APPLICATION FOR COLLEGE EXCELLENCE TEACHING PRIZE 2022

Name(s) and department(s) of applicant(s)
Lisa Medd - Careers, David Hannaby – Alumni Relations

Title of innovation:
Santander Open Minds Scheme

If your application is successful, would you like us to add your case study to the Teaching and Learning space?
Yes            No

Please describe how your teaching innovation is distinctive in one sentence:
A unique offering of a supportive, paid placements programme tailored to students with a mental health condition and/or a social communication impairment, ensuring participants feel empowered and educated on how to navigate the world of work and recruitment processes in an inclusive and focused way. Offered in collaboration with our alumni network, industry professionals and the SU via the VP for Wellbeing and Diversity.

Please describe how your teaching innovation has a specific focus on inclusivity in one sentence:
The Santander Open Minds Scheme was introduced as, according to the College's Access and Participation Plan students with mental health conditions or social communication impairment are currently 15% less likely to progress to further study or graduate-level employment than students without a disability, by offering a supported, confidence building application process and a learning-by-doing placement the students can feel confident to apply for graduate level work (and have improved confidence due to having experience in line with their peers).

Please describe and evaluate your teaching innovation (for example creative, novel, original) in any aspect of course design (teaching, learning, assessment) and include reference to inclusion and engagement.

Please write this in a form that can be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

Through innovative cross College collaboration, eligible students were contacted through the Disability and Neurodiversity team ensuring students were confident to apply and supported through the application process by their Placements Officer, with support from the Students' Union.

Students were sent targeted communications via the Target Connect Platform from the placements team – trialling a new and innovative way of reaching out to students across the College.

The VP for Wellbeing and Diversity recorded an informative introductory video welcoming the students to the scheme explaining the benefits clearly – ensuring students felt that peers and advocates were encouraging them to apply – this cross collaboration was unique to the Scheme and something we are keen to replicate.

Student communication throughout their journey on the Scheme was well thought out and supportive, offering an opportunity to speak with their placement officer should they have any queries and students were informed how to access all areas of careers support including CV and application reviews and interview practice.

Students accessed a specifically curated Moodle page providing a suite of tailored support materials created in conjunction with disability professionals MyPlus Students Club, and links to additional opportunities such as the Circl Programme and other suitable organisations.

The placements were hosted by our fantastically-supportive alumni network. Applicants were made aware that the placement providers would know that they were offering opportunities to students with a Mental Health condition and or Social Communication Impairment.

All providers were given a handbook on how to best support the cohort throughout the application, selection and placement stages – created specifically for the Scheme.

The students reported that they felt more comfortable knowing that the potential awkwardness of having to explain any adjustments for interviews or on placement required would be reduced.

As a result of the innovative course design, alumni stated that they felt that they had an affinity with the students who applied, felt well advised on how to support the students during the selection process and whilst the student was with them on placement and knowing that they could speak to a dedicated placement officer at every stage made them feel comfortable with the whole process.

Overall, the placements team has deemed this pilot scheme to be a success. They have strengthened their connection with alumni, MyPlus and was a finalist for the NUE Award for Best Widening Participation Initiative. The Scheme has been future proofed by placement providers offering to host again as part of the Open Minds Scheme in the 2022 and students have enquired about the Scheme prior to launch for 2022.

Word guide: 500 words
Please describe the actual or potentially beneficial effect on student learning and include discussion of some source of external evaluation and/or (ideally), student feedback.

Please write this so that can be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

Students completed a reflective blog/vlog and indicated their top five skills developed as a result of their placement, with increased confidence, communication, time management, research and self-motivation all scoring highly. All students had increased confidence in discussing their condition with an employer in the future, and a vast majority of respondents stated they felt better prepared for applying for a graduate job after the experience. Out of the 10 students who took part in the scheme, seven went on to be offered paid work, another placement or the opportunity to engage further with the placement provider in the future. The credibility of the programme was further reinforced by the innovative collaboration between industry leaders MyPlus and the Disability and Neuro Divergent team.

Sample student testimony:

'It was more than just an internship, although no 2 days were the same. It provided lifelong lessons which I will take with me for my future ventures like my work ethic and the passion to succeed. I learnt more about the industry, was advised on career progression in my desired field of choice.'

'My favourite aspect of this internship by far was the chance for me to design my own research study from scratch ... The opportunity to create this study and use it to gather genuine responses has definitely provided me with invaluable experience in conducting market research that shall help me with future employment prospects.'

'Genuinely, I think I have come out of this placement a different person. Prior to the placement I would be extremely uncomfortable interacting with others once, let alone multiple times a day.'

Placement Provider Testimony:

'I really wanted to support this cohort, I also benefited from the placement as this gave me a chance to trial run having an employee. My intern was excellent'

'The intern program has been hugely beneficial to our business and therefore a joyous value exchange. The support from the team overall has been excellent, thank you Royal Holloway.'

Word guide: 250 words

Please describe any help which you have received from professional support staff (e.g. Careers, CeDAS, Educational Development) in developing, implementing or evaluating your initiative.

Collaboration with Alumni Relations via their extensive network including the ability to filter our communications to those alumni who have specifically registered interest in offering placements resulted in engagement of suitable alumni placement providers who would be in a position to offer support and opportunities to this cohort. The Disability and Neuro Diversity team gave feedback on our Scheme proposal of offering and endorsed the programme when reaching out to the cohort, giving the students confidence that the Scheme was appropriate for them to apply for. This programme would not have been possible without the continued support and funding from Santander Universities UK.