

Title of presentation

Professional Skills in Higher Education - Supporting Authentic Participation and Building Student and Community Partnerships

Presenters

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Abstract

For over a year a Professional Skills component has been embedded in our International Year One pathway programs at INTO Queen's university Belfast. The goal is to assist and support students in the development of essential professional skills to increase their employability and workplace effectiveness. The course includes relevant materials to focus on a range of skills, for example: problem-solving, communication skills, CV and cover letter writing, interview techniques, digital skills, and self-reflection. An important element of the course is authentic participation of students with industry experts in their fields of study. To that end, live panel events were held where industry experts in global companies spoke to students over a period of weeks, giving valuable insight into specific professions, job roles, advice on skills development and internship and graduate scheme opportunities. Some of the companies involved included KPMG, Danske Bank, and Linamar and students were able to ask questions and interact with the speakers throughout the events.

This academic year, an event was added to encourage alumni and faculty from Queen's University to engage with current students. INTO QUB alumni students currently in their second and third year at Queen's, who are currently in placements/internships themselves, and who have graduated from Queen's and are working in the Engineering industry shared their experiences and engaged with students. Faculty from different engineering streams at Queen's also provided their perspectives, discussed their courses, and emphasised the importance of placements and internships.

Students that have gone through the Professional Skills course and participated in events have said the following, “I found it very nurturing...,” and “I think that the topics covered were really helpful to present us with the next steps (we) will have to take, tips we should follow and things that we should avoid,” and “One thing that I learned by participating (in) the ‘Professional Skills’ class through this second semester is that have a good educational background is not enough to get a great future. In fact, students must show other important skills such as team working, organization skills, problem-solving skills and analytical skills.” Past students commented that after taking this course they decided to pursue internships and placement opportunities and are now gaining experiences that will help them in their future careers.

Utilizing the local offices of multi-national companies here in Belfast can enrich student experiences and help create strong partnerships, benefitting students and the community as a whole.