**Employer Advisory Boards Guidance**

**Good examples of agenda items, activities and topics**

1. **Invite senior staff to talk about the strategic plans of the institution**

It is important that Board Members feel they are accessing insights and information they would not receive if they were not giving up their time to support this initiative. Example topics could include:

* The new courses we are developing
* Research that has recently been in the news or made headlines
* How we are investing our money to develop the university
* The impact or findings of our latest research
* New facilities and equipment that employers may be interested in/able to access
* Widening participation or civic engagement in the region
* Research and knowledge transfer partnerships

1. **Invite the Board Members to present to the board**

The purpose of the board is to hear the views of employers of your students and graduates, so creating space to hear about their business, plans and challenges is critical. Asking a different member to give a short presentation (5-10 minutes plus short Q&A) can help to educate staff and also provide a useful opportunity for Board Members to share best practice and increase their engagement in the group. Example topics could include:

* What is your biggest challenge with graduate recruitment?
* What are the key people, research or investment challenges to support your business strategy over the next five years?
* How do you train and develop your graduates once in post?
* What changes do you expect in your sector over the next five years and how do you want students and graduates to prepare for this future world of work?

1. **Hot topics/roundtable discussion topics**

An open discussion amongst employers and university staff is often most constructive when framed around a hot topic or key discussion. Examples might include:

* How we can we work with you to support your diversity/social mobility agenda?
* How we can we work with you to develop students commercial awareness and/or embed more work-based learning into our courses?
* What areas do you find it most difficult to recruit for? Why?
* What would be your preferred methods to engage with our students?

When deciding on discussion topics, it is important that they are not too specific that most members will not be able to contribute to the discussion, or too general and vague that you provoke lots of conversation but little chance of actionable outputs.

An example of something too specific:

* Should this (insert obscure software) be taught in the 2nd year module of (insert name of comparatively small and niche course)?

A better question would be:

* Which are the most important pieces of software for our graduates to be competent in and how might these change in the near future?

An example of something too general:

* What skills do you look for in graduates?

A better question would be:

* What skills do our graduates typically lack that you expect them to possess?

1. **New initiatives and projects**

Members of your board should be the ideal group of people to take new ideas, pilots, projects or initiatives to for feedback and constructive criticism. They are also frequently happy to be the first people to offer their support or engagement in a new project, giving them early and privileged access to your students. Examples:

* A funded summer internship programme
* A widening participation/social mobility mentoring scheme
* Sponsorship opportunities or involvement with student groups/societies/events
* A new work-based assessment method designed to reflect professional practice

1. **Opportunities to meet Students**

Inviting students to join you over lunch, during a tour, to present a project or for part of the session are well worth considering and often valued by employers. Some board include current students on their boards, but it is worth noting this can sometimes prevent academics and employers from speaking entirely openly about any challenges they may have with engaging students or how Sheffield Hallam students may be performing in any recruitment processes, or in role. This is manageable but comes with a note of caution.

1. **Showcasing Sheffield Hallam**

Taking your Employer Advisory Board out of the meeting room and into the institution is a powerful way to increase advocacy and positive ‘storytelling’ about the institution. You might want to consider: Examples:

* Taking them to an event, showcase or student presentation taking place that day
* Taking a tour of some cutting-edge new research facilities
* Visiting other areas of the institution they may not know about, but may be related
* Visiting the careers and employability centre
* Timing the board to sit with a visit from an eminent speaker or visiting professor who is well known in the sector, with the option to visit or join a guest lecture later in the day
* Offering a memorable experience such as seeing 3D printing in action, being cooked for by the facilities and events students or even chocolate tasting (there are fabulous experiences like this across the institution)
* Seeing a student society or activity in action e.g. a mock tribunal, mooting or varsity