One IT Internship Experience at a Not-For-Profit Organisation

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Abstract
This poster provides an overview of the approach, learning and outcome of a trial graduate internship involving the School of IT and a Not-For-Profit (NFP) community organization.

Keywords
Applied R&D, Internship, Tertiary Collaboration

Introduction
A funded project to identify opportunities for collaboration between Wintec’s strategic not-for-profit (NFP) community partner and the School of IT lead to looking into further opportunities for student involvement in ICT projects at the Trust, outside of the 3rd year project, including graduate internships. However, rather than just consider what other ITP’s were doing in this space and identify possible pieces of work, two recent graduates were recruited for a 3 month fixed term arrangement to enable the Trust to experience what this level of involvement would bring to the organization and what would be required to be put in place to ensure the experience added value for the Trust, the graduate and the School of IT. The existing funding also enabled a brief exploration of interest amongst local organizations for placement of graduate students and the availability of funding and support for such a programme in the Waikato.

The initiative would also create a reference model for establishing formal internships between other Schools and organizations in the community.

Background
The Trust is embarking on an ambitious ICT strategy implementing an Intranet/Extranet environment and developing an integrated client management platform in order to better serve client needs. The Trust is partnering with ICT suppliers but much of the ‘labour intensive’ aspects need to be undertaken internally in order to save costs and build internal capacity for the longer term. An internship programme would enable graduates to gain valuable ‘real world’ experience and be exposed to the latest technology.

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with the Trust benefiting from their fresh untainted perspective in taking up the challenge and working with Trust staff to bring them on board.

**Recruitment**
Steps involved:
- Define deliverables and identify resource requirement
- Approach possible candidates
- Interview and skills assessment

The Trust was seeking candidates who:
- were well presented and prepared
- were able to work with and understand user needs
- had developed ‘soft’ skills along with technical ability

Two Wintec graduates were recruited to the position of Applications Administrator in January 2011 providing a good mix of skills, experience and aptitude. Having more than one body on the ground would develop greater awareness and support for the ICT initiatives and enable much more ground to be covered in the time available.

**40 hours a week for 3 months**
In remaining true to the Trust’s strategic alliance with Wintec it was important that the arrangement not only added value for the organization but that the interns were also able to make the most of the opportunity for their own professional development.

The intern’s role involved allowed for:
- ‘business as usual’ enabling an understanding of the organization, existing processes and user perspective
- ‘training’ focusing on technical and soft skills involving sessions with technical experts, opportunities for networking and site visits, mentoring and an allowance of time for self-directed training
- ‘project work’ set out in a project plan developed by the interns in collaboration with management and suppliers

**Key lessons learnt**
- Provide opportunities for the intern, and staff, to feedback
- Management planning and general oversight is vital
- Steep learning curve considering students normally have a semester or year to uptake new material
- Work to the strength and interest of the graduate
- Planned deliverables ambitious given time and resource
- Lack of academic commitments was important
- International students and NZ workplace ethos

**Establishing a formal programme**
- Very successful models in existence at other ITP’s
- Local organization interest but cautious of investment
- Possibility of national funding being available
- Further opportunities at the Trust in the interim

**Outcome**
The internship resulted in one of the graduates being offered a permanent position with a leading national ICT supplier and the other one having their contract extended for a further 14 months.

**References**