'Meet our Graduates' – Alumni networking event

An opportunity for recent alumni, 3rd and 4th years undergraduate students to network.

**School:**Informatics

**Target Audience:** Year 3 and Year 4 undergraduate Informatics students

**Staff involved:** Informatics, Careers Service, Employability Consultancy

**Date**: Piloted September 2008, repeated September 2009

Key features

The idea to bring together recent alumni with 3rd and 4th year undergraduate students over a networking lunch was developed jointly by staff from the School of Informatics, the Careers Service and the Employability Consultancy, aiming to:

* promote students’ employability by giving them insight into the world of work and some of the options open to them with their degree;
* foster relations with alumni and give them the chance to ‘give something back’ to the University;
* encourage attendance at Careers in the Curriculum (CiC) sessions by arranging these adjacent to the networking lunch.

Planning

Three meetings were held over the space of five months – an initial meeting to develop the idea in April, detailed discussions in July regarding the event and a final meeting to clarify the logistics a couple of weeks before the event. Less planning was needed the second time around.

Forty Edinburgh-based alumni were invited, which translated into eight graduates attending the event in successive years. The alumni each provided a short career biography before the event outlining their degree, current job, education and employment history.

The events were advertised to students via an announcement on the Informatics Teaching Organisation website and a reminder email sent by the Careers Service.

Event

The events were attended by approximately 40 students, which was slightly disappointing considering the size of the cohorts, but not unusual.

Each graduate briefly introduced themselves, gave an overview of their career since graduating, then offered one piece of advice to students about making the best use of their time at university in order to maximise their chances of career success.

This was followed by networking over lunch, then separate Careers in the Curriculum sessions for 3rd and 4th year students. The 2008 event concluded with a tour for the alumni of the new Informatics Forum.

Resources

* Staff time for planning meetings, corresponding with the graduates (inviting them, briefing them, collecting their career biographies, answering questions, meeting and greeting, thanking them afterwards), organising the logistics of the event.
* Good venue to attract both students and alumni
* Lunch as an added incentive
* On the day – 3 members of staff available to host the event.

Evaluation

Feedback from students was generally very positive. They commented on how informative and interesting it was meeting the graduates, hearing about their real life experiences and learning about their different career paths. The 4th year students in particular took full advantage of the networking opportunity, the 3rd years seemed slightly more reticent.

The graduates were overwhelmingly positive. One of their comments sums up well: “I enjoyed the event very much and felt it was very well set-up for the students to get a good chance to ask the questions you just can't ask at a lot of the ‘official’ company events or won't get an honest answer for”.

Advice

* The team approach (School, Alumni Office, Careers Service and Employability Consultancy) worked well, especially in terms of students hearing messages about the value of early career planning from academic staff and recent graduates as well as from the Careers Service.
* Students will self-select for this sort of event, so do not necessarily expect a very large turnout. Earlier year students may need more encouragement to see the relevance and value of networking.
* Two hours was slightly too long to expect alumni to network over a buffet lunch, 1.25 hours was adequate in the second event.
* Graduates were given 2 minutes to introduce themselves and their career paths which was extended to 3 minutes in the second event, as this was a more realistic timescale.
* Consider providing advice to students about how to gain maximum benefit from networking prior to the event.

Key contacts

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<http://www.ed.ac.uk/employability/staff-information/how-employability-addressed/good-practice/cse/meet-our-graduates>