

## WINNING THE WAR ON TALENT

As we all know, there are professional development programmes and there are professional development programmes. But, without having experienced one at first hand, how is a potential employee to judge which are simply average, which are good and which are outstanding?

The chances are potential recruits will look at what they actually receive at the end of the programme. Are they handed a congratulatory letter and a company-branded certificate by the head of HR? Do they receive an industry-specific qualification? Or are their achievements formally recognised by a higher education institution?

Without doubt, each of the above is worthwhile and motivating, but the high-flyers amongst them are likely to be drawn towards organisations that offer them the third option.

Why? Because, unlike the majority of company or industry-specific accreditations, a quality-marked university consortium award has the additional benefit of containing elements that may count towards future degree programmes.

In today's ever-changing marketplace - where no job is a job for life - potential employees have to look the future, which means that they will opt to work for those organisations which actively encourage them to develop their full potential.

What's in it for organisations?

Understandably many companies say they don't want to invest time and resources in developing people if they're just going to up sticks and leave.

But I'm afraid that's exactly what they are going to have to do to attract and keep the best people. Some will leave and never return, some will leave and come back having gained additional experience elsewhere and others will stick with you through thick and thin. But the undisputable fact is that you will have a far better chance of recruiting and retaining the best people if you do invest in them - because, if you don't, your competitors will.

Gaining an accreditation for an existing professional development programme, or even developing one from scratch, needn't be an onerous task for the business concerned. UVAC is a not-for-profit organisation and provides free help and support to companies seeking PDP accreditation, drawing on the experience of its membership base – which consists of over 80 Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Colleges - and helping to establish partnerships with universities and colleges where necessary.

To appreciate the benefits of PDP accreditation it's worth looking at why GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) asked UVAC to accredit its PDP for chemistry students and the process involved.

PDP accreditation at GlaxoSmithKline

Information from UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) showed that while the number of people attending university had been relatively constant since 1989, the proportion studying chemistry had dropped from 3% in 1989 to less than 1% in 2002. Against this background of declining numbers, there was also increasing competition amongst pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to recruit the best graduates.

Undergraduates play a key role in driving project science forward within GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Research and Development and are fully integrated into project teams. Although GSK's one-year 'Synthetic Organic/Analytical Chemistry Industrial Placement Programme' had been running for many years, GSK believed that by having the programme formally accredited it would establish the company as market leaders and help them attract the graduates they needed.

#### The process

Working closely with the University of Glasgow (where the Chemistry Department already had strong links with GSK) and in association with the National Council for Work Experience (NCWE), UVAC developed a rigorous yet straightforward process for accrediting GSK's PDP. The process built on UVAC's existing Foundation Degree and Graduate Apprenticeship accreditation programmes - providing an integrated approach to academic study and work-based learning and incorporating Vocational Qualifications and Units, National Occupational Standards and Key Skills (where appropriate).

GSK was able to provide evidence of how its PDP met UVAC's criteria, following which independent scrutineers assessed the submission and submitted a report to the UVAC accreditation and education committee for formal approval. Although rigorous, the whole process took less than six months.

#### Results

The quality mark is already proving to be effective in attracting undergraduates and identifying potential new recruits as well as giving GSK a competitive edge over other pharmaceutical companies.

While from a student's perspective, a placement involving a structured professional development programme gives them confidence in their prospective employer, allows them to make a more informed career choice and helps them to begin to develop an understanding of business and the skills required for the world of work.