

LTC15D128

Title: **Employability and the curriculum**
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Date: 29/04/2016
Circulation: Learning and Teaching Committee – 11 May 2016
Agenda: LTC15A005
Version: Draft v5
Status: Open

Issue

To consider how employability can be strengthened in the UEA curriculum.

Recommendation

Recipients are invited to consider the following paper *Employability and the Curriculum* and approve the recommendations on pages 8 and 9 as part of developing an over-arching strategy for embedding employability into the curriculum at UEA.

Resource Implications

There will be resource implications associated with expanding student opportunities and these are currently under consideration as part of resourcing commitments in the UEA Plan.

Risk Implications

Implementation of the recommendations is intended to help reduce risk to the University associated with its performance on Graduate Prospects. The risk of not addressing employability development within UEA courses will be that a significant fraction of students will continue to neglect their employability development whilst at UEA, resulting in under-employment after graduation and further challenges in maintaining/ improving league table positions.

Equality and Diversity

This will be taken into account by Schools when developing employability related opportunities, particularly in relation to work placements.

Timing of decisions

A decision soon will allow colleagues time to incorporate into course planning and revision for 2017-18.

Further Information

For further information please contact James Goodwin, (j.goodwin@uea.ac.uk ext. 2826)

Background

This paper is the product of many discussions involving employability stakeholders (mainly Heads of Careers Service, Associate Deans Employability, Academic Director Employability, PVC Academic) over the last 6 months and has been approved by the Employability Executive in March 2016.

Discussion

At time of writing the latest Complete University Guide data confirms that UEA has slipped 8 positions in ranking for Graduate Prospects (from 47th to 55th) and it remains UEA's poorest performing metric. Despite increased focus and effort being placed on employability across the University and improved student engagement with their careers there is clearly more to be done.

The paper (pages 3-9) considers approaches to embedding employability within the curriculum adopted in UK HEIs. It then summarises the existing UEA approach and makes the following recommendations:

1. Each School to consider how their curriculum can be utilised to the greatest advantage for students in developing employability. In many subjects QAA benchmark documents are permissive in terms of what kind of 'content' should be covered. Schools to identify existing content that might be re-purposed (as outlined in Section 3).
2. Each School to reflect on Figure 1 (page 7) and indicate how elements of work-related and work-based learning could be incorporated into each course, ideally aiming for activities extending across the full spectrum, from awareness to workplace experience and harnessing existing Careers Service provision.
3. Each School to outline how it will embed career management within existing courses, identifying appropriate modules and taking into account support for students undertaking work-based learning.
4. Each School to integrate the graduate attribute framework (e.g. as contained within the UEA Learning & Teaching Strategy and the UEA Award) into course design, annual course update, and new course approval. Skills and attribute development to be regularly mapped for each course so that 'gaps' in attribute development can be identified and addressed in a systematic manner.
5. Each School to map student participation in the types of activities across the Student Opportunities Programme matrix (Appendix 1), and to develop proposed targets for the 2016-20 UEA Plan period.
6. Schools in SSF and HUM to set-out plans for developing Year in Industry equivalent programmes.
7. ADs L&T to work with ADs Employability to address responses to these recommendations and bring back to LTC and Employability Executive.

Attachments

Appendix 1 UEA Student Opportunities 2014-15 engagement

Employability and the curriculum

1. Drivers and context

There are several drivers for reforming and developing the curriculum at UEA:

1. The intellectual need to maintain a rigorous and up-to-date curriculum
2. Employability and enhancing skills development within courses, recognising a changing world of work
3. Competition and positioning of UEA course offer in a national and global education market
4. Admissions – attracting students to UEA
5. Improving efficiency and protecting academic staff time for research and other tasks
6. Incorporation of online and blended learning and use of learning technologies
7. New Academic Model and course-level assessment strategies
8. TEF – Teaching Excellence Framework

This paper focuses on employability and enhancing skills development within the curriculum at UEA, recognising this topic also influences some of the other areas described above.

Although a large literature on the subject has developed and many definitions have been proposed, essentially employability comprises two elements: firstly the ability to obtain employment and secondly the ability to succeed and advance once in employment.

Careers Services in universities focus particularly on the first element, namely the ability of students to narrow down their options, make effective applications and secure work experience and graduate employment. Since 2012, UEA has invested in the Careers Service and enterprise as well as in Faculty and School academic positions to strengthen employability. These investments are paying dividends with increased student engagement with the Careers Service and increased awareness in Schools. Student enterprise activity is now well established and The UEA Award (administered by the Careers Service and launched in October 2015) currently has over 600 students registered.

However, whilst surveys consistently reveal that one of the top reasons students come to University is to improve their career chances, there remains a quite high level of ignorance amongst new students about what they actually need to do to achieve this. Both UEA surveys (e.g. Reasons for Choice, Student Tracker Interviews) and national research (e.g. NCUB, NUS) reveal that increasingly year 1 and 2 students expect employability and career preparation to be part of their timetabled course offer and many are unaware of the importance of developing extra-curricular experience. Couple this with evidence that a 'spoon-fed' mentality in year 1 students may be increasing and it implies a resultant struggle with their transition to independent learning and taking responsibility for their own development.

It also implies an upper limit to the proportion of students who use careers services. We know for example that just over 50% of UG students use the UEA Careers Service in a given academic year. Although final year student engagement does increase up to 60%, this still leaves 40 - 50% of students who will be largely reliant on their course and their peer/family networks for their career and employability development. As a result, we have a significant fraction of students who 'slip through the net' and who graduate distinctly unprepared for finding opportunities after university. This is particularly apparent in less vocational subject areas that are traditionally delivered.

The second element of employability as defined above relates to how well the university prepares students to be effective once they are in the workplace. Taught courses are vital in honing the cognitive abilities required to work at 'graduate level'. However, graduate employers require a range of attributes and attitudes that take time to cultivate and they expect a rounded development in addition to subject knowledge, core academic skills, communication and teamwork. Undertaking and reflecting on work experience and extra-curricular activities is now a crucial part of this preparation for the workplace.

If we are to further improve student employability at UEA and in turn improve our Graduate Prospects as measured in the league tables, then we have to address these elements for a larger swathe of our students. Across UK HEIs, attention is increasingly turning to the curriculum to achieve this.

2. Approaches to employability within the curriculum

Five different approaches to embedding employability within the curriculum are summarised in this section – all of which have been adopted to varying degrees by a large number of UK HEIs. These approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in some institutions all have been adopted.

2.1 Freestanding employability modules

These are usually credit-bearing and sometimes compulsory. They vary in the extent to which they balance theory and vocational preparation, as illustrated by the following types:

Career Education. The career education approach offers students the chance to explore in depth career decision making and is grounded in theories drawn from sociology and psychology. It often involves the creation of a stand-alone credit-bearing module assessed by an essay on careers theory. Such modules tend to attract relatively small numbers of students and they are not normally vocationally orientated.

Employability and career learning. A number of institutions (e.g. Newcastle, Essex) offer careers and employability modules. Although often grounded in career theory, these modules attempt to equip students with the practical skills needed for job searching and usually combine traditional career management activities with reflective components. They are sometimes associated with opportunities to gain work experience and may involve employers in assessment.

2.2 Embedding career management material within existing modules

This approach aims to ensure that all students have a basic grounding in CV preparation, job seeking and interview skills. Sessions are delivered in lecture or seminar slots and can involve assessed CV or application form submissions, sometimes with feedback from employers built in. Sessions are usually delivered by careers staff in conjunction with academic staff.

Although arguably all students stand to benefit from acquiring these skills, career management is only one part of employability so such sessions do not necessarily lead to broader employability development unless they are linked with course materials and opportunities for work experience.

2.3 Skills and attribute frameworks

An increasing number of institutions have created attribute frameworks. The basic idea is to supplement or modify traditional learning outcomes and subject benchmark statements with a set

of desirable graduate attributes. Because employers are remarkably consistent in the basic attributes they look for in graduates, these are relatively easy to define but do require careful thought when they are applied to existing course offerings.

Such frameworks can help in clarifying the expected development from a particular module/ course for both the organiser and for students. They can help Schools to address possible gaps across courses or under-developed areas within courses. Where module evaluation includes attributes then feedback is also obtained on the extent to which students have developed as expected.

Attribute frameworks on their own can be limited however: acquisition of attributes does not necessarily mean increased confidence or aspiration, or the acquisition of helpful attitudes (such as work ethic, motivation, resilience) or the instilling of values useful in career choice.

2.4 Work-related learning

Although often mixed with work-based learning, work-related learning (WRL) describes any learning activities that closely reflect real-world tasks and problems. They are sometimes referred to as 'authentic' in that they apply either to professional practice in a particular discipline or reflect the kinds of consequences and behaviours encountered in the workplace.

Whereas work-based learning normally happens within the workplace, as its name implies, work-related learning usually takes place in the classroom as part of the curriculum. Examples can include:

- A lecture, seminar, or workshop led by an external organisation, perhaps giving insight into how subject-related topics are relevant to their day-to-day work
- A workplace scenario, case study, or simulation exercise provided by an external organisation
- A project based around a real business issue
- An assessed enterprise related activity

Work-related learning is already widespread in UK HEIs and internationally. Although traditionally confined to business schools and vocational subjects such as engineering, its use is spreading beyond these disciplines. The University of Essex, for example, has adopted an institution-wide toolkit that allows any subject to introduce WRL.

Work-related learning can be made available to all students through specific exercises, scenarios or tasks and assessed in collaboration with external organisations.

2.5 Work-based learning

Work-based learning (WBL) is work experience that involves learning and assessment activities. It normally takes the form of structured work placements over a defined period and works to meet requirements set both by the employer and the University. Increasingly, it may also embrace enterprise experiences. The following are all examples of WBL:

- One year sandwich placement/ year in industry
- Semester work placement
- Short placement (usually 1 week to 3 months in duration)
- Project conducted wholly or partly in the workplace

Work-based learning is already widespread in UK HEIs and internationally. At UEA all vocational courses are based around WBL and the SCI Year in Industry programmes are very well established. There is potential however for introducing WBL of variable duration in other Schools and disciplines.

WBL placements require agreements between the university and hosting organisations, adherence to codes of practice and support for students in sourcing and applying for opportunities. The competitive element means that students often have to make many applications before they are successful.

3. Applying these approaches

Each of the above approaches requires either new modules to be created, space to be identified in existing modules that allows students to undertake placements and related activities or a re-purposing of some existing subject content. Clearly some courses and modules are more appropriate than others to accommodate such changes and it is sensible to consider feasibility of implementing at course level and incorporating different module pathways.

Existing subject content need not necessarily be reduced, it may be re-purposed for instance by:

- Considering ‘real world’ applications of a topic. This may be indirect. In subjects like history or philosophy, for example, the emphasis might be on how approaches taken by historians or philosophers have helped inform current thinking, identified alternative questions or solutions or applied learning from the past to present issues
- Considering more explicitly the attributes and qualities required to excel in that topic, including ways of approaching problems, researching issues, analysing facts or incorporating elements of digital literacy
- Finding new ways to shed light on a topic that helps students consider it from different angles and in novel ways
- Reviewing subject delivery and assessment methods to incorporate for instance blended learning and increased critical reflection activities at individual and group level
- Bringing in more examples from research impact case studies into taught materials
- Incorporating more ‘externality’ where possible into projects, essays and activities

4. What is the UEA approach?

The UEA Plan 2016-20 has renewed its commitment to embedding employability into the curriculum as well as creating an institution-wide Student Opportunities Programme (Strategy 2: Advancing our Academic Mission, Actions 3 and 7). The latter seeks to expand the availability of work-based experience, international experience and language study to UEA students.

The Student Opportunities Programme provides us with an opportunity to expand work-related and work-based learning at UEA and to further embed enterprise (see Appendix 1 for a summary of existing student engagement with opportunities at UEA, including work-based placements and internships, international, volunteering, mentoring and School-specific activities). Furthermore, The UEA Plan commitment to expand research-based teaching (Strategy 2, Action 4) will enable more students to be involved in the process of research and enquiry during their studies.

With an increase in student opportunities, career management activities and graduate attributes would both have to be strengthened, as students taking work-based opportunities need to be able

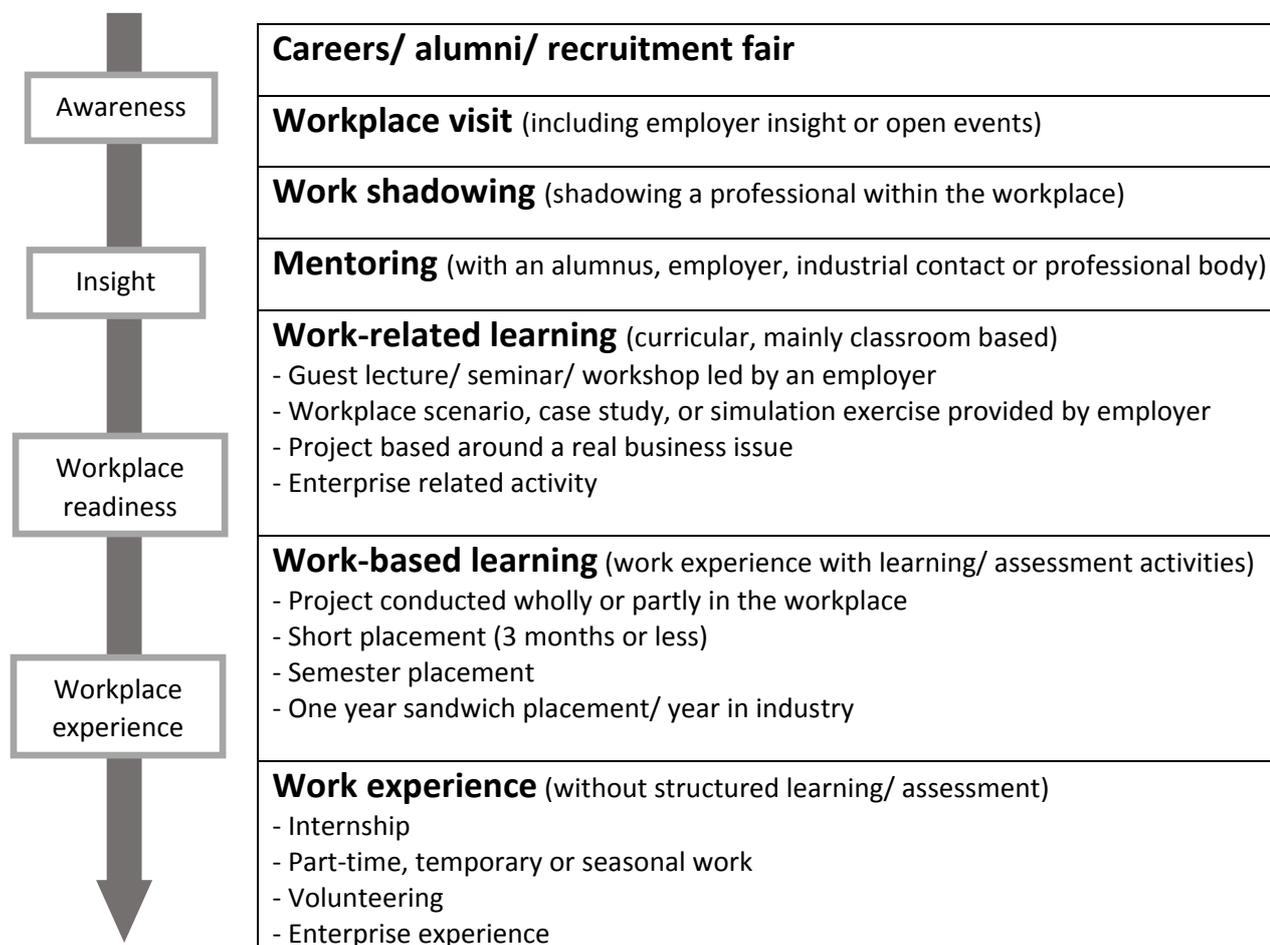
to write excellent applications and need to reflect on how they have developed through their experience.

In terms of what is already happening at UEA, in relation to the approaches described above:

- 2.1 Freestanding employability modules have not generally been adopted
- 2.2 Career management is embedded within some modules, although most instances are either non-assessed, non-compulsory and/ or outside timetables
- 2.3 A framework of graduate attributes was introduced last year and is incorporated in both the Module Outline Template, the UEA Award and the UEA Learning & Teaching Strategy 2014-19
- 2.4 Work-related learning: there is patchy occurrence in all Faculties but mainly in vocational disciplines (MED, HSC, SWK, PHA, ENG)
- 2.5 Work-based learning: examples outside FMH and vocational Schools include SCI Year in Industry and a few other SCI modules; DEV Placement Programme

Figure 1 below summarises a spectrum of work-related and work-based learning activities that take students from a basic level of awareness through to gaining various forms of work experience. By expanding this range of activities we can offer students greater choice appropriate to their course level and degree of confidence and experience. In time this could also lead to creation of ‘pathways’ for student personal and professional development throughout their time at UEA.

Figure 1. A spectrum of work-related and work-based learning activities



What needs to be done to move us forward?

There are several quite practical things that could be done to expand and develop student employability and opportunities for work-based/ work-related learning at UEA, including:

- Continue to re-purpose subject content to enhance employability development as outlined in Section 3 above, utilising module and course review processes
- Adapt the Year in Industry model from SCI, introduce similar one year placement options for courses in SSF and HUM
- Build career management support into courses with placements, making it very clear to students from the start what their responsibilities are in sourcing and securing opportunities
- Identify existing placement offerings at UEA and seek to expand those
- Expand the use of project-type opportunities that enable students to engage with real-world problems and real data within the campus itself
- Identify and develop subjects/ courses that appear most amenable to incorporating work-based opportunities
- Pilot several projects incorporating work-related learning into existing courses (perhaps initially a small number per Faculty)
- Examine existing year abroad, Erasmus and other study abroad options and consider how they might be incorporated into a Student Opportunities Programme

However, if we are to be more ambitious in expanding the range of opportunities and ensuring students can actually take them up we will need to address the following:

- Create space in all courses for students to take work-related opportunities
- Review methods of assessment to ensure they can harness the learning potential from work-related opportunities
- Create a more frequent dialogue with external organisations and employers with potential to increase their involvement in course/ placement delivery
- Build provision of opportunities into course review and course design processes
- Establish 'pathways' by which students can gain experience through their courses, beginning with confidence building and awareness raising in year 1, through to placement opportunities, enterprise and international experience in years 2 and 3

Recommendations for consideration by LTC

Members of LTC are asked to consider the recommendations below and approve each of them as part of developing an over-arching strategy for embedding employability into the curriculum at UEA:

1. Each School to consider how their curriculum can be utilised to the greatest advantage for students in developing employability. In many subjects QAA benchmark documents are permissive in terms of what kind of 'content' should be covered. Schools to identify existing content that might be re-purposed (as outlined in Section 3 above).
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6. Schools in SSF and HUM to set-out plans for developing Year in Industry equivalent programmes.
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Appendix 1. UEA Student Opportunities 2014-15 engagement

	Work-place based	International	Internships	Volunteering	Mentoring	School specific activities		TOTAL																																							
						UG	PGT																																								
Full year	<p>Year In Industry (UG) Data for Science Faculty only. Shows total number taking year in industry followed by total number year in industry was available too (in brackets)</p> <p>SCI: 41 ((87)) ACT: no data BIO: 5 (12) CHE: 8 (17) CMP: 17 (33) ENG: no data ENV: 11 (24) MTH: no data NAT: 0 (1) PHA: no data</p> <p>approx. 50% of students registered but failed to progress across all programs Data supplied by Peter Courridge</p>	<p>Year Abroad (UG) including Erasmus programmes Data shows total number taking year abroad and number of students eligible to take year abroad (in brackets - based on total number of students in school in second and third year of degree)</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>HUM: 120 (1483)</td> <td>SCI: 35 (1288)</td> <td>SSF: 26 (1834)</td> <td>FMH: 0 (1117)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>AMA: 74 (327)</td> <td>ACT: no data</td> <td>DEV: 0 (137)</td> <td>MED: 0 (327)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HIS: 0 (297)</td> <td>BIO: 14 (353)</td> <td>ECO: 0 (410)</td> <td>HSC: 0 (790)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>LDC: 0 (432)</td> <td>CHE: 4 (189)</td> <td>EDU: 0 (154)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>PPL: 46 (427)</td> <td>CMP: no data</td> <td>LAW: 23 (262)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>ENG: no data</td> <td>NBS: 1 (620)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>ENV: 8 (264)</td> <td>PSY: 2 (218)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>MTH: 8 (202)</td> <td>SWK: 0 (33)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>NAT: 1 (58)</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>PHA: 0 (222)</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>approx. 25% of students registered but failed to progress across all programmes</p>	HUM: 120 (1483)	SCI: 35 (1288)	SSF: 26 (1834)	FMH: 0 (1117)	AMA: 74 (327)	ACT: no data	DEV: 0 (137)	MED: 0 (327)	HIS: 0 (297)	BIO: 14 (353)	ECO: 0 (410)	HSC: 0 (790)	LDC: 0 (432)	CHE: 4 (189)	EDU: 0 (154)		PPL: 46 (427)	CMP: no data	LAW: 23 (262)			ENG: no data	NBS: 1 (620)			ENV: 8 (264)	PSY: 2 (218)			MTH: 8 (202)	SWK: 0 (33)			NAT: 1 (58)				PHA: 0 (222)				<p>Clubs and Society Committee Posts: 1412 (UG and PG combined figures)</p> <p>UUEAS Student Reps: 210 (UG and PG figures combined)</p> <p>DOS Reps: 20 (UG/PG)</p> <p>Language Ambassadors Scheme: 13 (10 months duration)</p>		<p>NBS: approx. 10 paid fixed term (9 months +) contracts offered annually to third years</p> <p>NBS: MSc in Business Creation. (PGT, numbers unknown)</p>	1907
HUM: 120 (1483)	SCI: 35 (1288)	SSF: 26 (1834)	FMH: 0 (1117)																																												
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Semester		<p>Study / Semester Abroad (UG) including Erasmus programmes Data shows total number taking semester abroad and number of students eligible to take semester abroad (in brackets - based on total number of students in school in second and third year of degree)</p>	<p>Springboard Internships: 16 (UG, approx. 12 weeks) Summer Internships: 69 (UG, approx. 8 weeks) PIPS Internships: 20 (PGR)</p>	<p>Voluntary Activities submitted on Skills Award Pilot: 132 (UG) CareerCentral Volunteering Schemes: 16 (UG), 5 (PG) MyCareerCentral Voluntary Vacancies Advertised: 588</p>	<p>6 Month Mentoring: 27 UG, 3 PG Start Up 6 Month Mentoring: 5 UG, 4 PG PIPS Mentoring: 3 (3 Month PGR)</p>	<p>PSY: approx. 10 paid UG internships annually - mostly over summer. EDU: BA Ed and BA PE have compulsory placement module which students' source themselves and undertake a small-scale research project. 1 funded summer work placement also offered in 2015</p> <p>LAW: approx. 15 international work placements offered to students in 2015 SWK: students undertake a 70-100 day compulsory placement</p>																																									

					Bioscience, approx. 3 months)	(UG/PG) 1272 click throughs from these vacancies	Mentoring)	LAW: approx 10 summer legal work experience placements allocated by competition each year	NBS: MBA programme has internships and Brand Leadership has work exp. scheme	
Semester		HUM: 31 AMA: 3 (327) HIS: 7 (297) LDC: 7 (432) PPL: 14 (427)	SCI: 11 (1288) ACT: no data BIO: 2 (353) CHE: 1 (189) CMP: no data ENG: no data ENV: 0 (264) MTH: 0 (202) NAT: 0 (58) PHA: 10 (222)	SSF: 0 (1834) DEV: 0 (137) ECO: 0 (410) EDU: 0 (154) LAW: 0 (262) NBS: 0 (620) PSY: 0 (218) SWK: 0 (33)	FMH: 0 MED: 0 (327) HSC: 0 (790)	Graduate Internships: 102 graduate internships of which 20 were secured by final year students before they graduated and 3 were secured by PGT/PGR students.		DEV: Optional module on development work experience in year 2, numbers unknown. 2 work placements offered in Great Yarmouth Borough council and 2 internships offered with Water aid in 2014-15. SWK: Yr 2 students undertake a 70 day and year 3 a 100 day compulsory placement ECO: 10 internships are offered annually through the school PPL: Parliamentary internships and a Brussels Internship programme are run annually (unknown numbers) approx. 8 Media internships awarded annually.		
Month						DOS Global voices: 16 UG, 5 PG		LAW: UEA Law clinic provides voluntary opportunities for legal students ECO: paid opportunities on academic projects in the school		21
Less than a month						Next Steps to Teaching: 50 (UG/PG) Men into Primary Education: 7 (UG/PG)	Insider Insights: 18 UG, 7 PG Start Up Insider Insights: 1 UG, 1 PG	LAW: UEA "Street Law" provides opportunities for students to run open days an events in schools and local community groups SWK: Yr 1 students undertake short shadowing experience PPL: Professional Practice Scheme has some assessments which work on real worked problems and produce recommendations to external partners	PSY: All PGT students complete work experience as part of degree - typically 2 weeks SWK: students undertake a 5 day shadowing experience and 70-100	84
TOTAL	41		223		207	2419	69	53	15	