Maximising the Benefits of Innovative Engagement with Uni students:

A Guide for Industry and Community

Industry and community organisations have gained many benefits from engaging with tertiary students to undertake placements or projects sometimes known as work integrated learning. (WIL). Now newer models for work integrated learning are emerging that include, micro placements (2 days to a few weeks), online projects or placements, engagement with events, hackathons, or competitions, students undertaking consulting activities for industry partners and student engagement with start-ups or incubators.

Benefits

These models provide many opportunities for broader engagement between tertiary education and industry and community partners particularly for small to medium enterprises due to the flexibility of the activities, and the less time and resources required. The benefits to industry and community include completion of short projects, identification of future talent and access to new thinking or technologies that can assist with growth and the competitiveness of your organisation.

Strategies for Success

Although many of the key approaches to forming and maintaining partnerships are consistent across all forms of work integrated learning the following outlines some of the extra considerations required when entering into these emerging models. Your tertiary education institution contact will also support you through these steps to maximise the benefits from the activity.

Establishing the relationship and preparation before the activity

As many of these newer models can be quite short or undertaken in an online environment it is even more critical to be very clear, explicit and realistic about your expectations and establish good communication with your tertiary education institution partner.

Many of these newer models incorporate elements of co design where the tertiary institution will partner with industry and community groups to design the WIL activity. This will require proactive engagement between the partners to shape the activity to ensure it meets the industry organisation's goals, the students learning needs, and is achievable from the tertiary institutions perspective.

The following outlines key enablers for success:
- Ensure the scope is clearly articulated, documented and agreed by the educational institution. With many of these innovative models there is no time, for example, during a micro placement or hackathon to adjust the scope so it is imperative that this is discussed in advance.
- Agree on realistic timeframes for the WIL activity.
- Ensure roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders are articulated particularly your organisation's role and contribution in relation to staff attendance, supervision of students and any provision of equipment or software. If you are involved in a Hackathon or event on

campus be aware of what technical and other support will be provided by the tertiary institution and its availability or arrangements for access during the event.

- Discuss and agree on arrangements such as intellectual property, use of non-disclosure agreements, and insurance prior to commencement. This is very important with hackathons and competitions. Ensure that students involved are clear about these and their responsibilities.
- Agree on issues such as naming rights, use of logos for promotion and attribution on social media. Ensure consent is given by all participants for taking and using photos.
- Negotiate, agree and then communicate criteria for any judging or providing feedback to participating students in an activity ahead of time.
- Agree on appropriate timeframes and expectations around progress reports and who should receive them and communicate this to students.
- Be aware that start-ups wanting to engage with students may be required by the tertiary institution to sign an agreement to proceed; this requires being legal entity so suitable alternate arrangements may need to be negotiated if start-ups haven't yet been formalised.

Optimising your engagement during the activity

- Utilise your communication channels with tertiary institutions actively throughout the activity.
- Provide timely feedback to tertiary institution staff and address issues as they arise and attempt to resolve them to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders.
- Coach students in either their participation or performance to build their personal capacity and maximise outputs during these activities. This can include:
    - guide students participating in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts like hackathons or virtual projects recognising that diverse cohorts of students will have differing levels of experience and resilience
    - encourage students to ask questions, take an entrepreneurial approach and seek feedback
    - encourage connection through the use of communication strategies including use of technologies for students working virtually
    - prompt students to reflect on their experiences and challenges encountered and recognise these as opportunities for learning
    - prompt participants around health and safety issues e.g. rest and hydration during events or hackathons
    - role model respectful communication and behaviour towards and between participants

NB: Any concerns regarding unacceptable behaviour should be brought to the attention of tertiary institution staff immediately.

Evaluating the WIL activity

- Measure the outcomes and evaluate your organization's involvement.
- Consider what return on investment your organisation received from involvement.
- Share your feedback with the tertiary institution to jointly agree on future improvements.
- Review the design (co-design), implementation and outcomes of the WIL activity including the collaborative approach.