy Management (GEM). To do this, different approaches are taken. Firstly, we invite a range of external speakers from different parts of the energy sector to visit the university to give 2-hour seminars. This forms part of a credit bearing module. Secondly, as part of this module, students undertake a number of field trips to broaden their understanding of the energy industry. This serves two purposes, firstly it exposes students to a broader range of people working in the energy sector, and secondly it expand their knowledge of the sector. These speakers and trips act as important reference points for students seeking employment. Third, we recognise industry internships undertaken during the final (summer) semester as the basis on which a student can write their final piece of coursework, the 'dissertation' in a traditional MSc. This enables students working in the sector on an internship to harness the insights and expertise they have access to in the sector to produce a report, of high academic quality, to fulfil their final coursework requirements. These internships have proven to be an excellent route into employment for our students.

Our Global Energy Forum now includes speakers from each dimension of the energy sector. We have talks from: policymakers in government, industry associations, energy consultancies, utility companies, the energy regulator, and a former Energy Minister. The calibre and experience of these speakers is notable and reflected in the content of their contributions. In addition to gaining important insights into the challenges and issues facing the energy sector from a range of speakers, students also begin the process of establishing for themselves their own professional network in the sector. This has some short-term gains

in terms of seeking internship opportunities, but is intended to offer much longer term advantages as they embark upon their career in the energy sector. Furthermore, giving students this level and frequency of exposure to professionals in the energy industry better prepares students for the reality of working in the sector and gives them the opportunity to engage in discussions about their career plans.

Establishing a high quality roster of external speakers is difficult when first establishing this kind of class. It becomes easier over time, although when focussed on attracting the highest calibre of speakers one inevitably runs into diary conflict issues. We have generally opted for a 2-hour slot on a Wednesday lunchtime, but have arranged alternative times to fit in with the diary commitments of our speakers. The logistics of field trips can become burdensome, although it too decreases somewhat in intensity over time.

There are no obvious 'we wish we hadn't done THAT' issues with this course. We review and reflect annually on how the course has gone and whether or not to invite particular speakers back again. In some cases, the first presentation by a speaker has not gone particularly well, usually as a result of the focus being overly broad or overly narrow. We generally ask speakers to address an issue of current relevance to their organisation, and to do so in an analytical and robust way. All of the students may not have the technical experience to understand all of the terminology, but they have a general enough grounding in the key elements of energy technologies, markets and policies that they can follow along and research additional material. Getting good guidance to the speakers is key. We have usually fed back to any speakers whose first talk was not as successful as we hoped, and this feedback has resulted in a much closer alignment with our course objectives in their subsequent talk.

We have generally around 20 students on this programme. This number works well for the seminars and the field trips. We deliberately encourage a lot of questions and discussions during (with the permission of the speaker) and after the talks. It is difficult to see how the quality of engagement between speaker and student could be maintained with many more students. For sure, more people could be in the room for the talk itself, but there is simply no way that the students could meaningfully network with the speaker if there were significantly more students present. In terms of field trips, this becomes significantly more difficult with greater numbers, e.g. many of the generation stations that we visit have limits on the numbers that can visit at any one time, which poses an additional constraint.

If this kind of approach were to be implemented on a larger programme, we do not think that the field trips would work. In addition, we think some thought would have to be given about how to maintain some kind of engagement with the speaker and the students. For larger courses this may have to be sacrificed entirely, but at a minimum the principal of having an industry engagement class on PGT programmes is a good one and could work in larger classes although without the kind of student/speaker engagement that makes the Global Energy Forum class work so well.

The importance of industry engagement, particularly at PGT level, is only going to increase over time. This is good. There are important synergies that exist by working with industry. One of the most obvious for us has been that it provides a means of helping our students gain internship and ultimately employment opportunities. It really helps distinguish our graduates in the job market that they have experience engaging and in many cases working with industry. In addition, one of the more recent developments has been that this course has enabled us to engage on a continuing basis with the graduates of our programme and their colleagues working in the energy sector. This enables our students to benefit from the experience of our own graduates and for our graduates to act as programme ambassadors. We would suggest that the approach demonstrated through the Global Energy Forum class

could, with the right blend of commitment and resourcing, be replicated in some way at PGT level throughout the University where there is a clear and obvious touch point with industry.

Contact details: *name and email address of key person (with their permission agreed before submission) who can discuss the case study in more detail.*

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.