



SULSA's Graduate Employability Masterclasses *Developing Industry-Ready Graduates*

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Despite the challenges from COVID-19, technology and a great organisation has ensured that students, universities, and businesses have continued to collaborate and stay connected. The Graduate Employability Masterclasses have been developed by the industry for the industry and offers a great development opportunity for highly promising students throughout 12 universities this year in Scotland with 25 companies in total delivering invaluable insight and knowledge, to about 500 students over eight weeks with two modules each day.

The graduate employability masterclasses were developed in 2013 by Dr Ronnie Palin (Skills Development Scotland) and Kevin Moore, OBE, (Glasgow Economic Leadership Board) and delivered in partnership with University Careers Services teams. A collaboration to respond to a need that individuals are coming through the education system in terms of undergraduates predominantly lacking an understanding of what the real opportunities are in the industry. The masterclasses reveal the breadth of opportunities in terms of life and chemical sciences, jobs and what really would be required of greatness within the workplace and bring the industry together.

In 2020 the Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA), in partnership with the Scottish Universities Chemistry Pool (ScotCHEM), joined the organising committee. The Research Pool's established networks across Universities and the Scottish Innovation Centres has enabled this project to grow significantly this year. Undergraduates predominately with some postgraduates in biological science can attend, the different modules bring them together and showcase all the great opportunities they are in the sectors and the diversity of careers available.

Students get a glimpse of practical businesses challenges to get them industry-ready. Each masterclass was held by the companies and included: presentations of the companies focused on specific aspects of the product lifecycle, interactive exercises based on real-life industry scenarios in small groups, and an opportunity for discussion at the end of the workshop.

Emma Garrell, Senior Team Leader Reporting at Charles River Laboratories Edinburgh Ltd, said: "Charles River is a Contract Research Organisation, offering a range of services for companies that produce pharmaceuticals and agrochemicals. The Edinburgh site involved in the Masterclasses predominately provides safety testing for clients, i.e., all the pre-clinical work before testing on humans. We presented at the last session. The whole theme was that data is king and so obviously working in our industry, it's super important that the data is really accurate. We presented on how to back check and make sure

we find the most honest source. Something I also learnt from the Masterclasses, was what kind of jobs are out there and students today are still the same – this is one of the main points of these Masterclasses.”

Alix Mackay, Director at The Life Sciences Marketing Academy stated: “It was a real privilege to be part of this initiative and to lead the session on Marketing in the Life Sciences sector. With over 600 life sciences companies in Scotland alone operating in cutting edge fields such as drug discovery, advanced therapies and industrial biotechnology, the opportunity to combine a passion for science with a commercial career is tremendous. A career in marketing in this sector puts you right at the forefront of translating scientific research into products and services that add value to healthcare, the environment and society as a whole and it was wonderful to meet so many life sciences undergraduates who are driven by this opportunity. My session shared the most valuable lessons I've learnt over the last 20 years in connecting innovation with the human beings in the market. Influencing a change in human behaviour is complex no matter how clever the product or sciences is and there is no blueprint for this. However, there are frameworks and processes that point you in the right direction and enable you to learn about the people in the market who you want to serve so you can reach more people and make the impact you set out to achieve. This is what my session introduced and what our online training and coaching courses provide at The Life Sciences Marketing Academy.”

The Masterclass provides the opportunity for students and global organisations based in Scotland to identify and develop emerging leaders with a potential influence. The Masterclass’ goal is to build a strong leadership capacity and network that maximises leaders' influence in Scotland and ensures the implementation of the Life Sciences and Chemical Sciences strategies. Marek Blaszyk, Biomedical Sciences BSc (Hons) 4th year student at the University of Dundee said: “The masterclasses expose you to the industry and the companies a lot, so you actually find out what you can do with your degree apart from working just in academia and just in research. Most of them had activities to let you work on the problems applicable to what they do to try to come up with the solution and you do that in groups, so with other people. You get to meet new people from other universities especially during those times. I think overall, It’s worth taking part in it, it gives you quite a good overview of what’s out there and you have the opportunity to meet people and work with them.”

Kevin Moore OBE DSc, Chair, Graduate Employability Masterclasses, said: “It’s targeted for year 3 and year 4. One of my key jobs was to put the presenters together and get the companies there for it. Despite doing it online this year and not having that face-to-face contact at the end, it worked incredibly well, the universities were fantastic. The approval ratings by the students on how much they found it useful and how much would they recommend it to other people is up to 94-96% from just about everywhere. That tells you it works. The masterclasses ensure that graduates understood the diversity of roles within a life science company or organisation by highlighting areas of LS companies across the TRL levels (Technology Readiness Levels) and thus improve their career planning post university and hopefully improving their first destination position and application(s).”

In 2021, 136 students and 14 companies gave their responses on the 5 classes through a feedback survey. The masterclasses were deemed a great success with 92% of participating students rating the masterclasses as good or very good and 96% would recommend the classes to their peers. All companies would recommend participation in the Masterclasses to other organisations and 90% of companies would contribute to the classes again.

Despite the current Coronavirus pandemic, zoom classes were held to deliver the masterclasses in the safest and student-friendly way. However, going forward, for the masterclasses in 2022, most companies are in favour of an in-person or blended event agreeing that in-person events generate the most dynamic outcomes. Students who participated in the assessment are almost equally split between

holding the next classes online or in-person. Dr Alison Dun, Executive Director, Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA) pointed out: “As much as it was a challenge to deliver as interactive an experience as possible it was also an opportunity to make the classes more accessible and also increase the number of students we could offer the classes to. We hope to expand the programme next year and provide that in-person event whilst not losing the increased cross-fertilisation across universities that we had this year.”

Sarah Hunt, Key Sector Manager for the Life and Chemical Sciences at Skills Development Scotland, stated: “The Masterclasses provide an opportunity for students to engage directly with industry; find out about the breadth of roles that are available within Life and Chemical Sciences in Scotland, and broaden their career prospects. The sectors are experiencing a period of growth within Scotland which makes it a really interesting time for graduates to enter into the workplace.”

After completion of the Masterclass program, digital badges are awarded to acknowledge attendance and associative learning. Furthermore, attendees can also access further resources to support career path development, work opportunities and formal mentoring.