The need for alternate approaches to Cooperative Education
Increasing responsiveness to varied industry needs

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Recent years have seen research publications investigating and debating models of cooperative education practice at Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s). These publications showed that there is still uncertainty as to what is the appropriate response to industry needs. It reflected a singular view from the perspective of HEI’s as opposed to one based on a responsive culture to industry and their emerging needs.

As a result, Higher Education Institutions may need to adopt a consultative approach and develop a response that is balanced by the constraints of working within a public Institution. The main objective of this research was to investigate whether the availability of different models of Cooperative Education Programmes would enhance the uptake from both industry and students of cooperative education programmes.

A blended research approach was followed through the use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Four focus group sessions solicited needs from industry that reflected different priorities for various industry partners. These needs were categorised and a survey distributed to 85 Industry Scholarship (IS) Sponsors (as at 2008-2010), this represented all of the current industry partners. The survey measured the perceptions of Industry regarding HEIs construction of industry based scholarships and the benefit of being a partner in the experiential learning. The survey identified the following key points:

- Structure and the models of operation
- Financial contribution and the return on investment proposition
- Flexibility of models to adapt to various industries
- Responsiveness to emerging trends and projected labour market shortages
- Consultative framework and level of stakeholder engagement

Results showed that different responses were required and that the flexibility of response improved the adoption of cooperative education practice by both industry and students. Discussion will be invited on HEIs response to industry needs and the steps needed to continue evolving to meet future industry needs.

Keywords: Industry partners, Cooperative Education, collaboration, consultation, flexible models, responsiveness

University of Newcastle (UoN) Industry Scholarships

The University of Newcastle Industry Scholarship program facilitates partnerships and connects industry with students in the form of an Industry scholarship. The Industry Scholarship program is a key strategy adopted by the University of Newcastle to produce the work ready graduates demanded by employers.

The World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) defines Cooperative education as a formally recognised academic program integrating classroom learning and productive work experiences in a field related to a students’ academic and career goals. Currently over 71 % of scholars on the Industry Scholarship program have opportunities to undertake industry placements that align directly with their area or study. Students are able to utilise their placement activities as evidence towards achieving competencies and the industry placement reports may be recognised as part of an assessable task.

The 5 underpinning principles for the establishment; or variation to; models adopted by UoN Industry Scholarships are based on values and principles associated with W.I.L and Cooperative Education. The 5 features are:-

1. Relationships – Sponsors, Scholars and the University remain committed to maximising the relationship.
2. Selection – Sponsors are involved in the process of selection and Scholars have a choice in selecting their Sponsor (subject to availability).
3. Integration – academic studies and industry placements are aligned, with experience adding value to assessable tasks.
4. Professional development – the academic experience is enhanced by the industry placement, with additional opportunities for development to create leaders of the future.
5. Rewarding – financially and developmentally for scholars; professionally for Sponsors and enhancing the reputation of the University.

Industry Partnerships

Patrick (2009) argues that universities are under increasing pressure from government, industry, professions, and the community to respond to skills shortages by producing a work ready professionalised workforce with the requisite employability skills who can meet the needs of a rapidly changing economy. The Rudd and Gillard Labour governments “Education Revolution” continues a trend visible in enhancing the role of universities in generating graduates who are work ready. Given this level of interest and demand, it should come as no surprise that HEI’s will need to find ways to be responsive to industry. Industry partners are in business to either grow or sustain their business, to ensure their operations remain commercially competitive and financially viable. HEI’s have an obligation to actively listen to their industry partners if they seek to secure financial support. HEI’s will need to adapt to the changing needs of the business community if they are to continue seeking financial support in an increasingly competitive global market. The global financial market directly impacts on our industry partners and as it affects their capacity to fund or support education initiatives it is important to be cognisant of the extrinsic pressures faced by industry.

Identifying what motivates an industry partner to be involved is essential. The majority of Industry sponsors have identified their involvement is linked to their strategic workforce planning. A minority are involved with the program as part of a broader philanthropic community engagement strategy, with many local Council partners stating this as a primary objective in their strategic plan.

The nature of cooperative activity includes the ability to collaborate, to adapt and adjust to evolving conditions. Breen (2001) comments that that reciprocity between partners is important for cooperative education partnerships, with reciprocity relying on evolving adaptations and meeting mutual obligations between partners.

Quality and reputation building

To ensure continued positive rapport with Industry and reputation building within the broader business community, a cornerstone of the philosophy of Industry Scholarships is to adopt a consultative approach. Dobbelstein states that “Cooperative education may be seen as the close cooperation between higher education institutions and the world of work. The participation of industry is the key to the success of the cooperative education model”. In this context, companies have a choice of institutions to select where they would best like to invest and engage in the cooperative agenda. Universities need to think about their competitive advantage so they are able to attract industry.

With increasing competition in this area, it is not enough to just fulfil the requirements because every University will do so. It is important to make the sponsor companies feel enthusiastic about the way they interact with UON and to ultimately exceed their expectations. In this context, the branding, positioning and processes employed by the University of Newcastle must meet or even exceed pre-conceived notions that industry have about engaging with universities.

A consultative framework

The Industry Scholarship program has evolved to a mature consultative model, with the ability to respond to industry partners in a more flexible manner. The evolution of the program has dictated that the program is now more robust and complex than in previous years. As of 2012 there have been 3 formal phases of consultation, with the implementation of suggestions for improvement resulting in significant improvements to the program.

Phase 1 2006- a 1 day, externally facilitated workshop. The purpose was to commence a process of consultation with key stakeholders and review the program. The participant group involved 22 external industry sponsors; 4 scholars, 2 Senior Executives and 3 staff. The outcome was a recommendation for the consultation and review process to continue every 2 years. There were a range of recommendations related to infrastructure and
governance issues. These recommendations were adopted and in recognition of workload, a new Manager was appointed in 2007.

Phase 2 2008 – there was extensive consultation undertaken with 85 (100%) of Industry Sponsors. The outcome was that not only did the Industry Sponsors think the focus needed to remain on infrastructure, it needed to expand to include quality assurance in the areas of: - governance, policies and procedures; financial and legal administration; increasing positive outcomes for student experience; and improving sponsor relationship management.

Phase 3 2010 - A variety of methods were used to capture feedback. Advice was sent to over 250 stakeholders, which represented all Industry Sponsors, University stakeholders and Scholars. This was to advise that there would be a 6 month review and consultation phase. The advice provided an outline of the timeframes and methodology to be used for consultation. A critical success factor to engage with industry and maximise participation was to indicate that action would occur. Consultation was via small informal forums; telephone interviews; online surveys and an Executive steering committee for proposing recommended changes.

**Key Findings of Phase 3**

This phase was more inclusive of all Industry Scholarship stakeholders. Industry sponsors, Scholars and University staff involved with supporting the program were consulted; the ensuing main reforms have resulted in a high quality, flexible, responsive and innovative industry scholarship program.

**Table 1: Key Improvements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to 2008</th>
<th>Changes commencing late 2010, continuing into 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program known as UNISS</td>
<td>Name change to Industry Scholarships</td>
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<tr>
<td>One (1) model – “UNISS Foundation model”</td>
<td>Five (5) flexible models available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target- 1st year undergrad FEBE students</td>
<td>Target – any year and most disciplines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarships only in Engineering</td>
<td>Scholarships offered across any discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full year placement (gap from study) mandated</td>
<td>Flexible models offer range of options</td>
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<tr>
<td>One intake per year</td>
<td>Three intakes per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry placement completed in summer break</td>
<td>Industry placement structure is flexible</td>
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<td>Majority of sponsors were repeat “business”</td>
<td>Increased number of new industry sponsors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average intake # 22</td>
<td>Increase in intake numbers; 2012 = 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor agreements inconsistent; complex, not provided to all stakeholders</td>
<td>Sponsor agreements standardised, legally compliant and available to all stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerous variations on pricing depending on year accepted into program, all based on Engineering scholarships</td>
<td>Consistent pricing models across engineering disciplines. Non-engineering pricing determined by industry labour market rates.</td>
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</table>

There is flexibility in the 5 models outlined below, with variations to placement duration and the financial contribution from sponsors varying depending on the industry and preferred model.

“**Industry Alliance**” is the preferred longer term model as sponsors seek to assist in the professional development of a scholar and establish a long term connection. This model can be 4 or 5 years and is available with or without a full Year placement period. Where applicable a scholar undertakes a Final Year project with the sponsor.

The **IBIS** model is similar to Industry Alliance in structure but support mechanisms and ratio of available mentors to scholars is higher.

“**Industry Connect**” assists small to medium size companies by offering them the opportunity to connect and engage with scholars for a period of less than one year. Often this scholarship model is used over the University vacation period.

“**UNIGRAD**” has been developed to assists sponsors make a stronger connection with students in their final one or two years of study. Many sponsors incorporate this model into their workforce planning strategy.

“**T.A.P**” (Talent Acquisition Program) is an innovative model developed and tailored to suit the emerging needs of industry, specifically those with labour market shortage in a number of key areas. Similar to a “cadetship” style program, students maintain full-time study and complete the equivalent of 1 or 2 days a week on placement with the sponsor.

In 2008 100% of scholars were studying in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment. In 2012 the diversity of the program reflects the success of responding to industry and providing multiple options. In 2012 there is approx. 50% of Industry scholarships offered external to Engineering (Diagram 1).
A case study: Capturing emerging needs and responding to corporate citizenship

Corporate citizenship can be extended to mean the total impact of the company’s activities on society. The role of companies in society has dramatically changed (Osburg, 2009) with new forms of cooperation emerging (Schrader, 2003).

One current challenge for HEI’s is to respond to federal government initiatives and provide more concentrated engagement with students from diverse cultural and socio economic backgrounds. To provide a meaningful education experience for this group of students may require a more flexible approach, with curriculum and methodology of engagement needing rigorous review. The political and social agendas in our society significantly impact on our response not only to government but to Industry needs.

In 2010 there was a need identified to create a program in response to industry feedback regarding issues of engaging with the Indigenous community. Community in this instance refers not only to the broader community, but specifically to enhance opportunities for industry to build and increase the representation of Indigenous employees in their workforce. Sponsors who identified this as part of their corporate responsibility are embracing the Industry-based Indigenous Scholarship (IBIS)

Industry Sponsors adopting the IBIS model as part of their corporate strategy expressed a desire to create a pathway for Indigenous students to undertake tertiary studies and gain relevant industry experience.

“IBIS” – the Industry Based Indigenous Scholarship (IBIS) model is flexible and supportive. Collaborating with the Wollotuka Institute, this model offers real world opportunities for our UoN Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

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<tr>
<th>Study Year</th>
<th>Study Program</th>
<th>Placement Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>12 weeks/60 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>12 weeks/60 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>12 weeks/60 days</td>
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Conclusion

Industry scholarships will maintain a consultative framework to review the motivation or objectives of Industry Sponsors. It is important for continued success that HEI’s find ways to engage with industry in a meaningful way, that adds value to their business.

The current strategic aim for the Industry Scholarships program is to remain competitive, responsive to Industry and achieve growth in both the diversity and quantity of scholarships on offer. A cornerstone of this strategy is to offer scholarship options which reflect the expectations and needs of relevant industries.

For Industry Scholarships to achieve its goal of diversification and growth it will need to establish its value within the broader community through developing a reputation of being trustworthy, accessible to business and responsive to industry needs.


References


Breen, H (2001), Cooperative education partnerships: an examination of reciprocal relationships between universities and tourism and hospitality organisations in providing professional development education for their employees’, Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW


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