Review of a Joint Academic/Industry Sponsored Degree in Computing between The University of the West of England, Bristol and Hewlett-Packard

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Abstract — *What had started as a straightforward meeting with Hewlett Packard about obtaining sponsorship funding for students pursuing the BSc Computin g for Real -time Systems degree led to a radical rethink of the academic programme. HP, like many employers in the hi -tech sector are concerned about the level of technical skills offered by graduates and their lack of commitment to employers. The prelimina ry meetings in 2000 progressed through detailed discussions, which had a major impact on the final course design. As a result, a new industrially sponsored degree scheme is now being trialed at UWE. It is structured on a 2 + 2 format: two years full -time at the university followed by two years of extended placement (the equivalent of a year round internship or two year co -operative education programme) experience with HP, Customer Support Division. In our arrangement, students have two years of full time study, they are not part -time students released by the employer for a day or two a week, which is a typical model used by industry in the UK. After two years they embark on a full-time two -year placement in HP, returning to University only to complete the remaining modules and to undergo oral and written examinations. The selected students have their tuition fees paid and receive academic bursaries during the first two years. They then take up a placement as graduate apprentices at HP for the second half of their course and benefit from appropriate salaries for those two years. In order to study the required number of modules and so obtain the necessary academic credit within the normal four -year period, two modules are delivered during the summer vacation in block, short course mode. Should a sponsored student be referred twice on an assessment element, they are required to withdraw from the sponsorship scheme and transfer onto the normal award stream. Thus, special adjustments to assessment regulations h ave not been necessary. Two of the block -mode modules are jointly taught by HP and UWE staff to allow for the maximum relevance to placement activities, while retaining good academic depth. Further CBT materials and training sessions have been arranged by HP to support their students' studies and extend their skills in commercial and professional areas. Technical experience with particular HP hardware and software is provided through a substantial long -term loan of multiprocessor HP9000 mini -computers. Cu rrently, the UWE scheme includes 14 students, and it appears to offer a good model for other awards, which also serve employment sectors with specific recruitment problems. In summary, students can reduce their debt burden, employers obtain more benefit fr om their investment in placement students and the university develops a useful relationship with an active industrial partner. This paper reviews the experience so far, from both UWE and HP's viewpoints, and raises some ideas for further discussion.*