Work Integrated Learning: An industry partners’ perspective

Jude Smith
Queensland University of Technology
Ray Smith
Griffith University

Our focus:
- What is Work Integrated Learning in the Creative Industries context?
- What are perspectives of industry partners engaged in the provision of internships?
- How do these perspectives impact our collaborative partnerships?
- How can we better value the contribution of industry partners in the provision of students’ learning?

Work Integrated Learning

... an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum.

ALTC WIL Report National Scoping Study, (Patrick et al, 2008:9)

Creative Industries Internships

- Available to all students
- Internship undertaken intensively or extended over a year (100-200 hours)
- Up to 200 industry partners involved – many small to medium enterprises
- Assessment: CV, proposal, written reflective essay, IP evaluation

WIL Collaborative Partnerships in HE

- Nature and quality of partnerships depends on level of involvement (Smith and Betts, 2000)
- Establishing such partnerships is challenging. Problems related to:
  - different aims & expectations of partners (Colin & Tynjala, 2003)
  - limited academic engagement (Weisz and Smith, 2005)
  - lack of resourcing and recognition (Reeders, 2000)
- More inclusive approach to the development and implementation of WIL curricula (Franz, 2007)
- Creating more permeability between higher education & the world of work is a significant challenge (Brennan & Little, 2006)
Industry perspectives

Reasons for engaging in the internship program
- Source of extra labour, etc.
  - "Catching up with work"
  - Potential source for new employers
  - "New ideas" "new technologies"
  - Adding value to existing team skills
- Giving back, etc.
  - "Empowering them"
  - "Develop their skills"
  - "Address issues in the industry"

Students as workers and learners
- Industry partners as trainers and mentors - SMEs

Industry perspectives

Perceptions of readiness to support and assess interns
- Often supervisors had little to no experience supervising interns or undertaking an internship themselves
- Many SMEs did not have dedicated person to induct, mentor & support
- Most felt comfortable assessing students against standards and providing written and verbal feedback

Industry perspectives

Perceptions of the partnership: Issues of communication and collaboration
- Most relied on interns for information rather than print material and email contact
- Some requested more face to face communication and others were adamant that they didn’t require further communication
- Some had a desire for greater collaboration and ‘collegiate approach’ to the students’ experience
  - Information on the interns’ academic studies
  - Close the loop feedback of the effectiveness of their internship training

Ways forward

Towards more collaborative partnerships
- Shift internship assessment to better value learning at work
  - Increased weighting on industry partners’ assessment
  - Portfolio evidence
- Increasing industry partners’ contribution to the assessment of student learning outcome
- Invite industry partners into reflective dialogue with students about ways internship experiences have challenged their notions of professional practice
- Enable industry partners’ feedback to inform continuous improvement for courses and programs

Questions