AMBASSADOR SCHEMES

This is part of a suite of resources aiming to help international offices to develop, plan and deliver work, study and volunteer abroad programmes. This document provides guidance on how to establish an ambassador scheme. This has been drafted based on student feedback in collaboration with colleagues at Birmingham City University, Northumbria University and the National Union of Students.

What is an ambassador scheme?

An outward mobility ambassador scheme is a programme designed to encourage students to take up opportunities to study, work or volunteer abroad. Students who have completed an international opportunity with a university become ambassadors who share their experiences and support other students onto these life-changing programmes.

The case for an Ambassador Scheme

Universities UK International (UUKi) ran a project on Widening Participation in Outward Mobility which incorporated a toolkit to support inclusive approaches. This featured recommendations for ways in which institutions can increase the number of students engaging with outward mobility activities, including establishing an ambassador scheme:

Ambassador schemes help students further develop their networking skills, as well as developing new skills in public speaking and media writing. An established ambassador scheme can benefit the institution as ambassadors are champions of mobility and can participate in marketing activities, events and outreach in schools.

As part of the project, student focus groups were held to hear about the experiences of and advice from students that spent a period of time overseas. One of the key findings from the focus groups was that, across the board, student participants were positive about the impact of ambassador schemes.
Students from institutions without such schemes suggested that universities could do more to facilitate face to face discussions with students who had previously been abroad, including pairing mobility alumni with students preparing to do go abroad. Participants in the focus groups were keen to speak to students like themselves who will have faced similar challenges to them when going abroad. The British Council and UUKi’s Student Perspectives on Going International research also found that:

“students placed high value on encouragement and support from their peer group, previously mobile students and academic staff in their departments.”

Students often participate in mobility programmes to enhance their career prospects. Ambassador schemes are a great way to support alumni to continue to develop transferable skills. They provide students with opportunities to participate in public speaking engagements, write blogs and present vlogs.

TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING AN AMBASSADOR SCHEME

1. Collaborate:
Work with other departments, such as careers, recruitment, student engagement and the Students’ Union when planning the scheme. Consider how the programme can deliver team objectives and key performance indicators. For example, can you incorporate the ambassador scheme into established careers programmes which are designed to support the development of students’ employability skills?

2. Who:
Recruit ambassadors from all departments and faculties that have participated in different types of mobility. This will ensure you have a diverse group who can speak about all the mobility the university delivers. In the pilot year, start small – you can always increase numbers later.

3. Recruiting:
Create an opportunity profile for the role that outlines what the role involves and, crucially, how many hours are required from the ambassador. This enables students to make a judgment on whether they can commit and is particularly helpful for students with other commitments such as caring responsibilities. Be clear on the benefits of the scheme for the ambassadors: for example, opportunities to speak at events, blogging and networking, and flag the transferable skills students will develop from participating. Where possible, pay ambassadors for their time. Where budget is limited, consider other ways ambassadors can be thanked for their contribution to the scheme – for example, with travel grants, certificates of participation, letters of recommendation, references for job interviews, and training opportunities.

4. Application process:
Provide an application process that will help prepare students for the world of work. Develop an application form or create an expression of interest process and invite all previously mobile students to apply. Recommendations from academic staff and formal interviews can help shortlist particularly strong candidate fields. Speak to students on return from mobility to establish interest and follow up with those who you think would be impactful as an ambassador.

5. Funding:
Outside of the international office budget, consider applying to internal funding pots that support career development, student engagement or inter-disciplinary collaborations. English institutions may want to consider allocating funding through the institutional
access and participation agreement. Consider what external funding might be available; for example, Birmingham City University utilised Higher Education Funding Council for England Catalyst B project funding to support the pilot year of its ambassador scheme, as part of a suite of wider engagement projects. Northumbria University used Santander Universities funding to send students to Latin America who then joined the ambassador scheme on their return to the UK.

6. Management:
Decide which team will manage the scheme and what formal governance is needed, such as terms of reference. Where students are paid by the university, discuss with Human Resources any formal processes that need to be followed. Safeguarding is also important – consider, for example, if ambassadors need to have Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checks or first aid training.

7. Activities:
Be creative when using the scheme! Opportunities to involve ambassadors include open days, go abroad fairs, pre-mobility events, mentoring programmes, social media takeovers, webinars, points of contact for a new cohort, supporting incoming students at the university, outreach at secondary schools, summer school support and organising informal socials.

8. Training:
Consider what training will be provided to your ambassadors to prepare them for the scheme. Training can include public speaking, mentoring, media writing, social media management, first aid and safeguarding. Training could potentially be delivered internally by colleagues in the careers teams, student recruitment, or outreach teams. Ensure to flag training opportunities when advertising the role to students.

9. Plan for the future:
Start with a small group of engaged students and grow the scheme over time. Set targets and build this growth into your plan to ensure you can meet increased demand and provide long-term sustainability for the programme. Keep records of the programmes successes and its wider benefits to the university which will ensure you have evidence of impact for future funding bids. Where possible, pay ambassadors for their time. Where budget is limited, consider other ways ambassadors can be thanked for their contribution to the scheme – for example, with travel grants, certificates of participation, letters of recommendation, references for job interviews, and training opportunities.

Quotes from students who have participated in ambassador schemes:

“The [Ambassador Scheme] has been an overall amazing experience. The fact that you can help shape experiences and also get people to go on experiences of their life time is an amazing feeling.”

“Being a part of the network has been an awesome opportunity ... it has been super fun and exciting to meet and speak to so many people.”

“Having that student to student support, provides students with more confidence to enquire and communicate their interests.”

“The network allows your stories to be shared, extends your experience and your interest in the global field.”

“I was very happy to encourage other students and see how they start to get excited about the opportunities... I highly recommend to anyone who wants to share passion for travelling.”