



University of Lincoln Academic Futures

Development of an Academic Intern Scheme

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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

HE	Higher Education
HEA	The Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HR	Human Resources
LFHE	Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
PG	Postgraduate
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGRL	Postgraduate Research Lead
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
PGTL	Postgraduate Taught Lead
REF	Research Excellence Framework
STEM	Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics
SUMAC	An online data management platform for mentoring and coaching schemes
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework

1. Introduction

Background

In 2015 the University of Lincoln successfully bid for funding from the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education Innovation and Transformation Fund to develop a proposal for an intern scheme aimed at postgraduate students interested in academic careers. A post-92 university, the main campus is located at Brayford Pool in the heart of the city of Lincoln with additional campuses at Riseholme and at Holbeach. With a total student population of almost 13,000, almost 2,000 of whom are part-time or full-time postgraduates, the university attracts students from across the UK and overseas. The college-based academic structure is composed of the College of Arts, College of Science and College of Social Science, each of which comprises a range of academic schools. College postgraduate programmes are overseen by the postgraduate taught and research leads who, along with postgraduate students and a range of professional service and senior academic staffs, were invited to participate in this project.

Project Aims and Rationale

At a time when the focus for all universities is firmly on the student experience and ultimately employability, this project to develop a proposal for an academic intern scheme seeks to provide an innovative and inclusive way to expose postgraduate students to the wider academic skills, practices and processes whilst opening up an opportunity to see the workings of a Higher Education Institution at first hand. The scheme will also provide access for postgraduate students to gain awareness of how the academic community is structured and allow an opportunity to identify a career pathway into academia.

The scheme has been designed to feature various sector-wide initiatives and strategies which are highly relevant within HE including HEA fellowships, Athena Swan, LFHE Aurora Programme, REF and mentoring in support of this new academic career pathway.

Postgraduate students are at the heart of this project, which has provided a highly relevant case study to demonstrate collaborative working across a University. This in turn has the potential to demonstrate direct tracking into employability and the recruitment of new early career academic members of staff, thereby contributing significantly to the student experience through enhancement of key professional skills and academic practice.

The University of Lincoln currently operates a successful Graduate Intern Scheme which runs in professional service departments and has developed since 2009. As with other intern schemes, this has been designed to enhance the professional skills of graduates and provides what is for many, a first step onto the career ladder. The current scheme aims to provide tangible experience within a department environment complemented by a structured professional skills development programme. In this scheme for professional service (non-academic) staff roles, the University has seen a conversion rate of 46% for interns going on to secure further employment within the University in another role.

From August 2013 to August 2014, of the early career academic posts recruited at the University of Lincoln only 26% were recruited at the starting level of the Lecturer single spinal point. This highlights that there has been a highly restricted pipeline of recruitment to our early career posts from the postgraduate student population; and hence the successful transition seen of recent graduates into professional service posts through a non-academic Graduate Intern Scheme is not being replicated within our academic community. Based on analysis of HE sector internship opportunities for postgraduate students, this type of initiative does not seem to have been widely explored in the sector to date.

Objectives

The aims and objectives of this project were:

1. To gather research and analysis into the development of an Academic Intern Scheme.
2. To maximise PG student engagement in early academic career opportunities through the design of a professional development scheme for individuals interested in learning more about academic roles and responsibilities, enabling the organisation to identify a formal channel for talent identification and recruitment.
3. To explore an innovative route, including technology options, in which to enhance the career opportunities for PG students, enabling personal and career specific academic practice and development.
4. To maximise PG student advancement in key academic areas of:
 - Teaching and Learning Excellence;
 - Research activity and teamwork;
 - Entrepreneurship and consultancy skills;
 - Professional activities internal and external to the University;
 - Developing academic and social citizenship;
 - Administration;
 - Areas that support the running of a University.
5. To bring together numerous strategies and initiatives taking place within the HE environment e.g. HEA fellowship, Athena Swan, support for STEM activity, REF awareness, links to SUMAC mentoring, LFHE Aurora Programme, in support of a new academic career pathway.

Research Questions

From these project aims, and from initial discussions with the project steering group, working group and the student-led Postgraduate Advisory Group, a number of key research questions emerged:

What skills and experiences could the proposed scheme offer to participating students?

Students and staff involved in the early project discussions were keen for the research to identify specific skills which the scheme could offer students in addition to those obtained through their studies.

How could the proposed scheme compliment the participants' study-work-life balance?

Representatives from the University's Graduate School expressed concern at the potential impact of the scheme on a participating student's ability to progress and complete their studies within the required timescale. The steering group discussions also highlighted that a better understanding of student's existing commitments, including study hours, existing paid and voluntary work and other responsibilities, was needed.

How should the proposed scheme be marketed to students?

Discussions with student representatives in the steering group and Postgraduate Advisory Committee revealed several difficulties with the term 'internship', which was originally how this scheme was described. Although perceived as a prestigious role in some industries, unpaid internships have generated a slew of negative headlines in recent years (e.g. Wood, 2011, Mitchell, 2013). Although this is envisaged as a paid scheme, the negative associations of the term led one postgraduate student to comment that it was 'insulting' while others felt that it failed to adequately represent their existing accomplishments.

In addition, input from the Careers and Employability Service emphasised a need to market the scheme in a way that would appeal to a broad range of postgraduate students, since lack of confidence and concerns around the competitiveness of the academic job market might deter some highly able and accomplished students from applying.

2. Research Design

Management and Approach

The project was managed through an internal collaborative partnership between the Director of the Educational Development and Enhancement Unit and the Organisational Development Manager. Research was carried out by the project's Research Assistant with the support and guidance of project leads and the project working group and steering group.

The study utilised a mixed methods approach with a focus on collecting qualitative data to provide a rich and detailed picture of the aspirations, needs and concerns of students and staff at the University of Lincoln in relation to the employability and career ambitions of the postgraduate student population. The sampling methods employed ensured a broad cross-section of the student and staff population were involved and the data collected represented a wide range of views. Postgraduate taught and research leads from each of the colleges along with senior staff members from key professional service departments (such as Careers and Employability and the Graduate School) were invited to participate. Response rates were good, and ultimately seventeen members of staff (36% of those eligible to participate) took part representing three professional service departments and nine schools. Student focus group participants were selected from a group comprising the University's Postgraduate Advisory Group, Postgraduate Student Representatives from each college and International Student Ambassadors. All postgraduate taught and research students were subsequently invited to take part in a survey. Despite data collection taking place across the summer break, a substantial number of students (128 respondents, just over 10% of the Lincoln postgraduate population) took part.

Methodology

Literature review and an analysis of current practices, both internal and external to the University, were undertaken to provide context for the development of this scheme and to enable us to better understand current provision and opportunities for students seeking a career in Higher Education.

Ethical approval was sought and received from the University of Lincoln Ethics Committee. Further analysis and exploration of key themes began with a series of interviews with professional service and academic staff. Interviews were semi-structured, investigating staff views of the proposed scheme and the current opportunities for, and career development needs of, their students. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

A focus group was carried out with 10 postgraduate students from taught and research programmes at various stages in their studies. Questions encouraged discussion of the participant's aspirations, their perceptions of the pathways into academic careers, their personal and professional development needs and their hopes for, and concerns about, the proposed scheme. The focus group lasted for 90 minutes and was also recorded and transcribed.

Further feedback from students was vital if the scheme was to successfully add value to the student experience and to provide a credible career pathway into Higher Education. To obtain some quantitative data to support and shape the project, a survey was designed which sought to address the key complexities highlighted by the previous research. It was particularly important to clarify

some logistical aspects of the scheme's implementation, such as the whether a post-study or intra-study opportunity was preferred by students, as no consensus on these issues could be found amongst the interview and focus group participants.

With the assistance of Internal Communications staff, project information and invitations to participate were sent out to all current postgraduate students within the University. Despite the challenges of collecting student data during the summer break when many students were away from the Lincoln campus, a response rate of 10% was obtained which included a broad demographic of students in terms of age, gender, subject studied, full time/ part time status and nationality.

Research findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Designing a Pilot Scheme

Upon completion of the data collection and analysis, work began on designing a proposal for a pilot scheme with a view to obtaining funding to run a pilot in 2016. The project working group, which includes representatives from Organisational Development, Careers and Employability, the Educational Development and Enhancement Unit and the Graduate School, met to discuss the implications of the research and produce a proposal with a view to obtaining funding to run a small pilot in 2016. Details of the proposal are provided in chapter 5.

3. Findings

Summary Literature Review

The career aspirations and expectations of UK postgraduate students have undergone a significant shift in recent years. Despite a recent decline in postgraduate student numbers and particularly in enrolment on PGT programmes (HESA, 2014), postgraduate student numbers have grown significantly over the last past decade (HEFCE, 2013, 15; Auriol, 2010, 6).

No longer just a stepping stone into an academic post, postgraduates are pursuing increasingly diverse career pathways. The greater emphasis on developing transferrable skills during university programmes following reports such as 'SET for Success' (Roberts, 2002, 98) and 'Students at the Heart of the System' (BIS, 2011) has facilitated this transition into alternative employment for students across many disciplines.

However, the Higher Education sector is still the most significant employer for doctoral graduates (RCUK, 2014), both in the UK and elsewhere (Auriol, 2010, 15), although a scarcity of, and intense competition for, early career academic posts has been widely reported (e.g. RCUK, 2014, 8; Grove, 2014; Nuernberg and Thompson, 2015). A recent study commissioned by the Wellcome Trust documented the barriers to pursuing an academic career as perceived by doctoral graduates; many factors, including the intense competition to secure research funding, discouraged the active pursuit of early career academic posts. Particular issues were identified with encouraging women to pursue post-doctoral opportunities (2013, 14) and the authors warned that "some potentially excellent scientists may be lost from academia" because of the difficulties, pressures and challenges in pursuing an academic career (2013, 22).

These issues have great relevance for contemporary postgraduate students in Lincoln. Human Resources report that only 26% of early career posts at the University are recruited from the Lincoln postgraduate population. This study has highlighted that while a large proportion of students are interested in academic careers, numerous barriers are perceived, and a lack of confidence in the face of these challenges is considered an issue for many postgraduates. HEFCE (2010, 23) have argued that the Higher Education workplace needs "the brightest minds: highly committed, innovative and creative people with a desire to develop and share knowledge with future generations"; to retain the brightest minds from their postgraduate student population, universities must work proactively to overcome these difficulties.

Overview of Current Practice

With the current focus on developing transferrable skills to enable students to successfully transition from study to work, numerous work experience, professional development schemes and initiatives are run by HE institutions both in the UK and abroad. These schemes generally feature one or more of the following elements:

Online resources and toolkits

In addition to their in-house careers service, most institutions provide web-based resources for their students to aid their personal and professional development. One example is provided by the University of Durham, who offer PGR and college specific advice as a downloadable leaflet which includes interview tips for academic jobs and opportunities in other sectors (University of Durham 2015). The University of Oxford (2015) have created a dedicated website for prospective and current PGR students interested in pursuing an academic career, with numerous links to relevant research, advice, case studies and podcasts. A slightly different approach is taken by the University of Warwick (2015), who provide a toolkit of resources, signposting to work experience opportunities, careers guidance and their Institute of Advanced Study for those interested in research careers. Less commonly, careers resources are provided specifically for PGT students. The University of Birmingham (2015) has a dedicated careers page for Masters students, including links to supporting social media sites and advice on PhD applications and funding.

Work experience

Work experience schemes run by HE institutions are extremely diverse, providing paid and unpaid, part-time and full-time opportunities of varying duration either within the institution or through external providers such as businesses, charities and local authorities. Commonly these are aimed at undergraduate or recently graduated students; for example, the University of Lincoln's Graduate Intern Scheme provides a paid, year long, full time work placement for recent graduates featuring tailored professional development activities and careers advice, usually within a professional service department at the University. Manchester Metropolitan University (2015) currently run an intern scheme open to all MMU graduates to complete six month full time placements which may be faculty or professional service based and includes bespoke training and development opportunities. Many other institutions currently focus on work experience placements external to the institution, for example at the University of Sheffield and University of Liverpool.

Subject-specific projects and experience

Formal, subject-specific placements are less commonly offered in the UK than other kinds of work experience. The University of Lancashire provides short, full-time, paid research placements for some undergraduates over the summer break, and the Faculty of Engineering and Computing at Coventry University offers a paid summer research internship open to all of their taught students interested in research careers. Elsewhere, the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship offered by Columbia University in the US provides a short, laboratory-based placement for students of biology, while similar schemes operate at many institutions across Europe and the US, for example at New York University, Université Paris-Sud and the UROP programme run by Imperial College, London.

Postgraduate internships-a gap in the market?

It is clear that there are many excellent opportunities for students at UK universities to engage in career and professional development activities. However, this overview reveals inconsistencies in the provision of formal professional development schemes for postgraduates and particularly for those aspiring to an academic career. HE institutions may offer informal opportunities on a voluntary basis

or paid experience through fixed-term or zero-hours contracts for Graduate Teaching Assistant and Demonstrator roles which can provide valuable skills for some students. Yet these, along with the chance to work on live research projects offered by some institutions do not necessarily include the wider careers and skills development offered by other graduate intern schemes. Furthermore, some schemes exclude postgraduates altogether. Given that more than half of the participants in the postgraduate student survey conducted as part of this project were interested in HE teaching and research careers, the development of an academic intern scheme for postgraduates would seem a valuable addition to the range of opportunities currently available.

Key Research Questions-Summary of Findings

What skills and experiences could the proposed scheme offer to participating students?

Figure 1 demonstrates the wide range of skills and experiences that academic staff at the University felt their students would benefit from developing, both in terms of academic careers and general employability.

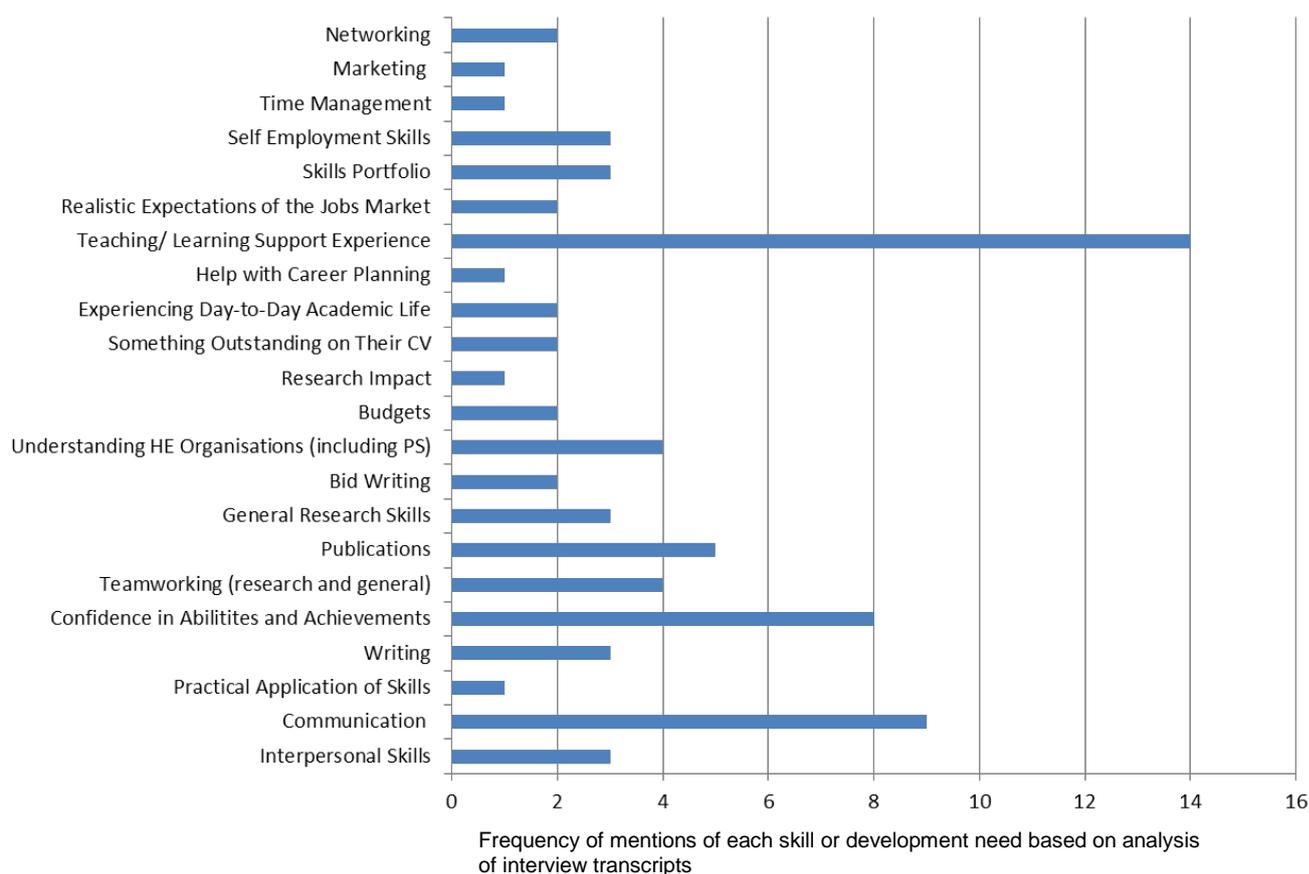


Figure 1. Summary of staff views on PG student development needs

Teaching and learning support experiences, for example the supervision of undergraduates, leading seminars and involvement with module planning, were considered the most desirable skills to develop by the academic staff interviewed, although many departments provided opportunities for postgraduate students to develop these skills already. The second most commonly identified development need was for improved communication skills, particularly with regard to presenting research to students, peers and at conferences, but also being able to communicate achievements and sell themselves during job interviews. Confidence was ranked third, with the majority of staff identifying a lack of confidence as a significant issue for many of their students.

Focus group participants (10 PGT and PGR students) were asked to consider their development needs, and expressed a wish to develop the following skills and experiences:

- Understanding of how a large organisation operates (e.g. recruitment, finance)
- Research financing including budgeting and successful bid writing
- Practical application of skills in a business context
- Live project involvement, including project management and budget management
- Research impact
- Collaborative working, especially working as part of a research team (one student felt this was discipline specific, and unnecessary in her subject area)
- Supervising / demonstrating to undergraduate students
- Lecturing
- Public Engagement
- Identified a need for something that would stand out on their CV

Most participants were interested in pursuing an academic career, though many were open to other career paths too; only one had ruled out a career in HE entirely. However, the difficulties with lack of confidence identified by staff were further explored and illuminated by the discussion. Students expressed concern over the lack of job opportunities, the difficulty of obtaining the experience required for academic posts and a lack of understanding about how to pursue this career path. One participant took a bleak view of his prospects:

“There aren’t that many jobs and there are far too many people to fill them therefore they can keep shifting the bar higher and higher to thin down the applicants. Kind of reality we face really” (PG student, focus group participant).

Several students were confused about where to begin in their pursuit of an academic career, perceiving an unbridgeable gap between the skills and experiences developed through their course and working life and those needed by professional academics:

“I don’t know how to get into those [academic] jobs... for me personally, where do I make that leap? That’s something I think will put me off going into it” (PG student, focus group participant).

There was significant consistency between the skills and experiences that the focus group participants felt they needed and those areas for development identified by the staff, particularly with regard to research-related activities like bid-writing and budget management which were seen to be vital in securing early career academic posts. One participant hoped that the scheme might provide this experience:

“An ‘internship’, it’s almost kind of a space for learning about how research contracts are financed and in terms of the successful bids and things, and how that money is distributed, I think that would give people the additional skills that would be really useful when they come to job applications”(PG student, focus group participant).

To obtain a broader view, participants in the postgraduate student survey were asked to rank a list of skills they would like to further develop in order of priority.

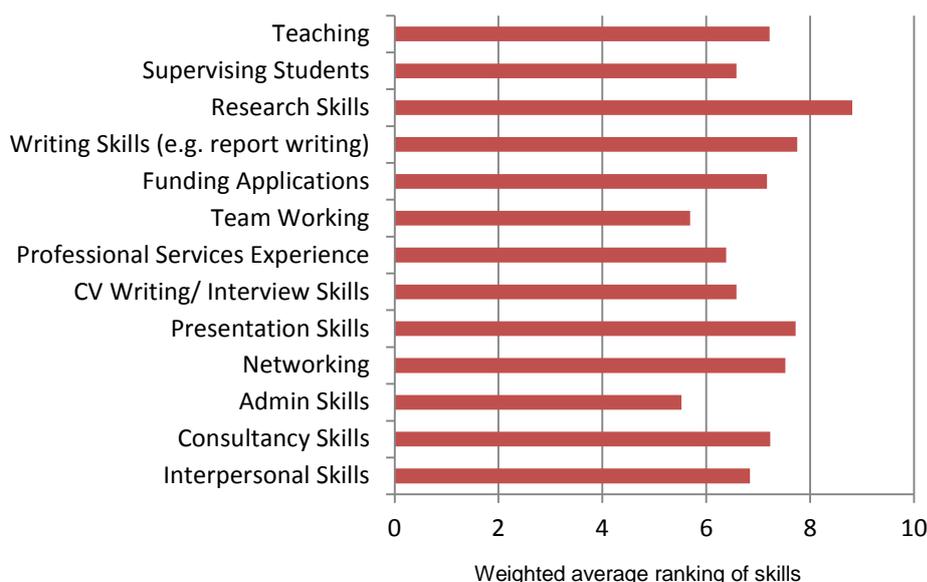


Figure 2. Average ranking of development needs by PG student survey participants

Although research skills were most highly rated, it is clear from Fig. 2 that a wide range of skills were valued by participants. Participants perceived a need for further development, even though many of these skills (e.g. research, writing and presentation skills) would be an integral part of their studies.

These findings demonstrate that the academic staff and the student participants felt that studying alone was not enough to guarantee success in the pursuit of an academic career. Opportunities for further developing skills acquired during taught or research postgraduate courses were perceived to be important by the majority of participants, as were the development of transferrable skills like team working and interpersonal skills.

How could the proposed scheme compliment the participants’ study-work-life balance?

Concerns were raised by the Steering Group that if the scheme were to run during a student’s study, it could have a negative impact on their ability to progress and complete their programme within the required timescales. Some of the academic staff interviewed also flagged this as a concern, although others felt that the scheme would have no effect or perhaps a positive effect on completions given that many students (both part-time and full-time) were already engaged in part-time work, often in unstable employment unrelated to their chosen field of study. During initial project discussions the Graduate School drew attention to the Research Council guidelines for full-time PhD students which state that candidates should not undertake more than six hours per week of work in addition to their

doctoral studies, a figure also stated within the University’s own guidance for PG students. Focus group participants expressed varying views. Some were keen for the scheme to run after their studies were complete, describing a gulf between the end of their studies and the possible commencement of employment:

“I can see it as a post-study work experience internship to that bridge that gap, being that first rung on the ladder would be its value to me” (PG student, focus group participant).

Other students felt that the scheme should run during their studies, seeing an opportunity for stable, paid employment which could enhance their academic experiences and career prospects. International students also emphasised the potential difficulty with running the scheme post-study, as the Tier 4 visa rules around remaining in this country to work post-study are potentially problematic. To further explore this conflict, survey participants were asked for their views, with the majority of respondents stating that they would be interested in both kinds of opportunities.

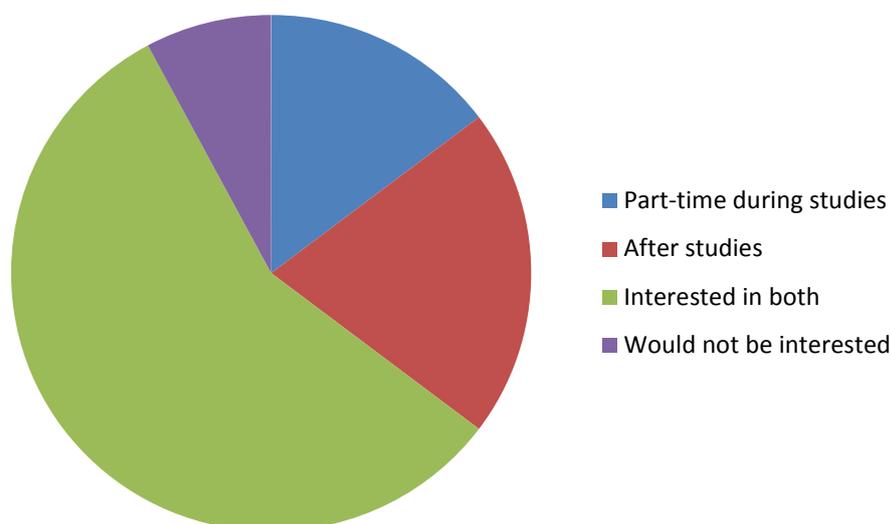


Figure 3. PG student views on when the proposed scheme should run

Other aspects explored by the research related to the duration of the scheme, the appropriate weekly time commitment and the ideal start and end points for the opportunity. Knowledge of the diversity of PG courses offered at Lincoln gained from academic and administrative staff within the colleges showed that there was no ideal start and end point, duration or time commitment for the scheme which would suit all students; enrolment times differed between courses, contact hours varied depending on subject area, and while study-time was expected to be around 37 hours per week for all full time postgraduate courses, staff described ‘busy’ times around assessments, exhibitions and other deadlines with less study- time commitment needed from students during quieter periods. This picture was confirmed by the focus group participants, who spoke of their fluctuating workload over the course of their studies. Furthermore, there was no consensus on the duration of the scheme based on the outcome of discussions with staff and students. Some felt that a short, intensive period of around three months was best for students, where others felt that a minimum of six months with

an ideal duration of a full academic year would give participants the best opportunity to understand the workings of an HE institution.

It was also important to consider other aspects of the student journey. It was clear from the conversations with academic staff and the focus group that many students were also engaged in part-time work, and/or had other commitments in addition to their studies. Understanding more about these commitments was vital to ensure the scheme could be designed to be accessible to all students and would enhance rather than detract from their student experience at the University.

Survey participants were asked about their current patterns of employment. Overall 48% of students surveyed had paid employment while 52% did not. Full-time students were less likely to have paid employment, with 62% not employed at the time of the survey. Part-time students were considerably more likely to be in employment; over 90% had a paid job.

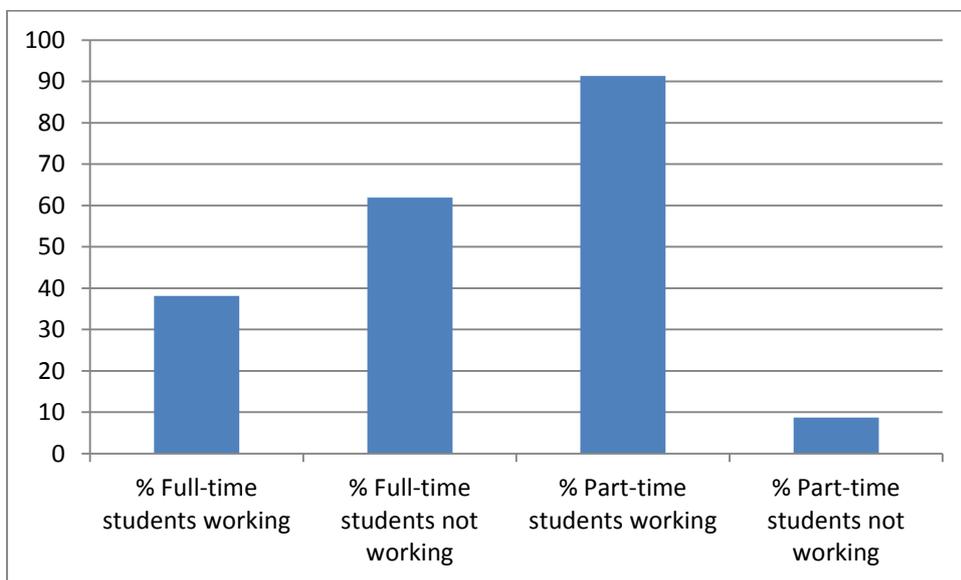


Figure 4. PG student numbers engaged with paid work

Students were asked about other commitments which might influence the time they had available for study. Thirty five percent of respondents did have further commitments in addition to their academic ones, mainly related to volunteer activities, childcare and carer roles.

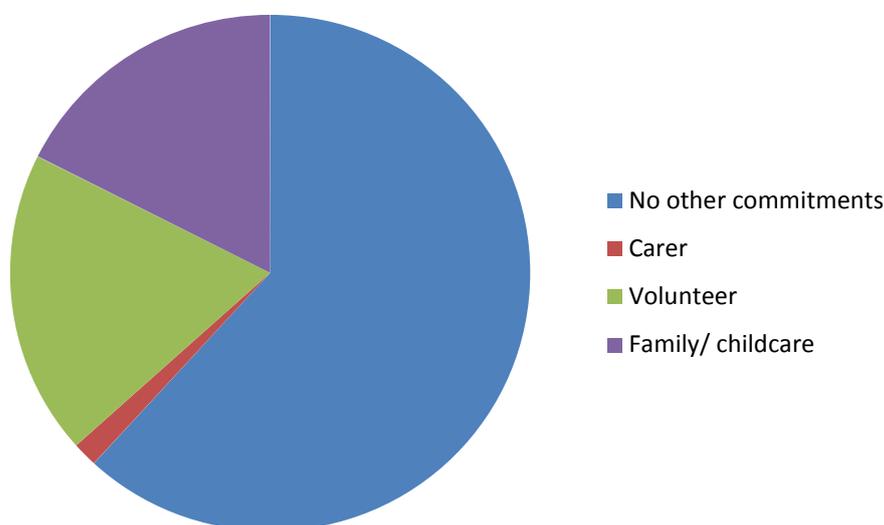


Figure 5. PG student commitments

Although the majority of those surveyed stated they would be interested in a post-study and intra-study scheme, these results show that many students at the university are juggling numerous commitments which have the potential to impact on their study-work-life balance. Overall, these findings present conflicting views of the best way to run the proposed scheme. A post-study internship would be valued by some students as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the end of their programme and entry into employment, would not impact upon a participant's ability to complete their course or create extra pressure or stress. However, the intra-study option was attractive to other students as a chance to gain skills and experiences while earning, and was valued by some staff and students as a stable and course-relevant career enhancing employment opportunity. Additional concerns raised by staff and students about the eligibility of some international students to legally participate in a post-study scheme require careful consideration, since a considerable proportion (27% for 2014/15) of the University's postgraduate population are from outside the EU.

How should the proposed scheme be marketed to students?

Terminology

The original bid for this project proposed an 'Academic Intern Scheme'; however, disquiet about the term 'intern' permeated conversations with staff and students. Overall, 12 of the 17 staff interviewed expressed a negative or ambivalent view of this terminology. One staff member, who leads on postgraduate taught programmes in their school, said:

“I wouldn’t call them ‘interns’ because people [staff at other Universities] won’t know what it means if someone’s been an ‘academic intern’...so I don’t think it will be good for their career” (PGT lead, interview participant).

Another felt it would deter students from applying for the scheme:

“It’s not very attractive because I think in most cases it’s associated with low pay and lots of hours” (PGT lead, interview participant).

Focus group participants also expressed concern about the reputation of internships in the current economic climate, and some felt that the term was particularly inappropriate for PGR students or mature students, who may already have considerable work experience within or outside of their field of study.

“Say ‘intern’ and they do assume it’s very low level. That’s the bad association that it’s got” (PG student, focus group participant).

Another participant spoke about the competitiveness of the academic jobs market and the need to make an impression early in the application process:

“When you’ve just got a CV and covering letter in front of you, the words on there do kind of matter” (PG student, focus group participant).

Focus of the proposed scheme

Discussions with staff and students resulted in numerous questions about the nature of the scheme- would it be school based or professional service based? Should participants be encouraged to work outside of their subject area to enable them to develop a broader understanding of the workings of an HE institution and to facilitate the development of transferable skills? Would students see value in an experience which was not directly related to their area of study?

Initial project aims centred on designing a scheme to enable participants to develop academic and social citizenship, understand professional activities internal and external to the University, and to gain insight into the areas which support the running of a university. This could be achieved by focussing on core academic skills while incorporating elements of professional services experience into the scheme. Most of the academic staff interviewed thought that this insight would be useful for their students, though felt that the students might not immediately perceive the benefit. One PGT lead said:

“They might not be interested in it, but I think it would be helpful. I think ... if you’re in academia you’re probably always going to be in a large organisation. Knowing how a large organisation works I think is always going to be beneficial” (PGT lead, interview participant).

Another commented:

“Working within university HR or working in other areas supporting the University will probably give them a big eye opener” (PGT lead, interview participant).

Others questioned the value of experiences outside of the student's research area, particularly in relation to more generic skills sets. One felt that research experience was key:

"I think that for most academic posts what they're primarily interested in is their [research] output" (PGR lead, interview participant).

One senior university academic voiced ambivalence about the idea:

"I know it is very useful for a student to gain additional skills in administration, in the nature of what higher education looks like and also to give them that extra knowledge if they are going to an academic career...and it gives you skills for working in a business like any other business. But I am not a great fan of this, I have got to admit, I am a greater fan of giving specific skills to students for specific career needs"(senior academic, interview participant).

Some of the focus group participants felt that an experience based within their own school would be most useful to them though others saw value in gaining a broader perspective. Only 14% of the 128 survey participants felt they had adequate understanding of professional service activity, and many reported a desire to further develop other transferable skills such as consultancy, writing and networking skills.

These research findings highlighted a diverse range of views from staff and postgraduate students which presented considerable challenges in the design of a suitable scheme capable of addressing the needs of both full-time and part-time, domestic and international taught and research students from across the University's three colleges and the range of disciplines represented. The design of a proposal for a pilot scheme taking these factors into consideration is detailed in Chapter five.

4. Resources

A key aim of this project is to provide knowledge and experience that will inform the development of similar postgraduate opportunities across the sector.

The project blog has been designed as a stand-alone resource and comprises two main elements: background project information and a toolkit. Project information, including funding sources, aims, acknowledgments and links to the LFHE report and ITF web page have been provided.

In addition, an online toolkit provides practical resources to guide a user through the process of setting up a similar scheme. Elements include:

- A chart detailing key scheme elements to facilitate discussion and decision making.
- A project timeline to enable more effective planning.
- Exploration of the research questions addressed during the project. These are presented as three user-friendly animated sequences addressing the key issues and debates encountered during the project. Transcripts of these sequences will also be available.
- Project updates, including information on the development of the pilot scheme.

The development of a series of open-access resources which are available online aims to provide support for HE institutions to create a flexible programme which responds to the needs of their own students. The above resources can be accessed at www.academicfutures.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk and will be signposted through the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and Efficiency Exchange websites.

5. Recommendations

Taking account of the findings outlined in section three, the working group met to develop a proposal for the pilot scheme. Prior to this meeting, key questions to resolve were identified as follows:

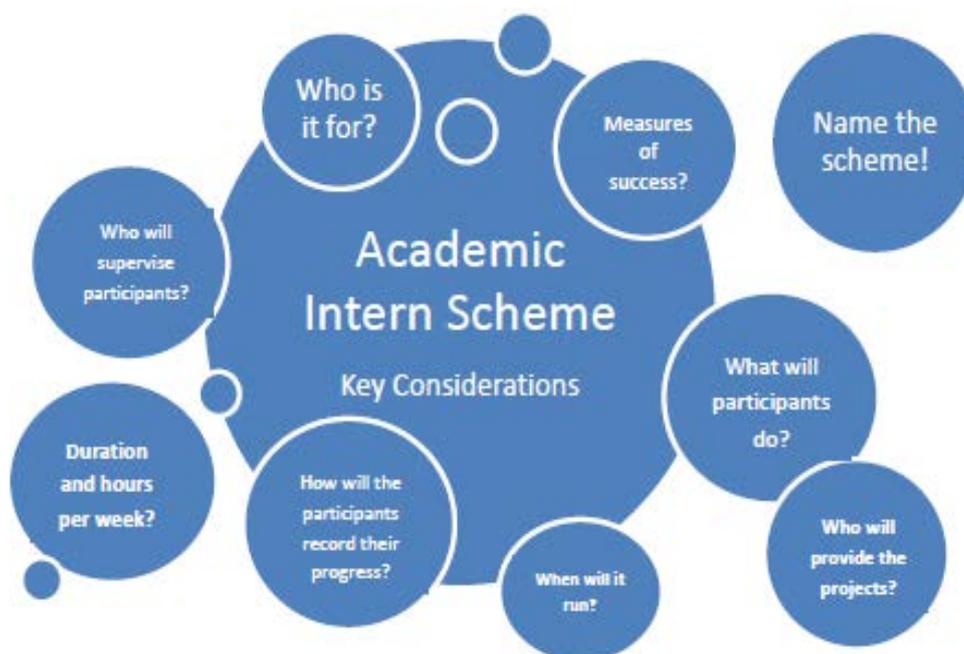


Fig. 6. Key questions for resolution by the working group

This proposal was then presented to the project Steering Group for consideration and adapted slightly in response to their feedback. The following recommendations for the pilot scheme are made.

Scheme name and purpose

An apparent dichotomy in the intentions of the scheme as perceived by staff and students has been highlighted during the research phase; for instance, the need for opportunities to develop transferrable skills while having a course-relevant, school-based experience. A priority of the project working and steering groups was to clarify the scheme purpose to enable appropriate marketing of the opportunity to potential participants. This purpose was summed up by one working group member thus:

“The overarching objective of the scheme is to give postgraduate students (PGT and PGR) an opportunity to explore a career in academia as a potential and aspirational occupation choice. The overarching purpose of the scheme is to support our existing talent pipeline, raise aspirations and put our postgraduate students in the strongest

possible position to make a successful, realistic and well informed decision when any such opportunities may present themselves”.

The scheme has been titled ‘Academic Futures’ and the proposed paid role has been titled ‘Postgraduate Project Officer’ in recognition of this objective and the feedback from staff and students.

The proposed pilot scheme will be open to University of Lincoln PGT and PGR students to enable exploration of the benefits of the scheme and challenges faced by these two groups.

Scheme content

Research findings highlighted a need to include a broad range of developmental opportunities for participants. Participating students will be offered a structured model in which they will experience the multi-faceted dimensions of a career as an academic in Higher Education. For the pilot scheme, this should include an applied research project linked to a professional service department, shadowing of chosen academic activity, and a core programme of workshops/ presentations with a particular focus on academic concerns and considerations. Participants will also be encouraged to publish research outputs, for example in the Graduate School Journal.

The pilot scheme will run for a complete academic year for six hours per week, allowing flexibility to help participants manage their academic workload and balance other commitments. Feedback would be sought throughout the pilot with regard to the impact of the scheme on the individual student’s work-life-study balance. In the future, providing a range of intra- and post-study opportunities should be considered.

Scheme management

Key decisions regarding the management of the project included how the scheme participants would be supervised, how they would record and evidence their progress and how the success of the scheme could be measured.

Research showed that providing a means of formally evidencing achievements and developing a portfolio for postgraduates were popular ideas with staff and students. Collaborative work with digital development specialists investigated the ways in which technology could support the personal and career development of scheme participants. Various portfolio systems were considered, including PebblePad, WordPress, Blackboard, the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and existing paper-based systems developed at the University of Lincoln. For the pilot scheme the working group recommend the development of a Blackboard based portfolio, since this virtual learning environment and course management system is already in use and well supported at the University, and could provide a user-friendly and cost-effective solution.

Supervision of students would be undertaken by a line manager within the College or Department in which participants undertook their main project. Independent mentoring should be provided by Organisational Development, who can provide impartial advice and monitoring to help maintain the participant’s study-work-life balance for the duration of the scheme, while pre-arranged meet ups with other scheme participants could be utilised for peer support (see Fig. 7).

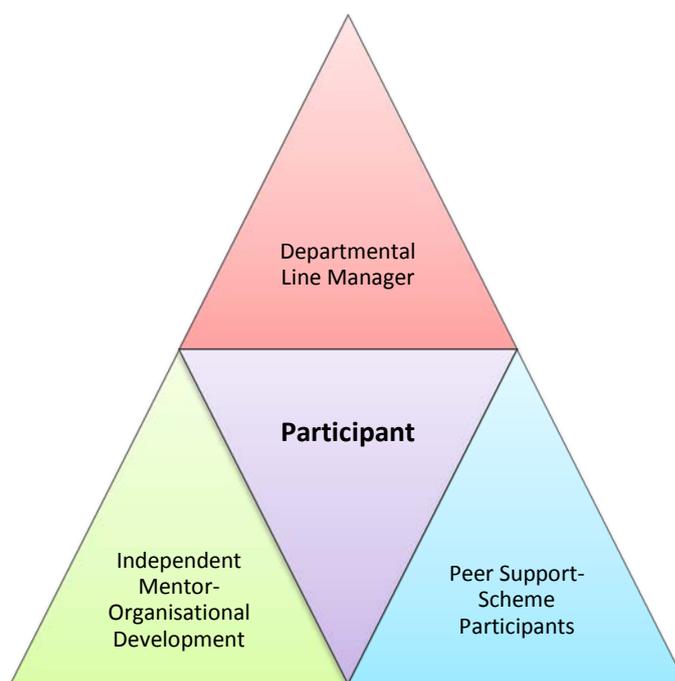


Fig. 7 Support and supervision for scheme participants.

Measures of success

The creation of a portfolio of required elements based on the development needs identified by staff and students in the research should be used as a basis for participants to assess their own progress through the scheme. Feedback will be sought from the scheme participants and their line managers at intervals throughout the pilot to ensure the scheme is complimentary to the student experience and the departments involved. Tracking the scheme participants into employment is vital to assess the impact of the scheme on career destinations; ultimately the scheme's success would be evidenced through recruitment data capture from numbers of early career academic vacancies and applications and through talent conversion to 'home grown' early career academics in post.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This report has detailed the research undertaken as part of this LFHE funded project to explore the possibility of developing a paid intern scheme for postgraduate students interested in academic careers. Although there were a broad range of opinions on how such a scheme could and should work in practice, there was also considerable enthusiasm for the creation of an opportunity of this kind for postgraduate students.

With the completion of a proposal for a pilot scheme, the University of Lincoln are now considering how to secure resources to enable the implementation of the pilot in the next academic year. Project updates can be found at www.academicfutures.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk.

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