

Shell Step

Shell Step is different from many work placement or work experience programmes because it aims to be of direct benefit to the SME sector.

Have you ever thought how great it would be if you could dedicate eight weeks to solving just one of the many challenges you face in developing your business? It could involve looking ahead at new initiatives, examining your marketing strategy or developing more effective methods of production procedures or services.

The solution to your problem may be a simple suggestion that, once implemented, could make a real difference. But, regardless of the outcome, to tackle the issue in the first instance takes time - a rare commodity!

In exchange for giving a highly motivated undergraduate the chance to gain valuable experience, you can have someone who is dedicated to tackling your challenges.

The benefits are twofold. You gain a fresh perspective and a quality individual working hard for your cause. The student gains the experience of putting theory into practice.

At the end of the eight weeks, the student is expected to write a report on their placement and make a presentation to a panel of judges, for which cash prizes are awarded to the best students. The very best may be able to go on to Shell Step Regional and National Finals.

Whatever the outcome, the vast majority agrees that the benefits far outweigh the costs.

Who are the Students?

Generally, the students will have just completed the second year of a three-year course, although occasionally they are more mature students or their course may be longer than three years.

They will usually be following a course that is broadly technological or business oriented, although students following a different course may well have the skills particularly suited to your project.

This may be their first opportunity to gain relevant experience within a real work environment. It is seen as an excellent investment in the rest of the student's life. They are able to capitalise on skills developed during the project, not only in their final year, but to show practical proof to potential employers.

By taking part, the student gains on three levels:

- On a personal level, they build transferable skills, valuable to any organisation, such as managing time, teamwork, communicating and presenting information and, particularly, self confidence
- Practically, they will be able to use the skills developed during their course
- Most importantly for their future career, they will be able to demonstrate to potential future employers they have the skills and experience increasingly sought in graduates

Sometimes the Company looks upon these placements as an extended interview with the view to employing the student when they graduate. Others may keep the student on for an extended placement. However, there is no requirement to do either after the completion of the eight weeks.

What are the Projects?

Projects take many different forms. Generally they are of a technological or business nature. They may cover areas like engineering, manufacturing, information systems, computing and marketing but sometimes they could encompass other company needs.

Examples of projects undertaken recently:

- Developing a formula for a new product
- Defining an Internet strategy & establishing an e-commerce facility
- Writing and modifying computer systems
- Replacing existing manual stock control system
- Undertaking an environmental audit
- Researching the market potential for new products and services

Initially, the company has to define the project and the broad outcomes anticipated. They also have to ensure a member of staff is assigned the primary supervisory responsibility for the student. This is done in conjunction with Science Park staff, who have many years of experience with students and projects.

As the project progresses, the need for close supervision rapidly declines as the student takes increasing responsibility for their own assignment on a day-to-day basis. They are encouraged to use their own enterprise and initiative but regular reviews of the project will still be needed. This will give the student the experience of regular contact with senior members of the management team and 'ownership' of the project. Visits by Science Park staff to the student and supervisor also help keep the project on track.

How the Scheme Works:

1. Students and companies apply to the scheme from January.
2. Companies work with the Placement Projects Team to identify suitable projects as soon as possible.
3. The Placement Projects Team review projects and student applications to find potentially suitable matches.
4. Selected students' applications are sent to the Company for consideration, and interviews are arranged.
5. Contracts are drawn up between the Science Park, the Company, and the successful student. The company is expected to assist with travel expenses.
6. At the start of the project, usually the end of June, students receive induction and orientation training by qualified staff.
7. The Placement Projects Team visits students and the host supervisors during the project to monitor progress.
8. Mid-way through the project, students return for a formal review and further training in giving presentations.
9. At the end of the placement, students produce a Final Report, which includes an evaluation from the company, and make a presentation to a panel of judges.
10. The winning students receive cash prizes and may have the opportunity to go forward to the Regional and National Shell Step Finals.

For further information:

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