1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is to provide the University Management Group with an update on the progress made to date within Project SEARCH and to outline how the programme will be sustained during the Academic Session 2014/15.

A cohort of 12 Interns commenced Project SEARCH in September 2013 and are due to graduate from the programme in June 2014. They have all made excellent progress in relation to their personal development, vocational studies and within their work placements. Funding to recruit a further 12 Interns to participate in the programme during Academic Session 2014/15 has now been secured and the recruitment process will commence shortly.

The project is gaining considerable external recognition, with visits and requests from information being received on a regular basis from representatives of organisations who are considering the feasibility of establishing a programme. In addition, a number of high profile visits, including from Sir Ian Wood and MSPs, are planned. The programme has received a SURF Award, and a number of Interns have been nominated for Student Achievement Awards within North East Scotland College. Furthermore, representatives from the Aberdeen programme have been invited to deliver presentations and facilitate workshops at the Project SEARCH Scottish Conference in June 2014.

The paper is presented for information.

Further information is available from Mrs Heather Crabb, HR Adviser (Policy & Projects), telephone (01224) 273732, email: h.crabb@abdn.ac.uk and Professor Neva Haites, Vice Principal (Development & Equality and Diversity), telephone (01224) 437082, email : n.haites@abdn.ac.uk

2. BACKGROUND

The Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Project SEARCH team is a collaboration between the University of Aberdeen, Inspire (Partnership Through Life) charity and the North East Scotland College, operated under a licence from the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities (SCLD). The project is based on an international model which originated in the USA and seeks to provide preparation for employment to young people with disabilities through a mix of education and work experience placements.

The Project commenced within the University in September 2013 and the first cohort of Interns will graduate in June 2014.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The University's Ambition, Mission and Values Statement outlines our commitment to" the twin principles of sustainability and social responsibility". In addition, the Strategic Plan 2011-15 states that we will “ensure that the key principles of equality and diversity are embedded in all our activities”. Project SEARCH contributes to the achievement of these strategic objectives.

4. OTHER CONTEXT

The Interns are supported to undertake 3 internships/work placements over a one year period of study. It is the normal expectation that each participant will undertake 3 or 4 placements over
the course of the year. All partner organisations work together to identify work placement opportunities based on the student’s experience, interests and skills assessment. The Interns are supported to attain vocational qualifications and upon the conclusion of the programme, receive support to source and sustain paid employment.

Work experience placements have been undertaken in the following areas:

- Cruickshank Botanic Garden
- Estates
- Student Life
- Library, Special Collections & Museums
- Finance & IT

An individual from Inspire is based on campus to provide support to participants on the programme in the role of ‘Job Coach’, and conducts job analyses, makes recommendations on appropriate adaptations/assistive technology etc and provides ongoing training and support to the students.

5. PROJECT SEARCH AT ABERDEEN

5.1 Achievements

The following achievements have been made in the programme to date:

5.1.1 Launch Event and External Visits

Project SEARCH at Aberdeen commenced on 2 September 2013 and a high profile launch event took place on 20 September 2013. The event was chaired by Professor Neva Haites and speakers included Ms Anne O’Bryan (Project SEARCH Programme Specialist – Europe), Mrs Maura Lynch (Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities) and Mr Rob Wallen (Principal, North East Scotland College). It was attended by Lewis MacDonald MSP and senior representatives from local private and public sector organisations and attracted significant media interest.

It is anticipated that the forthcoming schedule of visits, which will include Kevin Stewart MSP and Sir Ian Wood (as part of the work he is undertaking on the Youth Employability Agenda), will also further enhance the internal and external profile of the programme.

5.1.2 Assessment Outcome

As a condition of licence, all programmes are required to undergo a ‘First Term Assessment’, undertaken by the Project SEARCH UK Programme Specialist. This assessment forms part of the Project SEARCH implementation plan and seeks to assist each site in its early development. The Aberdeen assessment was undertaken in late November 2013 and the programme received excellent feedback.

5.1.3 SURF Award

In December 2013, the Project SEARCH programme within Scotland (including the Aberdeen programme) won a SURF Award. SURF is Scotland’s independent regeneration network, with an overall objective to improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Scotland’s disadvantaged communities. Each year, competition is run to highlight, celebrate and share some of the best examples of regeneration initiatives across Scotland. Project SEARCH was recognised in the Support to Work category.

5.1.4 Student Achievement Awards

Five Interns have been nominated to receive a Student Achievement Award through the North East Scotland College. The outcome of these nominations will be known in May 2014. These
Awards are intended to recognise students who have overcome adversity and/or who have shown outstanding innovation in their approach to their studies and work.

5.1.5 Project SEARCH Scottish Conference

The Project SEARCH Scottish Conference will take place in Glasgow in June 2014 and representatives from the Aberdeen programme have been invited to facilitate workshops and deliver presentations as part of this event. This demonstrates external recognition of the success of the Aberdeen programme. In addition, a number of approaches from other organisations currently considering the feasibility of entering into a Project SEARCH arrangement have been received over recent weeks e.g. South Devon NHS Trust and University of Strathclyde. In addition, representatives from Edinburgh Council have visited Aberdeen ahead of the launch of their Project SEARCH in August 2014. It is anticipated that collaborative work will be undertaken between Edinburgh and Aberdeen as the only two non-hospital based Project SEARCH sites in Scotland.

5.1.6 Employment Search

Under the terms of our licence, it is expected that 60% of our Interns will enter into paid employment upon graduation. In this connection, considerable progress has been made in supporting the Interns as part of their job search. One Intern has already commenced a paid, part time job within the University and a further Intern has been shortlisted for a vacancy. In addition, consideration is currently being given to the feasibility of retaining an Intern following the successful completion of a project and interest has also been received from the Wood Group in securing the services of the same individual.

5.2 Next Steps

The following initiatives are underway to support the longer-term sustainability of Project SEARCH within Aberdeen:

5.2.1 2014/15 Intern Cohort

In January 2014, confirmation was received from Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council that funding was in place to ensure the continuation of Project SEARCH within the University for a further 12 months. In this connection, the recruitment process to identify a further cohort of 12 Interns is now underway as follows:

- Applicant Open Day - 28 February 2014
- Application Closing Date - 14 March 2014
- Shortlisting Meeting - 17 March 2014
- Interviews - 26 March 2014

5.2.2 Additional Sites

Work is being undertaken to explore the level of interest amongst a number of local organisations in hosting a second Project SEARCH site in Aberdeen. Whilst the establishment of these sites would not directly impact upon the University programme, the model which has been developed would be used as a blueprint for extending Project SEARCH within the North East.

6. Resource Implications

The University will be expected to continue to provide:
• Infrastructure resources to host the project (classroom, IT facilities etc)
• 0.1FTE staff resource as Employer Partner Co-ordinator
• Suitable work experience placements for the Interns
• Assistance with the internal marketing of the project

7. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

No area of significant risk has been identified.

8. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

As this project is designed to support individuals with disabilities, it will have an important positive equality impact. However, it does not require a formal Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken.

9. **SUSTAINABILITY & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Project SEARCH makes a positive contribution to the University's Social Responsibility and Sustainability strategies.

10. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

The University Management Group is invited to note the achievements made to date in the Project SEARCH programme and to endorse its continuation within the University.

11. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information is available from Mrs Heather Crabb, HR Adviser (Policy & Projects), telephone (01224) 273732, email: h.crabb@abdn.ac.uk and Professor Neva Haites, Vice Principal (Development & Equality and Diversity), telephone (01224) 437082, email: n.haites@abdn.ac.uk

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