

Welcome the Experts: Using Guest Speakers to Support the Lecture Programme

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A typical undergraduate business and management module is timetabled to comprise a lecture element plus an associated seminar. While the seminar session naturally facilitates a range of interactive student activities such as research tasks, discussion groups, student presentations etc., the lecture remains traditional and problematic, particularly, how to maximize student attendance and raise levels of interest and participation, especially in a large theatre setting.

Inspiration for improving lectures was derived from the QAA benchmark statements (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/GeneralBusinessManagement.pdf>). The QAA Benchmark statement for undergraduate business and management states, "There should be integration between theory and practice by a variety of means according to the mode of delivery, including for example...inputs from visiting practicing managers". It is this notion of using guest speakers to not only enhance the lecture programme, but provide closer links between business students and local industry that provided the catalyst for change. In addition, it would provide insight into local organizations which could inform students' future career choices. As a result, a number of guest speakers were integrated into the lecture programme.

Initially, a review of local business contacts and acquaintances was drawn-up to generate a list of potential visiting speakers. Contact was then made with a number on the list, and meetings set up to discuss possible lecture content. Dates were agreed and lecture materials jointly developed. This resulted in six guest speakers evenly spread over a twelve week module schedule. The agreed format was that the lecture would be split equally between the university lecturer and the guest speaker. Not only did the guest speakers get excited about their presentations, "I also intend to surprise them and illustrate the quite dramatic changes our business is facing", but the students recognized the contribution they could make to their learning experience, and consequently attendance was especially high at those sessions. Students acknowledged the expertise being delivered, "I found the guest speakers very useful. It is always easier to understand a topic from a practical point of view". Moreover, at the end of the lecture, it was pleasing to note a significant number of students remained behind to ask further questions of the guest.

It was found that the student experience was enhanced by the use of guest speakers, by providing a sense of "real-world" and practitioner experience to the lectures. Additionally, up-to-date knowledge of local enterprises was forthcoming which will not only be useful in supporting graduate career aspirations, but provides business lecturers with a means of updating knowledge of organizations and industry.