Workshop on Computer Science Graduate Employment – Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 29 August 2014

Key conclusions on action to be taken – to be developed further, as indicated, including action plans with milestones and outcomes.

1. Student Placements

There was consensus that student placements and interaction with industry play an important part in improving the employability of computing science graduates.

Encouraging a broad range of employers to provide placements for students is important. Whilst many large companies provide placement opportunities for students, opportunities in SMEs are felt to be limited, because of their more limited capacity to host placements. Large companies could use their influence with/ support of their supply chains to encourage the offer of placements to students.

Who – Tech Partnership to take forward, working with the Council for Professors and Heads of Computing (CPHC)). This work should be informed by the research being carried out by National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB), funded by BIS, and by successful existing examples such as experiences of the SEED project at Hull University.

Additional Action - HMG to consider how SMEs could be supported to take on student placements

2. Staff Placements/Exchanges in Industry

It is also important to encourage University lecturers to take up placements to help ensure their teaching is relevant to current industry requirements. Exchanges could provide an even richer interchange of ideas and experience.

Who – Tech Partnership to take forward, informed by the research being carried out by the Higher Education Academy on placements for lecturers.

3. Identifying and Sharing Good Practice.

A number of Universities were identified as offering courses with particularly strong student employment records and good engagement with industry. It was agreed that it was important to draw on this good practice, including analysis of the curriculum, sharing it with other universities so that innovative and effective approaches could be adopted more widely across the sector.

One possibility would be a programme of workshop events so that approaches could be considered in depth in a peer-led context.

Who - CPHC, HEFCE to lead the development of this programme, discussing delivery with the HE Academy.

4. Learning Lessons from ITMB Degree Approach and Accreditation

The ITMB degree approach was considered to be an effective collaboration between universities and employers leading to outstanding employment and academic results. It was therefore agreed to investigate the extent to which the underlying principles of the ITMB degree approach could be applied more widely.

It was also agreed to examine the role that a flexible, robust accreditation system could play in making courses more relevant to industry requirements.

Who – HEFCE and CPHC, working with the Tech Partnership and the British Computing Society

5. Better Understanding of BME employment issues

Statistics indicate that a larger percentage of BME students are attracted to computing science, they perform less well in terms of degree classification and in gaining graduate employment. It was therefore agreed that a better understanding of the factors behind these statistics was needed.

Who - HEFCE to take forward.

6. Careers Guidance

It was recognised that effective careers guidance that inspires and informs young people about digital roles and career opportunities - including motivating girls in particular - is critically important. This needs to start early on, with pupils at primary school.

Who - BIS to examine with the Dept for Education.

Additional resources

It was noted that

- all relevant skills activities should link into the work of the Information Economy Council Skills Working Group.
- the Digital Economy Unit (new joint BIS-DCMS team) and BIS analysis and research teams would provide help and support, working with HEFCE