The Institution of Engineering and Technology

LOCAL NETWORK EVENTS

Reaching undergraduate students

Research shows that many student members are not joining as full members on graduation from their course. We believe that undergraduates and other students are not fully aware of the value of their membership for their futures, that when they are asked to pay over one hundred pounds for membership on graduation, many student members choose not to convert to full member status.

We believe that part of the solution is to help undergraduates to understand – whilst they are still undergraduates – the potential value of continuing membership on graduation.

Local Networks and their members are ideally placed to undertake that role, by interacting more with universities and other educational establishments, in order to forge solid relationships between the IET and the undergraduates.

Benefits from this approach include:

- students are more likely to remain members for longer
- potential new volunteers and activists
- opportunities for mentoring and to help the students get more out of their membership and careers
- promoting Professional Registration
- access university facilities
- interactions with science, technology and engineering departments.

This Event is designed to help the LN develop a relationship with undergraduates. It is expected to increase the number of undergraduates becoming student members of the IET.

Student members will benefit from the LN's advice and experience, as well as from the resources the IET can offer. The LN will benefit by having a solid relationship with the university SET faculties as well as by recruiting potential volunteers.

These same ideas can be used in any further or higher educational establishment catering for students who could be expected to join the IET. It can also be used for LN interactions with people on 'Modern Apprenticeship' courses.

There are currently templates for four Undergraduate Events in a Box:

A: A classroom lecture to first year students
B: A careers advice event for final year students
C: An informal lunchtime reception for first year students
D: A Freshers' Fayre activity

Each of these can be adapted easily to help you put on other events with different content within the university or other establishment.

During the consultation period for this project and during the regional presentations, there were many other ideas for event content that would help LNs to interact more with universities and their students. This would give us the opportunity to layer greater understanding of the benefits of continued IET membership to the undergraduates.

These ideas included:

- applying for a work placement
- who wants to be an engineer? The reality of the first few years in industry
- how to get your papers published (for post graduates)
- MIET: How to get the perfect CV
- job hunting (sector specific)
- introduction to Professional Registration
- local industry networking
- final year project advice.

Each of these could be put on using ideas from any of events A, B or C, or by using any advice given elsewhere in the library of Events.

The existing IET Lifeskills Training events are already a great success in universities. Equally important are opportunities for undergraduates to learn from the experiences of LN members in an informal setting. Successful LN events with informal interactions include paintballing, brewery visits and Quiz Nights.

Fitting into the IET corporate ambitions

The aims of the event are to:

- showcase the IET and explain its role in helping the future careers of graduates in SET disciplines
- recruit the undergraduates as student members
- retain more graduates as members by demonstrating the potential value to their future careers of continued IET membership
- build a relationship between the LN and the SET faculties at the educational establishment.

Using the LN event Framework

There are ten steps to putting on any LN event. This Event in a Box follows these steps:

1. Decide what the LN wants to achieve from the event
2. Decide who you want at the event in order to achieve the desired outcome
3. Choose the content for the plenary session that will encourage the correct people to attend
4. Decide what the volunteers have to do during the event to achieve their outcome
5. Keep on top of the money side of things
6. Set up the event
7. Market the event
8. Ensure the event goes well
9. Follow up where appropriate
10. Evaluate and learn

1. Decide what the LN wants to achieve from the event

The primary desired outcome of these events is to demonstrate the value and worth of IET membership, from graduation and beyond.

There are subsidiary aims as well:

- to recruit more student members to the IET
- to develop a relationship between the LN and the educational establishment concerned
- to recruit more volunteers and activists from both existing student members and from the new recruits
- to help the student members to get more out of their membership of the IET and to make the most of it to help launch their careers
- to explain the importance and benefits of Professional Registration for career development.

2. Decide who you want at the event in order to achieve the desired outcome

This event is aimed at undergraduates in disciplines appropriate to membership of the IET, as well as existing members.

3. Choose the content for the plenary session that will encourage the correct people to attend

A: A classroom lecture to first year students

Part of the formal course content, this provides an opportunity for a LN member to explain the IET and how it can help studies and future careers, using personal stories and anecdotes to bring the theory to reality. It will be held during the second term, so that the students have had a chance to get used to their courses.

B: Careers advice event for final year students

Held at the start of their final year, this is an opportunity for those preparing to apply for jobs to benefit from the knowledge and experiences of LN members. The event is to be held in a 'coffee morning' style, with LN members leading discussions in small groups, sat at tables with tea/coffee/biscuits etc., followed by a plenary Q&A.

C: Informal reception for first year students

This will be held during early November, at lunchtime or as an early evening reception. There will be a short

speech or two with interesting anecdotes, explaining the IET and its function to students, but, most importantly, a chance for interaction over appropriate drinks and nibbles.

D: Freshers' Fayre activity

This consists of working with the Engineering Society (or similar – e.g. Student Society, Younger Members Section) to make their Freshers' Fayre offering more compelling.

4. Decide what the volunteers have to do during the event to achieve their outcome

A: A classroom lecture to first year students

Deliver the lecture and take questions. A framework for a lecture, along with visual aids, will be produced by HQ staff and this should be personalised with anecdotes and examples, to link theory and reality.

LN volunteers should be competent and engaging public speakers.

B: Careers advice event for final year students

Lead round-table discussions in pairs of LN members, with 5–7 student members, about possible careers, applying for jobs and how the IET can help, both now and in the future. Two or three LN members should take the plenary Q&A that follows.

C: Informal reception for first year students

Two or three members must be able to make short, interesting speeches about the IET. Others should be able to circulate and chat about the IET, with the aim of recruiting student members.

D: Freshers' Fayre activity

Work with the Engineering Society (or similar – e.g. Student Society, Younger Members Section) to produce eye-catching publicity material and interactive items ahead of the Freshers' Fayre. You can work with these parties to put on interesting and informative events and meetings.

5. Keep on top of the money side of things

Costs for these events are likely to be minimal as much of the costs are covered by the venue itself – i.e. the university.

Costs will depend on the ambition of the LN to interact with the undergraduates and to build a solid relationship with them.

Your costs are likely to be:

- refreshments
- room signage and branding
- publicity materials to advertise the events, such as posters and flyers
- props etc. that may be used at Freshers' Fayre or during lectures
- membership forms, pens, information leaflets, clipboards etc. used for recruitment during the event
- information packs about the IET and its benefits to undergraduates and their future careers
- ongoing communications such as newsletters to students or IET-branded posters and leaflets relevant to their studies
- branded 'giveaways' for the students.

Many of the materials above are generic materials that will be available via the online Marketing Toolkit or HQ.

6. Set up the event

A, B & C – working with a university faculty

To make these events work you first need the support of the appropriate SET faculty.

Discussions surrounding these types of event have already been held with some universities and the response to all was overwhelmingly favourable. Each time it has taken a few phone calls before finding the right person to help, and follow-up emails to set up a subsequent meeting to start it off.

If a relationship exists already with staff or other members inside the educational establishment then these events will cement it further. If one doesn't exist, then these events provide the perfect reason to start it up. Wherever this process can be facilitated by LN members in a SET faculty then so much the better.

The process is simply one of phoning the faculty, and speaking with the Dean and/or other lecturers until you find someone who is interested, and able to help get the ball rolling.

Previous activity has shown that it was possible to find an interested party quite quickly, as they immediately understood the benefits to the students of having relations with external professionals as well as the potential of membership from an appropriate Institution. They quickly realised that it was worth exploring further, at the very least.

During the phone conversation you will need to introduce yourself and give your position in the IET, and explain the purpose of your call.

Try and mention the following points:

- the IET is the largest Institution in the UK and the second largest in the world, and will be of great benefit to the students
- many student members lapse their membership upon graduation because they don't understand the potential worth of continued membership to their careers, especially when faced with a steep increase in fees at the same time
- interaction by undergraduates with professionals following similar career paths to their own desired one, and who are also IET members, will both help the undergraduates make more of their future careers on graduation and also allow them to make the most of the IET's resources whilst still an undergraduate
- the local branch of the IET has some ideas about ways to help the undergraduates and we'd like to come and talk with someone about it
- if appropriate, give a flavour of those ideas but move the conversation to the next step – a face-to-face meeting to confirm arrangements
- get agreement for a meeting (within the subsequent 2 weeks in order both to keep momentum and to show desire and commitment to the project)
- either arrange the meeting there and then or finish it off by email exchange.

The sooner you follow up the phone conversation with the meeting the better. It is often best if two LN members attend the meeting to explain your ideas. They should be explained in terms of the benefits they provide to the undergraduates and their future careers, and also as being of knock-on benefit to the faculty.

Most of the organising will happen as a matter of course through liaising with the SET faculty with whom you are partnering. The faculty provides an excellent channel of communication direct to the undergraduate.

The faculty will need help with their communications on behalf of their relationship with the LN. It may not initially be at the forefront of their minds. The LN should remove the burden from them whenever they can – e.g. producing materials such as letters, newsletters and posters that can easily be circulated by the departmental staff.

It is important that the LN drives the project, pushing to make it work. Once established, the relationship between the LN and the faculty has the capacity to grow, but it needs nurturing and encouraging. The LN has to take responsibility for that.

Whatever it is that the LN promises to do must be undertaken. Whilst setting up this relationship, the faculty's expectations always have to be bettered in order for it to be maintained.

Once the first event of each type has been held it will become much easier to repeat and to improve.

D – working with the Engineering Society

The important people here are the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Engineering Society. They can be approached through any of these means:

a) directly by the LN through the university Student's Union
b) by using any student IET members
c) through staff IET members

Once contact has been made, a face-to-face meeting should quickly follow. It's then a question of finding out just how much can be done together. The only limits are time, and the extent of the enthusiasm and imagination on the parts of the LN and the ES.

The LN should be as helpful as they can be to the ES and gradually build greater involvement and interaction through shared events and the knowledge, expertise and resource that professionals can bring.

7. Market the event

A: A classroom lecture to first year students

This will be an integral part of the course, however as attendance at lectures is never compulsory, lecturers and other staff (especially IET members) should be emphasising the importance and encouraging IET members in higher years to promote the lecture's importance.

Other ways to market the event are to distribute an interesting flyer, put up posters advertising the event – and word of mouth from previous lectures is always powerful.

B: Careers advice event for final year students

Marketing will be via the internal faculty communications, e.g. posters, flyers, pamphlets, newsletters, and word of mouth from staff and other members. This kind of activity will become an established part of the curriculum over time.

C: Informal reception for first year students

This will be marketed within, and by, the course and faculty. Lecturers and other staff (especially IET members) should be emphasising the value, and encouraging IET members in older years to promote it.

Other ways to market the event are to distribute an interesting flyer, put up posters advertising the event – and word of mouth from previous lectures is always powerful. Extend the invitation to other years' students too.

D: Freshers' Fayre activity

The most important factors for success in this case are the pre-communications, designed to increase footfall. Not only is there a captive audience, but also university communications channels that are possible to aim directly at the target audience. Imaginative communications will start to make the IET Society (or similar – e.g. Student Society, Younger Members Section) stand out and drive traffic.

For all of these events, the LN should be producing eye-catching publicity materials to promote them. It is the ability to stand out in a crowd and to create interest that will get the IET noticed. Issuing tickets also adds to the gravitas of the event.

There are templates and marketing materials available for use via the online Marketing Toolkit to help publicise events such as these.

All LNs ought to be able to manufacture interesting materials that can be used at Freshers' Fayres to attract attention, or at a lecture to create a memorable moment, or which could be used ahead of time to publicise a forthcoming IET event.

8. Ensure the event goes well

A: A classroom lecture to first year students

Things to consider are:

- know the content of the lecture
- rehearse it
- add anecdotes and real examples
- make sure there is something memorable as part of the talk
- know the benefits of the IET
- get advice on your presentation skills
- have recruitment and information materials to hand.

B: Careers advice event for final year students

Things to consider are:

- your representatives and volunteers must understand the IET very well, and especially

how it will help in job applications and future career development
- use charismatic members and speakers
- set out the room with round tables for 6–10 people
- provide decent refreshments – tea, coffee, juice, biscuits, cakes etc. (using in-house caterers at the university if appropriate)
- speed dating approach works well for this also
- link with Lifeskills Training materials.

C: Informal reception for first year students

Things to consider are:
- provide appropriate refreshments
- use a room as facilitated by the faculty
- have the appropriate number of LN members to cope with the audience
- make sure the speeches are short and well-rehearsed
- focus on IET study resources
- have recruitment and information materials to hand
- this could be particularly powerful in engaging with the International Students. LNs could get involved with the International Students Orientation Events which are usually organised by International Offices, rather than departments.

D: Freshers' Fayre activity

The event itself is likely to be run by the Engineering Society (or similar – e.g. Student Society, Younger Members Section) although younger LN members could help out if required. The LN's main duty is to prepare for the Fayre in advance, and then helping to provide stimulating and interesting content for Engineering Society (or similar – e.g. Student Society, Younger Members Section) meetings. It might be possible for the LN to have a stall in their own right (and at charitable rates) although it will be much more powerful to partner with the Engineering Society.

9. Follow up where appropriate

Developing a strong relationship with both the SET faculty/University and the IET Society (or similar – e.g. Student Society, Younger Members Section) are important here.

Joint and collaborative events will benefit all concerned.

Involving the student members in LN activities is very important, as is keeping them informed of LN work and opportunities. A regular IET LN newsletter aimed at students will help here.

It is important to invite students to all LN events, and endeavour to hold regular LN events on the campus in order to facilitate the participation of students.

10. Evaluate and learn

The main point to share and develop from putting on these events will be about how to create openings at universities and other educational establishments. Once the opening has been created for the first event the extent of the relationship is limited only by the success of each event and by the limit of ambition from either party.

The other important area for developing better practice is how to integrate students into the life of LNs. A lot of this will help in securing the continuity of the LN.

Good ideas will also be generated for strengthening the relationships between students and LN, and faculty/department and LN. At the start of this worksheet were some other ideas for event content that could be used by LNs. Whenever events such as these are held, advice can be passed on to other LNs. Likewise, whenever an LN devises a different event to help the relationship between LN and graduates.

Remember, the event only ends when you have collated your learning points. If you switch off when the last participant leaves, you will lose valuable information. Record your findings soon after the event has ended so you can make best use of them.