**Employer Advisory Boards Guidance**

**How to leverage meaningful relationships for the wider benefit of Sheffield Hallam University ​**

1. **Identifying new opportunities to work together**

The purpose of Employer Advisory Boards is to create a bridge between university and the professional world, to promote knowledge exchange and enhance partnership working.

In order to achieve this it is important to adopt a **needs-based approach** to engagement with employers e.g. focussing on their needs, challenges and opportunities and identifying how and where the University may be able to support. Adopting a consultancy style approach and asking probing questions will help you to understand their challenges, improve your offering and define which of the universities services (both inside and outside of your Faculty) may be best suited to their context. Good questions to ask Board Members include:

* Are there any other areas of your business with recruitment challenges we could support?
* Do you have anyone in your supply chain or clients that could benefit from our support?
* Would you like us to host any company or sector meetings on campus?
* What challenges are your business or sector facing in the next five years that we can prepare our students for now in curriculum?
* What work are you doing with other institutions that is really making a difference?
* What other ways could we support your business?
1. **Managing referrals**

When a partnership opportunity is identified with a Board Member, outside of your Faculty/area of responsibility, it is important that any referrals to other areas of the university are carefully managed to ensure a seamless and professional employer experience. For example:

* Avoid making email referrals with no input
* Speak to the relevant staff before making the referral to clarify their services and timescales
* Where possible, manage the initial stages of the collaboration rather than simply signposting
* Try to align multiple activities – time on campus is a huge cost to business
* Follow up and mediate – offer logistical support to ensure their needs are met

The success of Employer Advisory Boards will depend on the efficient delivery of the actions agreed with employer members.

1. **Add value**

Employer Advisory Boards provide a good opportunity to leverage key partnerships and to secure support with the university’s activities. However, it is important that members do not feel the primary function of the meetings is to sell the universities services or generate revenue from them. Approach any such discussions sensitively. For example:

* Ask if, as trusted partners, they would be willing to support specific pilot initiatives
* Offer Advisory Board Members ‘first-refusal’ on sponsorship opportunities
* Don’t focus exclusively on revenue generating activities, offer them free and funded services
* Although it can be a good opportunity to secure commitment, in some cases it may be more appropriate to seek expressions of interest
* Be sensitive to the fact that that there may be commercial sensitivities or political dynamics between members of the advisory board that you are not privy to. Always offer the opportunity to discuss outside of the meeting