

# The Alchemy Exchange

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### What is The Alchemy Exchange?

The Alchemy Exchange (TAE) is based in the Centre for Individual and Organisational Development in the Business School at Sheffield Hallam University. TAE recruits students from all levels and courses to complete projects for external organisations. These projects typically consist of secondary and/or primary research into a specific issue that has arisen for the client or an area of interest they have which they require further knowledge in. The students recruited become TAE Associates.

### Rationale

One of the main reasons TAE was set up was to enhance employability skills of the students at Sheffield Hallam University. Dr Dawn Lees, Employability Co-ordinator at University of Exeter Graduate Employability literature review states; 'De la Harpe et al. (2000) suggests that there is concern world-wide that existing undergraduate programmes are not producing graduates with the kind of life long learning skills and professional skills which they need in order to be successful in their careers. TAE therefore would like to counter this view and offer an enhanced learning experience for students who apply and are successful. Joining TAE provides Associates with employability skills as they are faced with a real life industry brief with set deadlines. This enhances crucial skills such as; time keeping and prioritising.

### Benefits to the Associates

TAE provides numerous benefits to students. These include the following:

- £8 per hour
- enhances their CV
- part-time, flexible work
- fits in alongside their studies
- networking opportunities
- mentoring and support from Academics
- training courses provided
- develops their report writing and presentation skills
- 'real world' experience
- Enhances the learning experience

### Assessment

TAE ensure feedback on projects and training sessions are completed. This provides TAE with a method of tracking progress of Associates, how they have developed whilst being a member of the pool and assess client feedback to ensure they are satisfied with the quality of work which they have received.

### Future Plans

- Associates - TAE hopes to enhance student's employability, improve written and verbal communication, provide 'real world' work experience and provide the opportunity to put theory into practice. For the next academic year, TAE hopes to increase the number of Associates to 150.
- Academics - TAE would like to engage Academics from across the University. This enables expert knowledge from a wide range of areas, therefore expanding the diversity of projects TAE can undertake. Also, if the number of Academics increases, this means the number of projects can follow this trend and increase as there will be more resources to monitor projects available.
- Projects and clients - TAE aims to complete 36 projects between August 2010 and July 2011. This equates to 3 a month.
- KTPs - TAE is looking into the administration and setting up of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships for the Business School. This will diversify TAE offerings. TAE can also make use of the Associates in the pool, as the graduates may want to apply for these positions.

### Key learning outcomes

TAE set out the following learning outcomes which they would like Associates to attain whilst they are member of TAE pool:

- Grown in confidence and complete tasks that are outside of their comfort zone
- They have gained an understanding of the world of work and their communication skills have improved.
- They have gained new levels of responsibility. Identified key skills that they have acquired during education and applied to a real world context.

### Associate comments: Training workshops-

**Formatting documents** - "It surpassed my initial expectations, very useful workshop" "It overpassed my initial expectations, very useful workshop"

**Questionnaire design** - "Valuable details to the whole picture" "I revised my knowledge and learned a few more things"

**Focus groups** - "Yes, I would feel comfortable running more focus groups. Information was very valuable" "I would feel comfortable moderating a focus group now I have been further trained"

**Networking** - "I feel more confident in my abilities to talk to people I don't know"

### Projects-

I learnt a lot, enjoyed my time and feel the projects are a great way to experience the 'world of work' within the safety of the university environment – Jessica Morgan

It gave me a chance to put theory into practice – Kristina Mee

I would rate my experience very highly and believe that it has been valuable to my final year studies – Natasha Wall

I found the internal team very supportive in their feedback on the progress I was making with the research. Their suggestions helped me enrich the content of the report. The internal communication was excellent. I was encouraged to get in touch with any questions and always received prompt replies. This made my work on the research go smoothly – Kristina Nitsolova

The most enjoyable part of the project was confirming our findings with the client, which confirmed the thoughts we had about their market. The benefits of the project were a drastic improvement to my report writing skills and presenting the information in a professional way, while qualifying everything which was written – Matthew Burke

Working on this Alchemy Exchange project was a fantastic learning experience. There was much more to be gained from my work with the Alchemy exchange than from other part-time jobs I had during my time at university. I am looking forward to working on another interesting Alchemy Exchange project – Kristina Nitsolova

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