Third Year Strategy Management Course: Employer panellists

Strategy Management is a Year 3 Business Studies core course, in which 10% of the credits come via end-of-course group presentations. The presentations are the culmination of an extended case study, based on a real-life corporate scenario.

**School/Subject Area:** Business School

**Target Audience:**Third Year undergraduates Business Studies students

**Staff Involved:** Course Organiser, Careers Adviser

**Dates/timings:** Launched December 2009, now ongoing

Key features

Strategy Management is a Year 3 Business Studies core course, in which 10% of the credits come via end-of-course group presentations. The presentations are the culmination of an extended case study, based on a real-life corporate scenario. The case study requires students to apply their theoretical learning to resolve a real-world business problem; performing the role of strategic business consultants.

The Course Organiser wished to investigate the possibility of bringing business representatives onto the assessment panel to listen, question and provide verbal and written feedback, alongside the academic audience. The rationale was that employers would ask highly pertinent, practical and insightful questions, and that students would gain hugely from hearing and responding to such questions, both in terms of their technical knowledge and their formal presentation skills.

The case study is carefully selected to ensure that it addresses issues pertaining to the course and that public sources of information are available on the case study, as students have to source all the information on the case study.

Planning

An initial exploratory meeting was held six months before the first event between the Director of Undergraduate Programmes, the Course Organiser and the Careers Adviser. Having scoped out the requirements and an employer brief, the Adviser was supported by the Employer Relations Team within the Careers Service to identify prospective employers over the following six weeks. Once a sufficient number of employers had expressed interest, the course organiser then took over contact with these employers before the start of the academic year to re-confirm their engagement and give specific details of the practical arrangements for the presentation session, forward the case study in advance, and answer questions on the nature of the presentations and the employer's role.

Event

Accenture, BT, Centrica, RBS, Proctor & Gamble, Ernst & Young, and Enterprise Rent-A-Car all provided business representatives to sit on the panels, most of whom held middle or senior management positions. Each panel typically had two employers represented, who led the feedback and questioning, supported by the Course Organiser. Overall, there were 10 hours of presentations, that were split into three (exceptionally four)-hour sessions. Typically, one business representative would attend one 3–hour session and observe six group presentations, each presentation lasting 20 minutes. Each team comprised 5 students.

Questioning and feedback from employers focused on the high level content of the presentation, the group-work process experienced by the students and the presentational style/skills in evidence. Employers had no role in awarding academic marks for the presentations; this was the role of the Course Organiser. However each panel member completed a 1 page pro-forma feedback sheet after each presentation and handed it to the Course Organiser, who submitted this feedback to students, along with the presentation marks and marking sheet when the final marks were released to students.

To enable employers to build rapport with the students, employers’ bios were made available to all students via the course website prior to presentations getting underway, and at the end of each three-hour session, students were invited to a sandwich buffet, hosted by the Course Organiser and the Careers Adviser, to enable networking and information-sharing with employers.

Resources

The planning time for this initiative took around 3-4 days spread over several months, and involved the Course Organiser, Course Administrator, Careers Adviser and Careers Service Employer Relations Manager.

A short written brief was prepared for circulation to employers, together with introductory and follow-up emails. A 1 page feedback pro-forma was also given to employers to record their feedback on each group at the close of each presentation.

Evaluation

Student and academic feedback on the initiative was very positive – students spoke about having to ‘up their game’ in the face of ‘real world’ employers and their lines of questioning. The employer feedback gained by students – both verbal and written – was described by the Course Organiser as ‘really insightful and beneficial for the teams’. The initiative is likely to be ongoing, with employers actively requesting further involvement – encouraging feedback in itself!

Key contacts

[Ruth Saville](mailto:Ruth.Saville@ed.ac.uk), Careers Adviser

[Dr Monia Mtar](mailto:Monia.Mtar@ed.ac.uk), Course Organiser

[Prof Wendy Loretto](mailto:Wendy.Loretto@ed.ac.uk), Director of Undergraduate Programmes

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/employability/staff-information/how-employability-addressed/good-practice/hss/employer-panellists>