

Innovation in Teaching - Live- Learn- Earn at The Stanley Hotel, Colorado, USA

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Overview

The Live-Learn-Earn (LLE) Programme, developed by Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) in partnership with Grand Heritage Hotels (GH), has created an innovative and unique experience which allows undergraduate students studying for a degree in Hospitality, Tourism or Events to spend a semester of their second year of study at The Historic Stanley Hotel Colorado, USA. This approach is not the same as a 'traditional' placement; rather it is a managed placement. The Stanley Hotel serves as a multi-disciplinary learning laboratory where students engage in active experimentation working and learning alongside experienced personnel in a range of roles aligned to their curriculum and degree choice. Students undertake 32 hours of work per week which is complemented with virtual classes delivered by SHU academics. Rather than completing their modules in the classroom with us at SHU, the students on this experience develop their learning through applied, hands-on work experience with the employer.

The Innovation in Teaching

LLE is innovative because it truly amalgamates practical learning within the existing curriculum and is anchored in the philosophy of 'praxis', where in this context theory and practice integrate and emerge in the workplace. It allows us to offer choice and flexibility to our students to select a pathway of learning which meets their needs and requirements. For our students the focus is on 'learning while working, learning how to do new or existing things better, learning that takes place in the workplace and a 'curriculum' that grows out of the experience of the learner, their work context and their community of practice' (SHU Work Based Learning Framework, p.6). This approach embodies applied learning and recognises workplace learning as legitimate as students study for 60 academic credits to complement their lived experiences. The content of the module focuses on supporting students to understand how they apply the theory to their workplace knowledge; it builds upon triggers of learning from students' work and is evidenced from their reflection on learning in the workplace.

Students are provided with an international learning experience through working and studying in a different culture. It widens participation as some of our students, because of financial circumstances, would not be able to live abroad however GH offers a package which covers expenses. A recent article in *The Caterer* (14 October 2016) discussed the need to think differently about how we deliver Hospitality education and grow future talent. This new approach is a solution to this dilemma as it presents an innovative way of partnering with industry. It is also an innovative approach to embedding employability in the curriculum. This approach is also novel because it allows us to offer students a 'fast-track' or 'accelerated degree' completed in 3 years as it contains a work experience integrated in the curriculum. By successfully completing this pathway, students will be able to obtain 'placement' in brackets in their degree titles. Should students desire to complete a further 48 weeks work experience, this opportunity is also available.

The Success

In just over one and a half years working with GH, we have over 22 SHU students having various work experiences at The Stanley Hotel and we are into our third cohort of students. Student feedback has been overwhelming positive. They are achieving better grades as a result of this experience. On average, the first cohort of students' marks improved by 3% with some students marks increasing by as much as 13.5%. Student feedback on the experience is:

The program also was extremely beneficial for me academically. In my first semester (whilst in the UK) I averaged a 57.75% for my modules, however for my second semester (whilst working in the US) my grade average was 71.25% which is a 13.5% increase. I feel that the knowledge and skills that I was learning at the hotel allowed me to apply them directly to my studies. The opportunity has given me international experience in which I was able to work in a different culture.

The Live, Learn, Earn program at The Stanley Hotel was incredibly beneficial to me in so many ways; not only did I learn a wide range of skills that will help me in my career but it also allowed me to grow as a person. The rotational aspect of the work allowed me to work in 5 different departments where I was trained to a supervisor level.

During the internship, I was promoted to a supervisor which has become a big stepping stone for my career. Not only by promoting me, but by also mentoring me along the way, I was able to develop managerial skills which will also support me in my academic work in my final year.

This innovation has also provided benefits for the employer as depicted in their comments below:

The SHU students bring to the organisation a heightened sense of commitment and enthusiasm, which is contagious among the rest of our staff. These students have evidenced a strong passion for hospitality and the various roles within the industry, as well as the strong contribution each makes to the overall effort of serving guests and creating outstanding memories for them. In addition, they have been eager to share with fellow employees and guests alike their own cultures, and to learn and experience what they can of American life, which has brought a marvelous sense of joie de vivre to the organization. We are very pleased to be able to work with these exceptional students, and very proud to be able to collaborate with Sheffield Hallam University.

This programme with GH has been shortlisted for a National Undergraduate Employability Award 2018 for Best Collaboration between a University and an Employer and the 2018 AGCAS Award for Careers Service Engagement.

References

The Caterer (2016). Shoulder to shoulder: David Foscett and Peter Jones. Available from: <https://www.thecaterer.com/articles/493607/shoulder-to-shoulder-david-foscett-and-peter-jone>

SHU (2015). Work Based Learning Framework. Available from: <https://portal.shu.ac.uk/sites/aqf/cda/pages/wblf.aspx>