RMIT University Youth Work UK Study Tour June 17 – July 15 2011

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Travelling to the United Kingdom between June 17 – July 15, 2011, six youth work students from RMIT University will partake in our first departmental study tour. The students are studying for either an undergraduate degree (three years) or a Vocational Education Training (VET) certificate (one year).

RMIT University encourages study tours for students. Undertaken in another country for a period of 2 – 4 weeks, academic study is credited to the student’s RMIT program. In this case the students will be undertaking some and/or their entire field placement unit. A staff member must accompany them and comply with all policies and insurance requirements.

The tour itinerary is:

*Week one:* Working with the University of Ulster, Ireland, it includes a two-day conference where the students will make a one-hour presentation on either car safety or mental health and well-being practices from an Australian perspective.

*Week two:* Visiting various youth organisations and agencies across the United Kingdom including Belfast and Manchester. We will finish the week working with Coventry University.

*Weeks three and four:* Each student will partake in an individual two week work placement/volunteer project at a pre-arranged agency. (Students have just begun this phase as the conference begins)

The United Kingdom was chosen as our tour destination because Australia’s youth sector was based on this model. Students learn about this during their studies. There was a sense of excitement about the trip because of this and the students were excited to be, what may be seen as, returning to Youth Work’s Holy Land.

As well as providing the students with a unique opportunity, we are working within the University’s strategic priorities for 2015. Set out in “Transforming the Future. Strategic Plan. RMIT 2015.” the desired outcomes of the tour reflect the first and last of the three priorities:
Global in attitude, action and presence, offering our students a global passport to learning and work.

Urban in orientation and creativity, shaping sustainable cities and drawing inspiration from the challenges and opportunities they provide.

Connected through active partnerships with professions, industries and organisations to support the quality, reach and impact of our education and research. (RMIT 2010a)

This tour will allow us to increase the number and level of partnerships between RMIT’s Youth Work department and the various youth work training providers and agencies in the United Kingdom. One example of a developing partnership is the development of an agreement with Ulster University with the aim of hosting some of their field placement students in Melbourne. Over the past eight years they have sent approximately 60 students to do field placement in Australia with two partners who are firmly established. We hope to be the third.

This meets with RMIT’s Learning and Teaching strategy which includes the priorities of:

fostering the internationalisation of the curriculum

enhancing work-integrated and work-based learning (RMIT 2010b)

By increasing the study and training opportunities available to our students beyond Australia we will be actively working towards a global passport which is the envisioned for all members of the RMIT University community. “RMIT remains committed to the global passport, which offers students and staff educational and research opportunities engaged with universities and industry in our region and beyond.” (RMIT 2010b)

In recent years approximately one student per year has undertaken either a study abroad or student exchange program to the United Kingdom as part of their studies. Studying for one semester at a reciprocating university, they always return with unique experiences, positive feedback and feel more grounded in their chosen profession. The study tour provides us with the opportunity to provide another option to our students, which appears to be a popular one. I was asked early on if it will be offered again next year by students who have started to save in the hope that it will be.

Youth work is an international profession. Providing our students with the opportunity to see and be part of that, beyond their own shores is invaluable. “The global passport is about giving our students globally recognised skills and being able to offer a variety of mobility options.” (RMIT 2010b) This will also increase the level
of partnership activity between Australian education/training providers, industry and their international counterparts.

Providing this international experience will also broaden our students’ experiences and furnish them with access to the work occurring in the United Kingdom. They are very excited and yet all have their own individual reasons for going. As one wrote to her placement supervisor

It seems that doing placement at X will really give me a chance to unpack what Youth Work is about, personally and professionally. I don’t want to live in a vacuum of theories and books. I want to get my hands dirty, to really experience Youth Work. I would love to learn more about how you are improving the sector in the UK.

The value and justification for the study tour is well supported, both from RMIT’s perspective and literature, although not for youth work specifically. How to ensure its continuity is the key to success. How do we make this part of the normal curriculum so that more than one student per annum gains the benefits of going beyond Melbourne for their field education experiences and become more rounded practitioners in the process? What are the benefits for the industry? How do we make this part of the norm and not a one-off?

References:


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