



To: **Jobs & the Economy Thematic Board**

On: **9 September, 2015**

Report by:
Bob Davidson, Chief Executive, Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce

VOYAGER PROJECT - EVALUATION

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Voyager Project is a cross partner international themed initiative focused on students conducting international research for local business; working with 4 key partners – Scottish Enterprise (SE), the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), Renfrewshire Chamber and Renfrewshire Council (Invest in Renfrewshire). Appendix 1 contains an evaluation report of the project.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes the report.

Voyager project

Evaluation document

12th June 2015

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*Contributions from Alison Loveday, Senior Executive,
Customer Operations at Scottish Enterprise*

Voyager Partners:



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Introduction

This document is a post project evaluation report for the ***Voyager Project*** – a cross partner international themed initiative focused on students conducting international research for local business; working with 4 key partners – Scottish Enterprise (SE), the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), Renfrewshire Chamber and Renfrewshire Council (Invest in Renfrewshire).

Background

The Voyager Project was a partnership initiative involving SE, UWS, Renfrewshire Council and the Chamber – whereby UWS students were assigned to Chamber members and local businesses that had a suitable piece of international themed research needing done that would serve as an excellent learning opportunity for the students and also add value to their business. The project was developed as a small pilot to test a) partnership working b) demand for international capacity support from clients & c) the ability of students to add value to the companies

Voyager like ExpoRen in 2014 – had the Jobs & Economy Thematic Board of the Community Planning Partnership as a catalyst. Following a request from the J&E Board for more innovation and partner working – SE & the Chamber asked UWS to work with them on Voyager.

(ExpoRen like Voyager was (and still is) a virtual coming together of key partners whereby any organisation that has export aspirations can knock on any partner door and understand what support is available from that organisation and other partners in the area. ExpoRen was launched in Spring 2014 and opened by the Minister of External Affairs and International Development Humza Yousaf MSP. At the launch 100 delegates attended a morning of international themed presentations and were given the chance to engage with key partners direct.)

The students

Students involved came from UWS Paisley & Hamilton campuses. They ranged from 1st year students to MBA students. Some clients were allocated an individual student, others a team of students with 1 student taking the lead and being the main point of contact for the clients and partners involved. Voyager for most students was voluntary with participants understanding that the work was in addition to existing studies – but that taking part would be provide real business experience and be a strong addition to a CV or indeed a talking point at an interview.

The Mentors

SE staff (account managers & senior executives) & 2 Chamber staff gave were assigned as mentors to the students (for example; to get them started and on the right path). The mentors added another important dimension that complimented university and client engagement – and brought to life the fact that this was a real life project with mentors able to offer professional advice and support

The Clients

The Chamber asked members and local businesses to get involved. The organisations that came forward with a suitable international brief were:

- 1) Ashtree house hotel (member) – local boutique hotel (staff <10)
- 2) Dimensional Imaging (Business Gateway recommended) – 3D facial capture – staff (small)
- 3) Eadie & Kanai Co. Ltd (member) – specialist textile industry parts (10 staff)
- 4) Jenier Teas (member) – source and supply high end teas - 10 staff
- 5) Kennett Watches (member) – watch design & manufacture <10 staff
- 6) Peak Scientific (member) – manufacture lab equipment ~ 500 staff
- 7) Scottish Leather (A Muirhead) (member) – UK's largest leather manufacturer ~ 550 staff
- 8) Smith & McLaurin (member) – label manufacturer ~ 100 staff
- 9) Tendercush (member) – post breast cancer surgery products – 1 staff
- 10) Worldteachers (member) – International education recruitment – 7 staff

**Another 2 were originally involved but students pulled out – one due to illness and the other due to exam pressures / private family matters (Logic Energy & Optimum Drilling – both Business Gateway clients)*

The process / timings

SE & the Chamber led the project working closely with UWS Paisley – with Senior Lecturer Meg Dunn being our main point of contact. Key elements of the project by month were:

Jan – agree project outline / support from partners / seek clients / initiate student interest

Feb - all clients on board / held induction at UWS / continue to recruit students

Mar – initial on site client meetings with student(s) & business mentor / develop proposal

Apr – conduct research / write report

May – finalise report / prepare presentation / SE finals / initiate evaluation survey

Jun – survey close / evaluation meeting / final report (this document)

The main 2 events with the period were the induction / launch at UWS and the finals at SE:

The launch / induction

For students that had expressed interest / came forward - to hear more from SE/ SDI staff, the Chamber and UWS giving useful info on what is involved, timescales and advice on how to run a successful project of this nature

The Finals at SE Boardroom

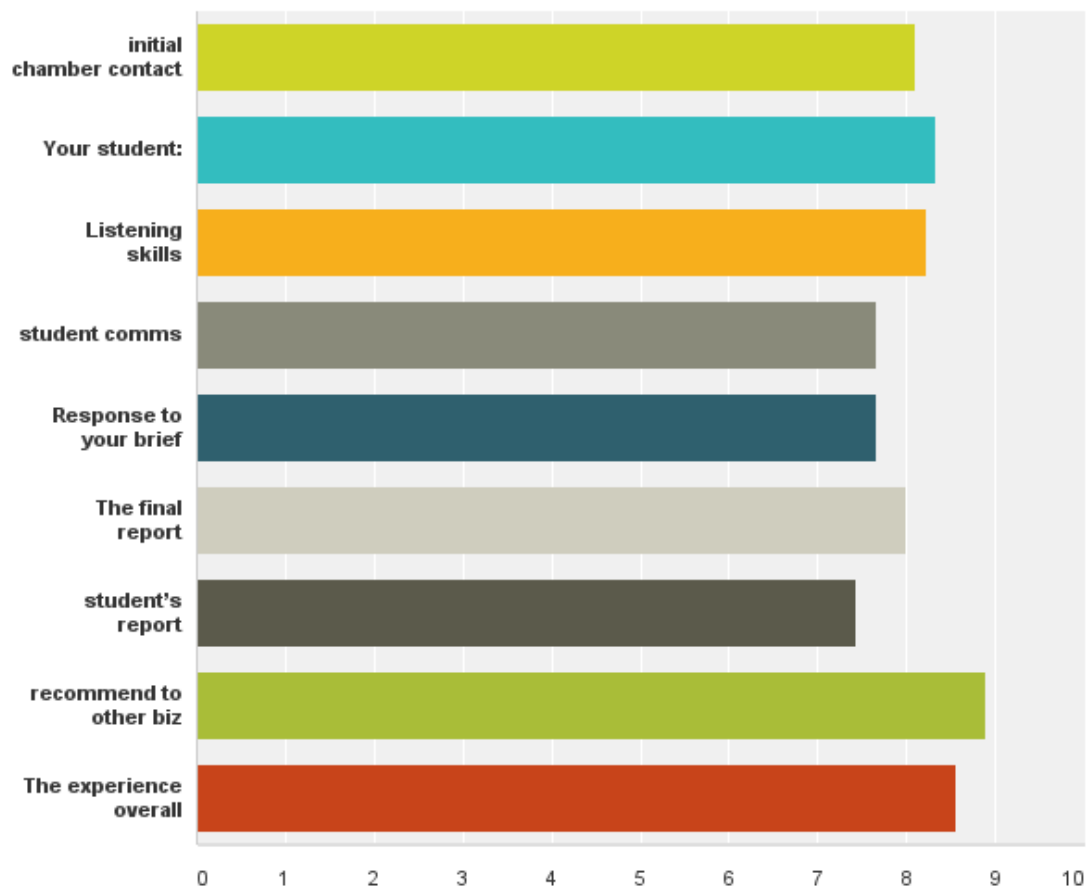
The teams presented their findings and discussed their experience at a “finals presentation” at the SE Board room at the end of May. All the students who participated were awarded a Certificate of Achievement and the offer of a professional reference from their Mentors. The Winning Team (for Andrew Muirhead & Son.), and Winning Individual (for Worldteachers) who scored most highly overall between their written report and Presentation, were awarded prize cheques donated by the Chamber.

Survey results

Client survey

Q2 Clients - please score the following from 1 to 10. Ten being the highest

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0



9 clients responded using Survey. The 10th was client Smith & McLaurin – their student was working to a later timescale and therefore did not wish to complete the survey

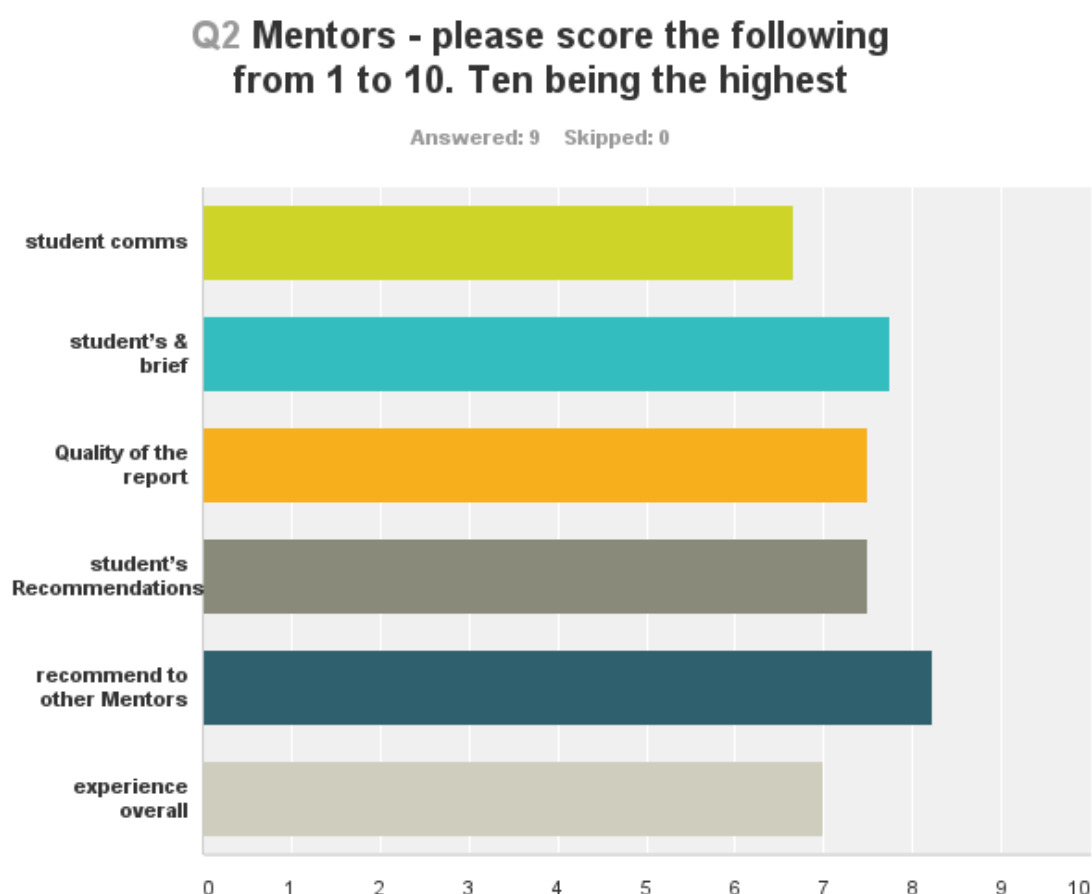
Highlights to note:

“Recommend to other businesses” score highest – clients understand they are helping student employability as well as getting research conducted

Student comms – area that need improving – combination of timing due to exams and also reality of the business world – clients expecting prompt response – when some students perhaps not appreciating that just yet. These are areas where some of the more mature students perhaps grasp better. (this should be focused on more at induction)

Student report although not a low score – it is the lowest. From the comments this is down to businesses perhaps expecting a response similar to a private e sector enterprise doing research or some students having understood and listened to the client brief more. Possibly again supporting the demand for more mature students?

Mentor survey results



All mentors completed the survey.

Students comms scored lowest – perhaps needs to firm up the role of the mentor v the client – can be addressed at induction (what a mentor is and what it is not)

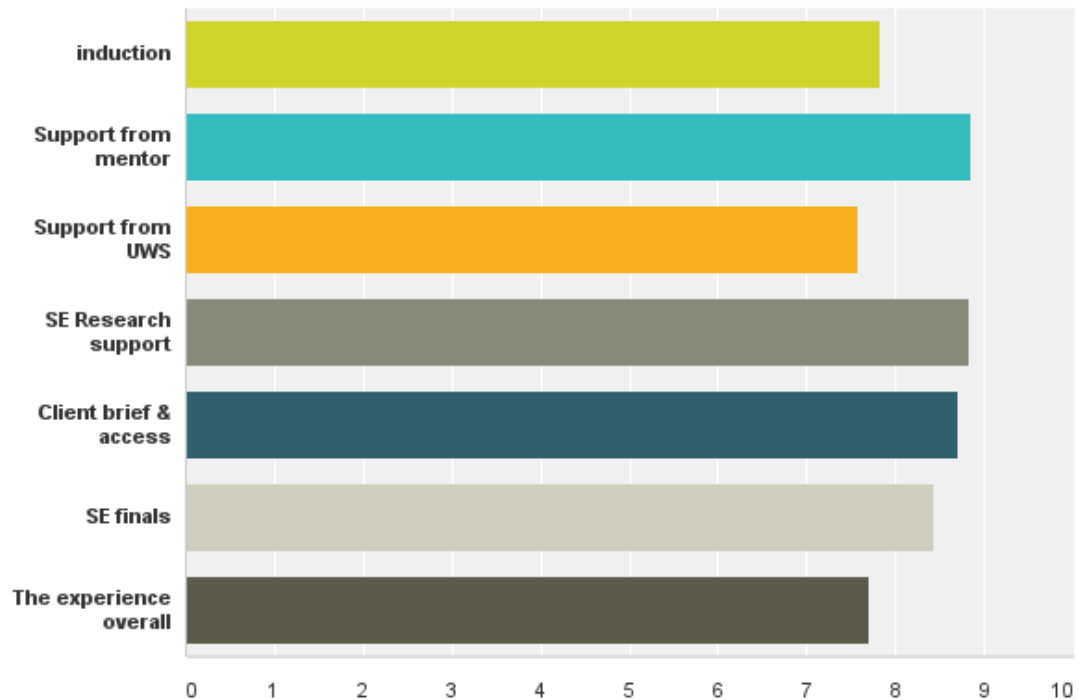
2nd lowest score was experience overall – again need to firm up mentor role.

But overall the highest score was “recommend to other mentors” – the mentors understand the importance of projects like this and how with the improvements and recommendations suggested- can really make a difference to employers and university engagement in a manner that benefits the business and the student.

Student survey results

Q2 Students - please score the following from 1 to 10. Ten being the highest

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0



The Survey came out during exam time – and most students after their exams don't return 'til September – the 7 students responded represented 7 of the 10 companies involved.

All survey respondents had the opportunity to also give comments – the most popular comments were *“to change the time – not have so close to exams”*. Second most common comment was for *“all involved to be engaged at the start”*. Partners agree with these comments and are reflected in recommendations.

For future Voyagers need to be clearer up front with timescales students have to work to and what is to be in by when – and who they have to send content to in the 1st instance i.e. UWS v mentor v client. That could all be fine-tuned and shared at induction

A small booklet in print of e-form could help act as a reminder to students and all partners in terms of what is expected by when / who to involve – with reminder re quality of comms etc..

Supporting comments

Scottish Enterprise

"The Voyager pilot has been an outstanding success. Scottish Enterprise and SDI have been delighted to lead this project along with Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce and University of the West of Scotland. The enthusiasm, commitment and vision of all the partners and of course the students in undertaking such a challenging project have shown just how effective real partnership working can be." - Alison Loveday, Senior Executive, Customer Operations at SE commented

UWS

"It was quickly evident with the students that chose to participate in the Voyager project became more confident through dealing with their real-world business clients and in applying the business theory they had learned. Particularly when presenting their findings, they were positive and assured - quite a transformation in the space of one trimester! UWS were delighted to support this very valuable initiative." - Meg Dunn, Senior Lecturer, UWS

Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce

"... we expect to continue and indeed expand this type of partnership activity. Like all initiatives of this nature, based on feedback there are learnings and therefore changes we would apply to make the experience even better for all concerned. I would like to thank all the partners, mentors, clients and students for all their efforts and making Voyager a success". - Chamber chief exec Bob Davidson

Student comment

"I really enjoyed taking part in the Voyager programme. It was interesting to apply what we had been learning in our lectures to a real life business." – Katie White

Client Comments

"I was delighted to be involved in this project and my student did a great job" – Sheila Logan, Owner – Tendercush

"I have been really impressed with the report and presentation – and planning to speak to my student about opportunities within the business" – Roddy Hammond, Worldteachers

Recommendations

Overall all partners, students, mentors & clients believe Voyager was a success – and we recommend the project continues and expands. As with all initiatives of this type there are learnings and aspects that would need to be adjusted to improve the experience. The main recommendations are:

Recommendation 1 - The Voyager Project should be completed over no less than a 16 week period” Voyager year crept too much into student exam time. We recommend the process for finding companies starts in December with a view to having an event end January whereby all students involved can interact with the clients, SE, UWS staff, the Chamber, Council and mentors. The project would run across Feb / March with SE finals in early April. Thus reducing the impact on the key exam period in May.

Recommendation 2 - The University and Client elements of the project should be localised”... Campuses to work with businesses & UWS staff in their own locale. E.g. UWS Paisley Campus students to work with Renfrewshire businesses, UWS Paisley staff & Renfrewshire Chamber & Council. The other 3 campuses of UWS – Hamilton, Ayr and Dumfries – all have local chamber and business bodies that could be approached to get involved:

- a. Hamilton – has Lanarkshire Chamber & LES – Lanarkshire Enterprise Services
- b. Dumfries - has Dumfries & Galloway Chamber
- c. Ayr – has Ayr Chamber
 - i. All areas have access to SE staff, Business Gateway & local council economic development teams

Recommendation 3 - The University should consider making Voyager a formal part of the International Marketing course for 3rd year and MBA students Careful consideration given to whether student involvement is extra-curricular or part of their course – the latter has more chance of success and cross partner involvement

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