

A crowd of white 3D human figures, with one orange figure in the foreground, symbolizing a standout individual or idea.

An eBook from
Talent & Potential

50 GREAT GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT IDEAS

The 50 Great Graduate Ideas ebook is our gift to the Graduate Development community, and to all those graduates taking the leap from education into work.

Newsflash!

Talent & Potential has just won the AGR Award for Supplier Contribution to the Business, nominated by our client EDF, who also won an Award for Post-Programme Development. In total, 2 of our clients won 3 AGR Development Awards between them.

At Talent & Potential, we have been working with clients to create high flier graduates for over 15 years. In that time, we have attended every AGR Conference, and delivered at the vast majority of them. We've been involved in networking events and hot topics debates, and with the Development Conference Planning Committee.

We've seen many novel and interesting ideas shared by public, private and voluntary sector organisations, and from large global companies to SMEs. And because we love innovation, we've taken note of all of them. This ebook is our gift to the Graduate Development community, and to all those graduates taking the leap from education into work.

We hope you find at least one idea you can select and use straightaway, and others that stimulate or shift your thinking. We'd love to hear from you about new things you are trying or have heard about, and we'll do updates via our Talent eBulletin (sign up on our website, at www.talentandpotential.com).

If you'd like to discuss our work with graduates, please contact us on **0113 257 5488** or drop us a line at **info@talentandpotential.com**

IDEAS ON SCHEME DESIGN

IDEA 1

Change your target group

Most schemes still use the 2:1 as a cut-off point for applicants. Yet T&P's research into the most successful graduates in 6 large organisations showed a normal distribution from First Class degrees through to Third Class degrees among these top-rated graduates. Interestingly, there was strong evidence that these high performers had broader and more challenging life experiences prior to joining their scheme. Schemes are now being set up specifically to attract graduates with 2:2s or lower, who can prove that they are achievers, or overcome challenges. Other schemes target people who are first in their family to graduate. Shortlisting can be done in other ways – online biodata that tallies up a wealth of different life experiences, interviewing for the ability to tackle mistakes and difficulties, and setting a qualifying task that requires initiative. A range of ways of reducing numbers can operate far more effectively than degree class as a hard and fast standard.

IDEA 2

Add graduate calibre internals to your scheme

A sweet manufacturer ran a programme that included both graduates, and graduate-calibre people who had been with them for several years. The qualifying process allowed graduate-calibre people to demonstrate their drive, and willingness to drive a new initiative. The graduate-calibre participants brought political nous and work ethic to the scheme, and the graduates brought 'attack' – the ability to challenge upwards, and interact confidently with senior management. Both learned from the others' strengths – a win for everyone! This is an alternative to a separate, full-fledged professional apprentice scheme.

IDEA 3

Staggered intakes

Our research found that the long-term successful graduates applied at every quarter of the year. Many of them had work experience and weren't tied to the end of the academic year – so there is a good argument that you need to pick up second jobbers when they are ready to apply. In addition if your organisation recruits hundreds of graduates, if you recruit and induct them all at once you'll be limited to 'talking at them' or large group activities at inductions; you can't engage with them on an individual or small group basis. Could you recruit all year round, and run several inductions a year, to increase your ability to start people off on the right foot?

IDEA 4

Earn the right – get graduates to qualify for development

If you're recruiting graduates into permanent roles, you can set up the development scheme, but require graduates to earn the right to start on it. So rather than every graduate automatically receiving a huge development investment by right, based on limited evidence from a single day of assessment, you create a hurdle they have to jump over in order to 'earn the right' to start the graduate development journey. The objective is to create a different mindset; so that graduates value the investment in them. Hurdles can be set up 3 months in, after they have settled into their role. A hurdle might be a presentation to a panel on learning which they have initiated; on a change that they have made that has improved things for the business; a mistake they've made and what they've learned from it and how it's changed their behaviour. The aim is not to exclude graduates, but to change their attitude to development by getting them to actively opt in.

"Successful graduates applied at every quarter of the year."

IDEA 5

20 days in training, 200 with managers

Graduates spend 200 days with their line managers. How much time and effort do you spend to ensure all managers deliver top quality graduate management? One FMCG company has led the way by providing structured training for all line managers who are about to start managing graduates. They also offer ongoing support using webinars, and quarterly webcasts on best practice; and

they created a Reference Guide and portal for managers. In similar vein, a Government Agency worked with graduate managers to get them to agree a formal 'Gold Standard' document which painted a very clear common view on how to manage graduates, including how many hours the job was likely to take, formal project reviews on a weekly basis, how to cover manager absence on business. This was an agreement between managers, and not a set of imposed 'HR rules'.

IDEA 6

Select the managers who will have a graduate reporting to them

If managers are the biggest single influence on graduate development, then can we ensure that our graduates adopt the attitudes and approach of high fliers, by rigorous selection of the managers who take on a graduate? This approach was adopted by a utilities company, who required managers to bid for centrally funded graduates, and

make a strong business case for getting one. Another company built managing a graduate into its high potential scheme. High fliers were given stretching managerial development, which culminated in the first meeting with a graduate who they would mentor and coach.

IDEA 7

Graduate-specific appraisal

We worked with a power company to completely revamp graduate appraisal so that it would actively grow high fliers. The problem was that graduates became competitive about reaching the 'exceeded objectives' end goal, complained about variability of objectives set, and became angry and demotivated. Managers ended up giving 60% of graduates the top 'Exceeded Objectives' rating. This made it hard to spot those who needed extra help or intensive development prior to the end of the process. The new process we developed focused graduates on how they added value (via delivery, ideas, use of networks). It focused managers on giving helpful feedback on behaviours proven by research to be typical of high-fliers.

A rating scale was devised that focused graduates on accelerating their learning, rather than competing to get the top rating – this resulted in the top rating being given to only 20% of graduates. Managers were also held accountable for the degree of 'stretch' in objectives – resulting in a 16% increase in the level of challenge graduates were exposed to. Graduates were put in charge of briefing placement managers on how the appraisal worked. The result – happier graduates with higher quality feedback, improving manager support, and a much wider spread of ratings, so that graduates who needed extra help were quickly identified, without demotivating them by labelling them 'below expectations'.

“The new appraisal process we developed focused graduates on how they added value.”

IDEA 8**Round peg in a square hole placement**

A food manufacturing company introduced a policy of stretching their graduates by moving them well out of their comfort zone in one placement. This stretch placement might put an IT graduate in charge of a night crew on production – with the aim of proving to graduates that they were capable

of much bigger things than they thought, and widening their horizons. Graduate on stretch placements were given intensive support – great managers and supportive supervisors, and they were contacted on a weekly basis by the graduate team.

IDEA 9**Create PA to the Director placements**

A services company created short PA to the Director placements, and rotated graduates through these demanding 3 month roles. These placements provided excellent exposure to top business thinking as well as high visibility. Graduates had to qualify for these roles, showing that they were excellent

ambassadors for the scheme; this acted as an incentive and a reward. Graduates in these placements were carefully supported (including via the Director's secretary) and were responsible for managing a smooth handover to the next candidate.

“A number of companies are finding a management information dashboard a viable alternative to trying to pin down ROI.”

IDEA 10**Management information dashboard**

The recession has resulted in cuts to many graduate budgets. Graduate teams are keenly aware of the crucial need to keep Board level backing for their scheme. Some organisations are now starting to take a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) approach that provides senior stakeholders with regular management information on how the scheme is meeting agreed targets and adding value. There is even a low cost software programme that enables weekly reporting from each graduate, so that the Graduate Manager is completely in touch and can roll up key stories and facts to stakeholders. A powerful management information dashboard for senior management might cover progress towards agreed goals, current performance data on graduates, reporting stories on graduates who have added real value, and tracking the career progression of graduates from past intakes. A number of companies are finding a management information dashboard a viable alternative to trying to pin down ROI for graduates on rotational schemes.

IDEAS ON KEEPING WARM AFTER OFFER

“Graduates are less likely to drop out when they have made a real connection, and know the people they are letting down.”

IDEA 11

Blogs on practicalities

One Bank actively built loyalty and interest between offer and induction via blogging. Previous years' graduates blogged on a range of articles like 'What's it like to wear a suit every day?' The aim was to introduce graduates to the challenges and differences of the work world, and infect new graduates

with the enthusiastic and resilient approach of the Bank's top graduates as they tackled a range of challenges. Graduates are social media natives, and achieve great things when given accountability for engaging incoming graduates.

IDEA 12

Personal connection with manager

Another Bank combats dropout between offer and start date by introducing the graduate to the manager whose team they will join. The graduate makes a personal connection, attends team meetings and receives team communications, and can be given learning opportunities, like shadowing

people. Graduates are less likely to drop out when they have made a real connection, and know the people they are letting down. At the same time, they build a bond with the team so that entry shock is lowered, and they are much better equipped to hit the ground running.

IDEA 13

Google alerts

At offer, encourage your graduates to set up Google alerts on the company, key competitors, and projects they may be working on. They will get a daily or weekly digest of newspaper and internet articles on the subject fed straight to their email. Graduates will absorb information rapidly prior to joining, as they are hungry to learn. Another payoff is that they will ask great questions at induction.

IDEAS ON SELF-DIRECTED INDUCTION

IDEA 14

Presenting graduates with the challenge

Our clients have found that senior leaders, in their desire to welcome graduates and show infectious enthusiasm about joining the company, can send messages that raise expectations too far. For example: "Welcome, you're the leaders of the future. We're really investing a lot in you, because you're the crème de la crème." After the heady days of induction, graduates land in the real world of unfamiliar work, stretched managers, and without the knowledge to make an immediate high contribution. Can you design your induction around the following opening message? "Welcome to our fast moving business. It's going to be really challenging and turbulent. All the structure that you're used to, being able to plan three years ahead, knowing exactly what you're going to be doing, reporting to a single person – all of that's going to change. And what it's all about now is being successful in a turbulent fast moving environment with

lots of stakeholders. It's a challenge for you. You've got the intellect, you've got the skills to problem solve and be successful – expect your performance to start low and rapidly improve, from Cs to Bs to As. Expect to make mistakes, handle them gracefully and learn from them." You can say to them right from the start, "Even this induction week is going to go wrong at some point. Some senior manager is going to be pulled out because there's a crucial meeting she has to attend. The bus will get stuck in traffic and your site visit will be delayed by an hour. What we need you to do is to pull together with us and make it work anyway – because that's a key high flier skill that you need to learn to be successful – remaining positive and ingenious even when things go wrong."

IDEA 15

Graduate success card pack

Graduates know exactly how to do excellent academic work, but they are much less clear on the basics of which behaviours impress people at work. T&P did research into the behaviours that the most successful graduates at 6 organisations showed during their scheme, and turned this list of behaviours into a card pack. This allows graduates to model their behaviour on that of people who were highly valued by their organisations and very successful in their careers. The cards can be used on Welcome events or at induction (we provide suggestions for large group interactive exercises that will promote discussion and problem-solving). We also provide a set of emails suggesting experiments and actions to reinforce the ideas. If you don't use the cards, do you have other ways to provide a clear outline of 'what good looks like' – in hard behavioural terms – so that graduates don't have to learn by trial and error?

IDEA 16

Chaotic induction

Graduates need to shift from the stable world of education to actively managing the chaotic world of work. A carefully timetabled induction where all the organisation is done for graduates can create false illusions of structure, leading to disappointment when the workplace is very different. We worked with a Government Agency to create self-directed induction, which involved graduates in taking an active role in creating a successful induction. They were responsible for phoning up guests from the business, meeting and greeting, organising transport for trips, clearing rooms. Graduates commented that when they entered work the next week, they already knew how to approach people in order to learn from them. Get graduates actively involved with managing induction and deciding how to adapt if things don't go as planned.

“If you want to create a self-directed induction, it helps to spend the first day in skills training that will assist them to learn from others.”

IDEA 17

Ban PowerPoint

One consultancy company limited senior managers to 15-minute inputs at induction, talking on their feet. They challenged each manager to tell a story or create an activity. They also set up graduate development slots as a challenge; senior managers knew

they'd get rated on their slot, and an external consultancy coached them in how to engage a Gen Y audience. A spirit of healthy rivalry emerged, with senior managers phoning up to find out how well they had done on the feedback board, and vying for top ranking!

IDEA 18

Get graduates interviewing

Another idea is to put the graduates in control – ie they interview, rather than being presented to. Brief visitors on this, and ask them for an overview of 3-5 subjects they would like to cover; allow the graduates to use this to create a series of questions to be investigated. Large groups can be managed by asking for 3 volunteers to manage the bulk

of the interview 'on stage' as a sofa interview (actually having sofas and easy chairs helps with the atmosphere!). Instructions should include graduates facilitating audience involvement for the last 15 minutes. Prep a few people in the audience to pick up on points that they would like to query, so that there is a ready source of 'first questions'.

IDEA 19

Give active learning skills; listening & probing; questioning & IT skills

If you want to create a self-directed induction, then it helps to spend the first day in skills training that will assist them to learn from others, capture their knowledge in checklists and reports, and share their learning. Their IT induction becomes less of a technical exercise when they know they will be researching internal guests online, producing and sharing reports and checklists, taking photos of site visits on their phone and printing these for an exhibition, and emailing material to others. Similarly, if they know that they will be interviewing people about their jobs and departments, they'll be focused on how to listen well, summarise, and extract the most from these conversations.

IDEA 20**Make graduates consolidate their learning by producing an output**

When you set graduates learning challenges at induction – make them accountable for an output. Graduates get so much information at induction that they need to spend time consolidating it and turning it into another format if they're going to retain it. Can they make a poster about a site visit, including photos from their smartphone? You can provide them with scissors and sellotape and pictures and coloured pens and card – and it's quite a relaxing, fun, team thing to do. This allows you to create an exhibition at the end of induction, to show visually what they've learned, and get graduates to show their manager or senior guests around it. It's a way of consolidating, but also sharing information quickly between graduate groups, without having endless presentations.

If graduates are interviewing stakeholders at a site visit, or interviewing people to understand different parts of the business – then can they use their company log in and hot desk to create and print a report for the whole group? Can they produce a phone video illustrating corporate values, which they'll show to managers at the end of induction at a 'film showing' with popcorn? Education forces graduates to consolidate their learning – tests, essays, seminars, exams – but at work people think learning is over once the information gathering is done. They don't realise how much learning they lose by not consolidating afterwards. It's important to establish that at work, you need to prioritise time to think about information and record it for later reference. Graduates need to understand that consolidation – turning information into a new form and teaching it or using it – is the final, crucial element of learning.

IDEA 21**Get graduates actively seeking feedback**

Graduates are used to getting regular marks on their assignments. They can feel adrift at work, where feedback is often not given unless requested. During induction, tell them they will only get feedback and assistance if they ask for it – like in real life. Encourage them to seek out a tutor, invite them to sit in on an interview and give helpful feedback – position this as 'being on their team', a resource for them. Or suggest that they ask your opinion on a thank you email they are about to send to a guest who attended induction. When they don't ask for feedback, gently ask the group how many have asked for feedback so far? You'll get more take up! Also help them understand HOW to get good feedback, eg not springing a request for feedback on someone after the event, but giving them notice so that they can observe, or the change to think and prepare what they want to say.

IDEA 22**1 hour alone with the best graduates 1 & 2 years ahead of them**

If you want new graduates to learn from your high flier graduates, then consider literally putting them in a room with high fliers – with no agenda, no observers, just a chance to ask anything they want. It's better by far not to set an agenda for this first encounter, as graduates have questions they are burning to ask, and will usually spend most of their time on that anyway! Why not let them take control and drive the agenda – and find things out from people you know you can trust to give great answers?

“They don't realise how much learning they lose by not consolidating afterwards.”

IDEA 23**Interview graduates two years on**

Once you've allowed the unstructured conversation with high flier graduates, you can create structured fact-finding conversations resulting in creating a checklist which can be diaried in to consult at an appropriate time. There are a range of topics you can set up. Examples include: What to do in your first week on a new placement; How to prepare for your second placement; Best practice in working with the appraisal system; How do you manage your manager? This allows the experienced graduates to pass on all the things that they've learned over two years. And the new intake are encouraged to be self-directed, to be in control. Give them preparation time to come up with good questions prior to the conversation, and a requirement for a structured output.

IDEA 24**Get Year 2 graduates to organise a day of induction**

Can you set your Graduates who are entering Year 2 the project of organising an entire day of induction? Give them clear criteria of success (eg not just fun but hard learning), and also a budget of money and how many hours they can spend on it. (This will make them appreciate how much time an hour's meeting between 7 people costs! And will pay dividends in making them effective in driving cost-effective meetings in their real job.) When 2nd year graduates are seen to be running a day of induction, it has two benefits. Firstly, seeing graduates a year ahead running induction means new graduates are less likely to fall into the consumer mindset. Secondly, we consistently get the feedback that graduates are struck by how professional and businesslike the 2nd years are. It sends a subliminal message about how they need to shift from being 'students' to being 'professional'.

IDEA 25**The most desirable induction opportunities have a price ticket**

A services company always included site visits in the induction period. One of the most exciting opportunities to graduates was to fly over to Belfast and tour the projects there. Graduates were excited about flying to Ireland, as they'd never been there before. There was no shortage of volunteers. Then the night before, they realised that their colleagues were planning a relaxed day, getting up at 8 o'clock in the morning, going off to their local site visit, getting back at five – whereas the people who were going to Ireland had to travel from Oxford to Birmingham airport to catch their flight. They had a frenetically busy day, very interesting and rewarding, but arrived back late at night and went straight to bed! Reviewing the experience the next day, it taught them a huge amount about the fact that opportunities in corporate life come with a price ticket, and there is a need to manage their energy actively (no late night clubbing!) We also commonly set up meetings with business guests at 0830 am, for the same reason...

IDEA 26**Personal impact training**

Top graduates will have the abilities to progress rapidly, but a handicap is often their obvious youth and hesitance. An engineering and services company runs a session at induction for their leadership graduates on personal impact – covering dress codes, advice on personal style of dress to maximise impact, body language, and how to make an impact at meetings. Graduates are also given a lump sum as a 'golden hello' to buy their work wardrobe afterwards! This can be particularly helpful for graduates from non-traditional backgrounds, both financially, and in spending their money to great effect. Result – graduates gained more confidence and gravitas, and senior managers were very impressed by the immediate, credible impact of their new graduates.

IDEA 27**Managers' eye view**

Graduates don't understand the pressures on their managers, so may not act in a way that makes them easy to manage. Get one or two people who have managed several graduates to be interviewed on the topic of managing graduates. Prime graduates with a few key questions that must be asked – like, "How would you ideally like to manage your graduate, if you had the time?" "What gets in the way of the ideal?" and "What can graduates do that really helps you?" Also allow them time in small groups to identify other questions they want to ask. Delegate the roles of Chair/Host, and Summariser to the graduates – get the graduates to manage the whole session. This allows graduates to take responsibility, and also to get a 'manager's eye view' of what it is like to be their boss, and the pressures that they have to handle.

IDEA 28**Get Graduates to help you control your admin**

Many Graduate Development Managers complain that grads often phone them to get answers to admin or corporate systems – taking up valuable time to deal with minutiae that they could have found out by asking people in their team. To stop this, you need to share the realities of your job up front. With one Government Agency, we facilitated a session where graduates explored with the Graduate Manager the nature of her responsibilities. She explained all the things she did, from emails to setting up placements to upwards reporting and managing budgets. Also she elaborated on the number of graduates she was responsible for – not only in their intake, but with Year 2 graduates, preparing for next year's intake,

and supporting people after the end of the programme. Then we asked her to give some estimates of how long each element takes on average, and how often she had to do it – not forgetting to allow a day a week for unplanned activity! The objective of the session was for the graduates to calculate how much time she had left to spend with each individual in their intake over the course of a year. It turned out to be only about 6 hours per person. We could then discuss what was good use of that time (eg an hour's conversation to help resolve a placement problem, or to discuss career direction) as opposed to poor use of the time (responding to an email on how to claim expenses!).

IDEA 29**Manual racing**

If you have a document that contains all the nitty-gritty admin information that graduates need to know, get them into teams to complete a challenge. Give them copies of the manual, and 30 questions to answer. Getting a wrong answer is penalised by losing points – this encourages accuracy! Set them the challenge of how many answers each team can find in 10 minutes. Have prizes for the quickest and the best quality answers. Great for after lunch, this raises energy (especially if you have a system where they have to write every answer on a card and drop it in a hat at the front of the room as they do it – lots of people dashing back and forth watching others' progress competitively!). It also makes the point that they can solve most admin questions with a few minutes of research.

"Get people who have managed graduates to be interviewed on managing graduates."

IDEA 30**Move access to CEO & Directors to the second half of the programme**

If you bring the CEO and directors in on the first week of induction, graduates new to the organisation cannot really make good use of their time. If you give graduates access to these senior players to the end of Year 1 or Year 2, they will get much more out of talking to them. They'll have more understanding of the organisation, they'll have more skills to question and probe, and they'll have more political nous and ability to challenge constructively. Having Board members at Induction talking to graduates as equals creates a real danger of leading graduates to believe that they are more important in the scheme of things that they actually are – leading to later disappointment. A lot of the political mistakes that graduates make

arise because they don't have the political understanding that in the real work world, they cannot treat Directors as equals, or drop an email to the CEO asking if they can call in for 15 minutes the next time the graduate is in Head Office (true story). This can unfairly damage the reputation of graduates who were only following through on a relationship they thought they had made at induction. Consider: at induction, is the real need for your graduates to talk to people who are a level or two above them and have been successful? The first week is crucial to understand the practicalities of what it takes to be successful on the scheme. Then give them a chance to have breakfast with the CEO a year later – and they'll really appreciate and make use of that opportunity.

“The first week is crucial to understand the practicalities of what it takes to be successful on the scheme.”

IDEA 31**Don't ask graduates to rate how good induction was**

This can create a consumerist approach, with graduates feeling that they are a group that can evaluate the performance of the Graduate Manager. Look carefully at the questions you pose when evaluating induction – what message do they send. The questions you ask will drive their understanding of what induction is for, what is expected of them, and what they can demand from you.

Focus your evaluation questions with an awareness of their subliminal impact. Ask about how welcomed they feel, how well prepared they feel for their first week, whether induction has exceeded their expectations. Ask about how well they were able to contribute, and what they'd like to help with when running parts of induction next year. Establish them as partners rather than consumers or judges.

IDEAS ON INFORMAL LEARNING

IDEA 32

Maximise exposure to high potentials

Don't use all your second and third year graduates for 1-to-1 buddying. Instead, make it an assignment for the top 20% of earlier intakes to take responsibility for shaping the attitudes and responses of a group of 5 new graduates. This is great managerial experience for their CV. Also – can you use your high potential population to manage or mentor your graduates – so their attitude and approach rubs off on them?

IDEA 33

Support graduates to source their own mentors

Very often graduates are assigned mentors. This tends to make graduates think that mentors are appointed, rather than informal relationships you can set up yourself. Yet part of a successful mentor/graduate relationship is chemistry – and most mentor relationships at work arise out of an initial enjoyment of working with someone you find inspiring or particularly helpful. An alternative is to say, "You need to think about sourcing mentors for your first year. Look for people that you relate to, people you'd like to meet up with, that you think could help you be more successful." This approach requires a small amount of formal training to kick into action. For example we designed an A3 flowchart that identified different types of mentor you might want, how to go about asking someone to be a mentor in a way that is likely to get the answer "Yes", how you can build and improve the relationship, how you thank and pay back the person who's invested their time in helping you. By approaching mentoring in this way, you can develop lifetime skills in choosing and using mentors effectively.

IDEA 34

Train graduates to actively seek feedback, and receive it well

Building on the work of induction (Idea 21) – can you give graduates real skills in seeking and receiving feedback? Many have only ever been given feedback on their outputs – essays, presentations – they are unprepared for feedback about the impact they make on others. They can see this as being criticised for 'who I am'. Why not train your graduates in how to seek and receive feedback in a way that impresses? Graduates need understand how to get high quality feedback, by priming people in advance to observe them and give feedback afterwards, rather than asking out of the blue 'How do

you think I did?" They need to have great questions and probes that will elicit specific rather than general feedback. They also need to learn to receive uncomfortable feedback in a thoughtful, constructive way, so that people feel encouraged to give them more. Some graduates come equipped with these skills – how are you helping those who don't? You can also provide materials that provide a focus for feedback – we use the Graduate Success cards (Idea 15), a checklist to find out your strengths and weaknesses in handling feedback, and Strengths Cards which can be used for informal 360 degree feedback.

"Can you give graduates skills in seeking and giving feedback?"

IDEA 35**The 'Shadow Board of Directors'**

One organisation set up graduates to hold a Shadow Board Meeting in parallel to the real Board Meeting. On the agenda was a selection of the topics for the real meeting. Graduates were tasked with addressing each topic and coming up with their own recommendations and comments. A Director reviewed their output and came to talk to them about their views, and also covered the

real Board discussion, with issues graduates missed. This proved a great route in the second year for informal learning about a Director's perspective – and also provided the Board with grass roots feedback about how people lower in the organisations were thinking about the topics they were discussing.

IDEA 36**The Graduate News Desk**

One Bank set up a Graduate News Desk who worked to a brief to communicate with the wider graduate group. Their job was to convey a team brief from the top, investigate news, interview senior people to deliver articles people could learn from, and communicate key messages out to the wider

graduate cohort via an e-newsletter. People rotated into and out of the editorial team in a controlled way. This helped to ensure that a large group of graduates was informed swiftly and semi-formally, rather than relying on informal networking and uncontrolled passing on of gossip (a Generation Y propensity!).

“Create a project whereby all graduates ask their mentor structured questions about the best person they have mentored.”

IDEA 37**Get graduates to investigate what mentors like**

Create a project whereby all graduates ask their mentors structured questions about the best person they have mentored, and an unsuccessful mentoring relationship. Ask them to collect specific behaviours about what impresses a mentor and what they do not look favourably on. While you may have an end point – for example a set of behaviours to ensure you get the most from your mentor relationship – the key benefit is that each mentor will tell their graduate in very specific terms, how they want the relationship to work! Note: next year repeat the project – don't just use the output produced!

IDEAS ON INFORMAL LEARNING: 1 – EARLY DEVELOPMENT

IDEA 38

Let your IT graduates loose

Can you challenge your graduates to use technology to solve problems? For example – “Can you use the technology to allow the graduate team and graduates to support each other with information and assistance, rather than everything being funnelled through the Graduate Manager?” In one company a group of graduates with IT skills set up a ‘ShadowMe’ global website to match up graduates who would like to understand other parts of the company, with people who were willing to be shadowed for a day. And it isn’t only IT graduates who can set up facilitative technology – many graduates are used to setting up forums, wikis and chat rooms. We’ve seen graduates set up a forum to ease the problem of finding flats for a 6-month placement, and others set up a wiki to record information on different parts of the organisation, so that as graduates rotated, they didn’t have to find everything out from scratch. Even a simple tool like a glossary of acronyms that everyone can contribute to, can be very useful!

IDEA 39

Challenge them and give very direct feedback

Sometimes the best support is to get graduates used to receiving very clear behavioural feedback early on. One Bank used to train HR graduates to do selection interviews early in their scheme. They told graduates in advance that their first attempts are likely to be Ds and Cs, and it would be their learning curve that counts. They were very tough in applying professional standards to their early interviews – very few got above a C. But HR was also very supportive in coaching them and recognising improvement. Their graduates got an initial shock – but then felt a real sense of achievement based on how rapidly they improved with this direct feedback. And it taught them not to be fearful of tackling hard challenges, making mistakes or getting feedback – this became ‘business as usual’.

IDEA 40

Skills in managing ambiguity

Graduates are a product of 6 years of structured education – they find it hard to work with rushed briefings, no ‘right answer’, and multiple stakeholders. We worked with a telecoms company and a utility company to create a 1-day session with 40 graduates to train them in how to manage ambiguity. Graduates learned a questioning strategy to tie down ambiguity, how to document fast and use this to check understanding, and how to work with multiple stakeholders. They immediately had to apply their learning, by working in groups to run a meeting where they questioned managers from the business and took the brief for a real project they would be working on. They had to prepare a formal project brief document, and consider ways of adding value before meeting the managers for a second time to report on progress. One graduate said, “This day was of more practical use than my Prince training, for the tasks graduates have to manage.”

IDEA 41

Activate the transfer of learning

For every piece of formal development, create a way to connect with managers, and reinforce the transfer of learning back in the workplace. Require graduates to set up a meeting with their manager to review the learning after the event. Send the manager a brief that describes the content of the training, and the behaviours the graduate should be showing more of, after the training. Also write a section on ‘How the manager can help’. At the start of the training – show graduates the behaviour section – it tends to make them sit up and pay attention, knowing that their manager will be looking for improvement on their return.

IDEAS ON INFORMAL LEARNING: 2 – LATER DEVELOPMENT

IDEA 42

Give graduates a training budget

Graduates benefit from attending mainstream training, as it extends their contacts, and helps them absorb the culture. One company made a conscious decision to bring graduates together to provide half the development, when their learning need (eg how to manage ambiguity) is unique to graduates. But they also give graduates a training budget to manage themselves, so that they can pick up mainstream courses at a time that's right for them – when there is a business need and they can immediately apply their learning. The puts graduates in charge of getting the biggest result for their spend, to support their own development needs and their individual journey.

IDEA 43

Find your own next placement

Graduate Managers often remark on the fact that many graduates are not self-directed in finding their own career opportunities at the end of a placement scheme. Yet for two years they've been told exactly where they will go next with everything set up for them. If they suggest they'd like a different placement they may be told, "If we allow you to do that, others will also want to change and it will upset the plan for the entire rotation." As an alternative approach, many consulting firms take their new graduates and put them into a client project, with the message that at the end of the project the graduate will be 'on

the bench' until they find the next project themselves. If you do this, however, you must give them career management insights and skills – see Idea 46 – Career management training. The NHS have used a variant of this approach, whereby its graduates are required to set up their own elective external placement, in an organisation outside the NHS (normally in the private sector). If you give graduates some control over setting up their own placements, you are starting to train them to be self-directed in managing their careers right from the start.

IDEA 44

Self-run Graduate Conferences

One of the key benefits of graduate schemes lies in the wide networks that graduates form. Many organisations like to bring all their graduates together to help with this process, at least once in their scheme. This can provide a great way of mixing the intakes too. Make the most of your graduate conference by challenging graduates to be accountable for delivering their own conference – this approach was taken very successfully at the NHS. Accountability can include creating online surveys to get graduates to choose from possible topics and activities, sourcing guests, conducting sofa interviews (2-3 graduates interview a senior manager or managers before throwing it open to the audience), vox pop interviews of senior management using smartphones, organising networking meals, and sheer organisational graft – rooms, equipment, food, timetable, materials... Not only is this great experience for their CV – it also means that they take ownership for the conference, and you get less critical consumerism.

"Give graduates a training budget to manage themselves."

IDEA 45

Give graduates choice

If you want to make a large conference successful, give graduates choice, just like at an external business conference, with a choice of different workshop sessions and activities. Graduates love to take ownership of their own learning journey through a conference. They are also more motivated to learn when they have made an active commitment to a specific session. Beware the 'sheep dip' approach that assumes every graduate has the same learning needs and interests. If you don't give them the physical choice to join a workshop or not, they will make a mental choice about whether to pay attention or not!

IDEA 46

Career management training

When they arrive at your organisation, graduates' career skills lie in searching external job boards, and making online applications. Do you want these to be their key career skills as they end the formal programme? We provide career management skills for many organisations across a number of sectors, usually about halfway through the scheme – focusing on how to drive an internal career. This allows all graduates have the tools and insights about how career opportunities can be created by informal means – so that they start actively building their track record, reputation, and network. 6 months later, they are well positioned to start work work on creating their own career opportunities as the end of the scheme approaches, just like the best do.

Training in the skills of internal career management is essential for retention, and is likely to have a bigger impact on ROI than any

other training. But make sure that your career management training is based on hard facts about successful careers, and not assertions about what is important – graduates are a very analytical audience. We now have a database of over 1600 interviews with people who've driven successful careers across all sectors – and we get graduates involved in doing their own interviews with people they regard as having a successful career – so we can give graduates the hard facts on the tactics and skills that can fast track your career. Our data makes a clear case for why organisation hopping is rarely a part of rapid progression. We have found that many graduates are actually relieved to find out that internal progression is often faster than making a leap into another organisation. Note that career management training can be a key retention tool for engineering and finance graduates, who are targets for poaching.

“Beware the ‘sheep dip’ approach that assumes every graduate has the same learning needs and interests.”

AFTER THE SCHEME

“Graduates who are both driven and take learning seriously will race through the development path.”

IDEA 47

Setting up an alumni community

Get graduates involved in actively setting up and running their own post-scheme community. Consider what will be of interest to graduates after the scheme. At the NHS, a successful alumni community was set up that organised development events, circulated jobs that might be of interest, and helped alumni match with opportunities to mentor new people.

IDEA 48

Giving more development to the best 10%

The big problem with selecting the best graduates and investing more in them, is that it demotivates the other 90% of the people you have nurtured for 3 years. One way of getting round this is to offer a series of small post-programme development opportunities to everyone. There is no prodding to respond or deadline set, but each of the development opportunities has hard work required to apply the learning. To unlock the next development opportunity, you must have completed the last, and presented solid evidence that you have used the learning to good effect.

Note that not all of these development opportunities will be courses, some will be workplace learning like shadowing. Graduates who are both driven and take learning seriously, will seize the opportunities and race through the development path. Less driven people will self select out by not volunteering, or not completing the post-event work, or working much more slowly. You can offer a programme with much more investment, solely to those who have completed the self-driven learning. Get graduates to earn the right to more investment!

IDEA 49

Turn Development Centres on their head

One of our utility clients worked with us to create a post-programme scheme that would encourage engineers to become leaders. There was a need to identify high potentials who could progress to leadership positions quickly. A common approach would have been to hold a Development Centre to spot these people, followed by development planning to address any weaknesses. The downside of this approach is twofold. Firstly, engineering graduates would be assessed at the point where they first tackled a managerial task – in the role-plays at the DC. This might not be a fair test of their leadership potential, and not doing very well would put many engineers off the idea of swapping their specialism for leadership. In addition there would be no strong driver to do the development work, as this comes after the DC, with little urgency to do it by a

particular deadline. We suggested turning the process on its head, with the development coming prior to the DC. We briefed the engineering graduates 3 months ahead of the DC on exactly what exercises they would meet. We set them up in small cohorts who would progress to the DC together, and provided a launch workshop that educated them about how to drive their own workplace development. The cohort's objective was to investigate and learn on the job, practise and coach each other (a managerial task in itself) so that all of them performed to a high standard on the DC itself. The result: a motivated group that drove exceptional learning, and delivered very successfully at the DC. And in the process, they improved their ability to spot a wealth of opportunities to develop their leadership skills in the workplace by 20%!

“The average graduate scheme loses over 40% of its graduate intake by the 5-year point.”

IDEA 50

Your boomerang strategy

The average graduate scheme loses over 40% of its graduate intake by the 5-year point. While there are many ways to improve this metric (Idea 46 Career Management training being probably the best), you can also maximise ROI by tracking the best of the graduates who leave. The best way of doing this is via making a personal connection on LinkedIn with graduates who are about to leave. You can track their later careers, and they can become a pool of high potential talent with external experience, who can be drawn back into your business at a later date. They will have every advantage; knowledge of your organisation, plus external experience to bring back. Just a note, though – don't start a LinkedIn alumni group. You will find some graduates who have left seeking to use it as their own pool of talent – to seduce graduates remaining at your organisation away! You have more control over your personal connections – and you can introduce them to your successor when you move on.

We hope you've enjoyed this selection of Great Ideas that the graduate development community have come up with over the years!

Pick an idea, any idea, and put it to work for your scheme. Or let us know your innovations and great ideas.

Once recruitment is finished, organisations don't need to compete – sharing information on best development practice helps ensure all graduates develop fast and stay with the organisations that have invested in them.

If you would like to talk to us about your graduate development scheme, please contact us on info@talentandpotential.com, and mention the 50 Great Ideas paper.

If you would like to stay in touch with Talent thinking, sign up our monthly Talent eBulletin and weekly career tips at www.talentandpotential.com

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