

Durham University centre to help career prospects

by Chris Knox, **The Journal**
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Launch of the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre at Durham University

Durham University has launched a new centre to further improve its career and start-up business advice services for students and graduates. Christopher Knox took a closer look.

THOUSANDS of students at Durham University have been enjoying the excitement of the graduation ceremonies this week. But when they hang up their gowns, clear their heads and look to what they do next it can be daunting, especially in these straitened times.

Even after spending time over the last three years talking to potential employers and considering all the possible options for further training students appreciate as much help as they can finding a good job.

Durham University, which says it prides itself on treating career progression as a key part of its courses. And recent rankings placed Durham in the top 25 global institutions for employer reputation, after its graduates were considered by 5,000 blue-chip companies to be better than those from many of the world's leading universities.

To cement this global reputation, the university has launched the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre (CEEC), which is split between Dunelm House in Durham, and the Ebsworth building on Queen's Campus, in Stockton.

Bringing together a host of advisory services, including career fairs and employability skills courses, the centre aims to improve the employability of many of its graduates at a time when concerns over youth employability continue to mount.

The centre will also seek to build on its relationships with some sought-after employers, including Ernst and Young, Goldman Sachs, Deloitte and Morgan Stanley, which have experts on hand to help students weigh up their career choices.

The launch of the facility featured a performance by musician and Durham University postgraduate student Peter Oken Ong'are, who received world acclaim for his song 'Vuma!', which was played and sung at matches during the in the 2010 World Cup Finals in South Africa.

Anthony Forster, deputy vice-chancellor at Durham University, said: "Employability and developing a broad range of skills is at the very core of the student experience and is one of the four key themes within the university's education strategy aiming to provide our students with outstanding and

distinctive opportunities for personal development. The new CEEC embodies the university's partnering approach to careers services, building on the excellent relationships we already have with many of the UK's biggest and best employers furthering the employability of Durham University graduates.

"We value highly our relationships with employers throughout the UK and within the North East, a region that allows our students through part-time work, work placements and internships to undertake activity that helps invigorate the local economy."

Working with employers, including KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), and independent charities such as Teach First, the CEEC also works with students to identify entrepreneurial and other work-orientated skills to help them map out their career pathway.

Catherine Richardson, head of the CEEC, said: "The new CEEC provides a natural evolution in our professional and integrated approach to careers support for our graduate and postgraduate students by enabling them to tap in to the rich resources of our staff and partner employers.

"Our students will also be able to benefit from the excellent Durham Award programme which allows our team, academics and employers to work closely with students to the benefit of all.

"It does this by allowing employers to interact with the students creating opportunities for future recruitment as well as providing a mentoring culture for students to develop their interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills.

"We have also developed invaluable links with employers in the region with companies including car manufacturer Nissan and IT consultancy Waterstons regularly taking our graduates as we actively look for excellent career opportunities for our Durham graduates right here in the North East."

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Durham University student John Cordrey, 21, has just completed a three-year business management degree and, with the help of the university's career services, has already secured a graduate role at PwC after serving several internships.

He said: "As a student you are looking to your university to provide a contact network within the working world and to develop your interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills through work placement, intern, mentoring and interview practice opportunities.

"Throughout my degree Durham University has provided me with numerous opportunities and it is great that all these services have now been brought together in the new centre.

"I was also able to use an alumni database that gave me access to advice from people within companies including Ernst and Young, Goldman Sachs, Deloitte and Morgan Stanley."

One firm that has welcomed the launch of the new centre is Sedgefield-based technology Kromek, which was spun out of Durham University in 2003 and has been a strong advocate of its services ever since.

As well as supporting a number of Durham's PhD students, the firm, which employs 54 staff, has a history of recruiting from its pool of graduates.

The company is behind technology that uses X-rays to reveal whether a bottle of liquid in a traveller's luggage is gin, mineral water or any one of a number of high explosives, and can even check barcodes to see whether the contents match the label.

The technology is not only helping to prevent terrorism, but is putting an end to passengers facing delays and having to ditch their drinks and shampoo before going through airport security gates. The NETPark-based company also sealed a four-year contract with the University of Massachusetts Medical School last year to use its technology to help improve the detection of breast cancer.

Chief executive Arnab Basu said: "I welcome any efforts to further strengthen the relationship between academia and industry.

"Kromek wouldn't have been possible had it not been for Durham's University's technology transfer office, which gave us so much support during the early days of the business.

"As we look to build up the North East's image as a knowledge-based economy, it is vital that we are able to retain the skills of our young graduates, and this means further collaboration between universities and industry.

"The region has a growing reputation as a centre for areas such as renewables and scientific development, and to help maintain this, it is important that our young people are able to draw on the kind of advice and support that can help to commercialise their knowledge.

"We currently employ 17 PhD students at the moment from a number of different universities. However, as we were born out of Durham University, we are keen to provide it with as much support as we can."