

**Title - The Careers and Work Experience Office**

**Keywords** - Employability

**Name** - Kathy Mitchell

**School / Dept** - Department of Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management

**Institution** - Oxford Brookes University

**Activity** - Developing students' awareness of career opportunities and supporting their transition from university to work within the hospitality and tourism industries.

**Group** - Level 3 Hospitality and Tourism undergraduates, MSc Hospitality & Tourism postgraduates.

**Aim** - To prepare students to effectively manage their transition from study to work, expose them to the vast array of career opportunities available within the hospitality and tourism industries and encourage them to pursue a fulfilling employment path.

**Context / Background** - In today's volatile graduate employment market it is paramount that students are equipped with the skills to not only effectively seek out employment but to manage their long-term careers.

**Example** - The Careers and Work Experience Office works in partnership with the University Careers Centre. It provides specialist industry-focused support and guidance to hospitality and tourism students in their career development. Undergraduate students initially forge links with the Office in their first year of study when preparing to undertake their Supervised Work Experience year. In addition to running the placement programme, a key function of the careers team is to provide advice and support to students in preparation for embarking on their careers. This is achieved through the facilitation of company presentations, career fairs and the provision of practical advice and guidance through individual tutorials.

The Office provides students with exposure to a range of companies and career opportunities in a variety of ways. A key vehicle for facilitating this is through company presentations, generally involving large international employers offering graduate development programmes. A career fair is also hosted for smaller industry employers. Students are routinely notified via email of current opportunities and receive notification of the companies scheduled to give presentations throughout the semester. Beyond the weekly updates of relevant vacancies and recruiting organisations, adverts are placed on the careers noticeboard located outside the Office and students can access a file containing all the latest vacancies forwarded to the office. The Office is open five days a week and students can sign up for one on one

tutorials to discuss their personal career aspirations as well as receive practical advice on CV preparation and interview techniques.

In addition, the Careers Office provides advice for students seeking international opportunities upon graduation. Assistance is offered in applying for visas to the United States and Canada and specialist advice is available on preparing resumes and covering letters for American employers.

A key strength of career management skills provision in the Department stems from the strong integration between the Career Planning module offered to final year students and the work undertaken by the Careers Office. In addition to the scheduled employer presentations and practical guidance offered, are two unique evenings, Focus on Careers and the Careers Networking Evening, organised to further enhance students' networking skills.

Focus on Careers is the opening event of the Careers Programme for final year students. This event, which commences with senior industry executives from a range of sectors presenting briefly on career-related topics from the perspective of their organisations, enables students to engage early on in their final year with their future careers. Presentations are followed by a discussion session and an opportunity for students to network informally with the speakers.

The Careers Networking Evening, hosted jointly with the Bacchus Student Society, involves departmental alumni returning to share their employment experiences with final year students. Each graduate is based at a table in the Brookes Restaurant and students rotate on a cycle to speak to each alumnus. The exchange of information is invaluable and helps students engage with the different career paths former students have taken. Graduates are also able to offer advice on job searching and career management based on their own experiences.

An additional key feature of the daytime and evening careers events, which links directly with the Career Planning module, is the opportunity for students to host the visiting employers and alumni by welcoming them to the institution, dining with them and presenting their thanks on behalf of those present. This enables students to further develop their networking abilities, a key skill for sustained career success.

**Other comments** - The Careers and Work Experience Office provides students with a number of highly effective opportunities for receiving practical advice, engaging with potential career opportunities and further developing themselves. The recently introduced Career Planning module fully complements the range of opportunities provided by the Office and this positive integration serves to further enhance student learning and their appreciation of required career management skills. A high level of uptake of the services offered by the Careers and Work Experience Office demonstrates that students are very willing to engage with extra curricula activities that help develop their skills for employment.

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