

# Developing and supporting the curriculum

## Employer Engagement: An Institutional Approach

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3	<b>Key words:</b> Employer Engagement; External Stakeholders; Employability
4	<b>Overview:</b>  This case study focuses on our institutional approach to strengthen and widen the University of Aberdeen's links with professional bodies, graduate employers and community stakeholders and explores how we are implementing the following directive from our recent Curriculum Reform project ( <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/cref/">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/cref/</a> ): <i>"In part to assist with employer engagement and the development of graduate attributes and the co-curriculum, each programme or group of cognate programmes should have an advisory group with external representation from alumni, employers and community stakeholders, as appropriate."</i>
5	<b>Background/context:</b> Employer engagement is an integral part of the University's vision; it is championed by the Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching and is a key aspect of the University's Strategic Plan 2011-2015 ( <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/documents/strategic-plan-2011-2015.pdf">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/documents/strategic-plan-2011-2015.pdf</a> ). To enhance current employer engagement activity, a review of existing provision was undertaken across the University to determine the number of existing groups that met the Curriculum Reform requirement, and hence to determine how many new groups should be established. During the review the opportunity was taken to discuss with academic staff the variability in engagement with employers across the University's provision, contrasting the strong and long-standing nature of employer engagement in some areas with others which have been traditionally less active. This was also accompanied by a clear message from Senior Management about the changes required within the University to implement the Curriculum Reform directive.  The new Programme Advisory Boards (PABs) or existing equivalents (e.g. Employer Liaison Committees) are a devolved, flexible and embedded approach to cascading the importance and relevance of the employer engagement agenda to academic Schools and disciplines. They also enable strong links between PABs and the Careers Service, the Centre for Learning & Teaching and Senior Management. This model provides academic staff with a channel for engaging more formally and creatively with a range

# Developing and supporting the curriculum

	<p>and multi-national organisations. Each board meets several times a year, the overall membership reflecting the size of the academic discipline(s) it represents. To monitor and review the impact of PABs, each Advisory Board (or equivalent) provides an annual report for the Careers Service Employer Board (chaired by the Vice-Principal for Learning &amp; Teaching). This board reports to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning for review and implementation planning.</p>
6	<p><b>Activities/example of practice (you might also like to include an account of activity to date):</b></p> <p>In the academic year 2011/12 the main focus of activity has been establishing the new PABs and aligning existing Employer Liaison Groups with the Curriculum Reform requirements. Specific activities of these new and existing groups have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing and commenting on the latest available graduate destinations data, and discussing the employment and further study prospects for current undergraduates.</li> <li>• Interpreting the broad Aberdeen Graduate Attribute statements within each academic discipline (<a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/graduateattributes/">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/graduateattributes/</a>).</li> <li>• Working in partnership with School Directors of Teaching to devise short/medium term employability action plans.</li> </ul> <p>At this early development stage employers involved with the initiative are aware of its potential:</p> <p><i>"For a relatively small investment of board member time the payoff can be substantial in acquiring graduates who will be best prepared to address industry challenges and should be able to "hit the ground running."</i> Iain Percival, former Global Chief Petroleum Engineer for the Shell Group, Petroleum Engineering Advisory Board</p>
7	<p><b>Key points including challenges:</b></p> <p>The key lessons and challenges of establishing and developing a coherent set of PABs across the University of Aberdeen include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of promoting the value of employer engagement as a priority from the very top of the institution.</li> <li>• The importance of recognising that PABs can impact on all areas of the University's teaching and learning provision including, curriculum design, work placements, careers education and Aberdeen Graduate Attributes.</li> <li>• The challenge of establishing a comprehensive set of PABs to spread change across the University.</li> <li>• The significance of building and sustaining employer PAB links over time to establish firm partnerships.</li> </ul>
8	<p><b>Where to next:</b></p> <p>Employer engagement is perhaps more salient than ever given the changes in funding for universities and the competitive graduate employment market in the current economic climate. The establishment of a coherent set of PABs is the University of Aberdeen's innovative and evolving approach to ensure its employer engagement activity meets the changing academic and employment market requirements.</p>
9	<p><b>Additional information:</b></p> <p>Further information including the PAB remit, membership and reporting structure is available at: <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/clt/good-practice/et/dsc/">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/clt/good-practice/et/dsc/</a>.</p>