

Listening to Malawian Students in Scotland

Hands-on Work Experience and Internships

Friday 24th May 2019

University of Strathclyde, Stenhouse Wing, Glasgow

Attendees

- Chair: Dr Yonah Matemba, the SMP
- Stuart Brown
- Limpani Chimimba
- Kemwood Chiwaya
- James Chilembwe
- Esmelda Chirwa
- Chris Crame
- Agnes Kaima
- Loveness Likaomba
- Dinna Likonde
- Patrick Makawa
- Alphaeus Ngonga, Secretary: Association of Malawians in Scotland
- Mindy Panulo
- Jamie Wilson

Apologies

- Joyce Phiri, Chair, the Association of Malawians in Scotland
- Madalitso Chikumbanje

Introduction

At the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP)'s Further and Higher Education Forum in November 2018, Malawians studying in Scotland expressed interest in gaining hands-on work experience to complement study and academic qualifications. In order to hear, better understand and discuss what would be most relevant and useful to Malawian Students in Scotland, the SMP and the Association of Malawians in Scotland (AMS) convened a meeting within the University of Strathclyde. The gathering was chaired by Dr Yonah Matemba of the SMP and University of the West of Scotland with input from AMS's Alphaeus Ngonga and the active participation of eleven Malawian Students.

Everyone was welcomed and thanked for attending and thanks were expressed to the University of Strathclyde and in particular to Chris Crame and Jamie Wilson of the University's International department who remained for and contributed to the event. Yonah Matemba recognised Mindy Panulo for her championing this topic and constructive liaison with the SMP.

Dr Matemba invited discussion: *What do we want? What do we mean? What are possible pitfalls?*

The following points were raised

This exploration of work-experience opportunities is valuable because while some academic subjects, e.g. medicine and nursing have work-experience built into courses from an early point, others such as business and marketing do not or not perhaps until fourth year and so graduates in these disciplines are at a disadvantage with employers saying that they “lack practical experience”. Some have been studying for five years and not had any work experience opportunity. Others note that, *in theory*, there is work-experience built into courses but relationships with industry can be weak and the input unsatisfactory. There is an expectation back home in Malawi that you will return with experience and clear ideas and proposals and be able to ‘hit the ground running’ and so genuine work experience is essential. There is value in gaining work experience in another country such as Scotland whilst studying here before returning to Malawi as this will be seen by employers as international experience.

There was a range of opinion as to the best point at which to undertake work experience. It could be too tough to do so in the midst of a Masters, but after a dissertation has been completed there is often some time left in the visa that has been granted for the UK before return to Malawi Tier 4 visas allowing for 16 months, it was suggested. Checks would be needed with GB Government as to whether this is correct and how many hours of work would be permitted under this visa. It was postulated that this is 20 hours when studying and had no limit after the course is completed. Within any visa limitations, the frequency and number of hours would vary depending on the individual’s interest and time commitments, with some suggesting that they had limited contact-time for classes or tutorials and could gain work experience around this for perhaps a day a week during the period of the course. Others would like a block of work after the course is finished.

There was discussion about the ability to self-finance through this and whether unpaid internships were viable and how different employers in the UK and Malawi might approach *unpaid* versus *paid* internships. It was noted that Volunteering is a well-established practice which provides work experience opportunities and this was warmly received.

There’s an interest in getting help to find jobs back in Malawi post-study. Malawians are “cheaper to employ” than non-Malawians, one Malawian student states. The SMP could help facilitate broadly and offers to help spread the word about the appetite for this from Malawian students in Scotland but it isn’t in its mandate to *find* placements and *arrange* jobs.

Once it is known that Malawians are definitely coming to Scotland to study, they might usefully liaise with the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP) and establish contact with the SMP to start planning ahead, together with University International Recruitment Offices. More fruitful engagement with University Careers’ Services might be brokered as well, beyond their just forwarding links to students. More advertising in Malawi of MaSP would be welcome. A gathering in Malawi of those who have already studied there and those who have been accepted to do so would be positive and useful for those coming to Scotland.

There is an appetite from some students for an array of leaflets from SMP Members describing their work and outlining opportunities; postings on websites being seen as not enough, especially for those who self-identify as less comfortable with technology. The SMP appreciated the reminder as to value of hard copy as

part of its dissemination activity, noting also the onus on students actively to seek out opportunities, it being a 'two way street'. Dr Matemba noted that there can be a cultural difference of approach in this respect.

The SMP might consider how to make events such as Malawi Cross-Party Groups better known to the Malawian diaspora and more attractive to them. It was noted that there are approximately one hundred and fifty and two hundred Malawians living in Scotland, plus children. AMS has a meeting on July 6, 2019 to which all participants are invited. All participants were also warmly invited to join the SMP. An understanding of the actions arising was checked with the meeting which confirmed the following:

Actions identified were

1. Invitations to join the SMP will be extended to all who are not currently members.
2. A note of this meeting will be posted on the SMP's website and sent to participants who provide e-mail addresses.
3. The SMP and AMS will reflect on the points raised, share with the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP).
4. The SMP will reflect on and take action to spread the message regards Malawian students in Scotland seeking hands-on work experience/internships/volunteering opportunities and consider convening opportunities.
5. The SMP will bear in mind that some prefer hard copy publications to electronic.
6. The SMP will come back to participants by end of June 2019 regards next steps.