



University of Essex

The University of Essex's Frontrunners initiative is a bold, innovative approach to improve campus life that has empowered students to tackle problems themselves.

Once staff had identified specific projects, students were invited to apply for part-time paid work placements to lead them. More than 200 students were involved in 176 projects across almost every academic and professional department in 2011-12. They addressed particular problems faced by their peers, providing their own insights into campus issues while developing problem-solving and project management skills required by future employers.

One impressive project involved students undertaking a five-month investigation of why Chinese undergraduates and postgraduates did not access support services. Their work helped to inform a more targeted approach.

Several student Frontrunners praise the scheme for helping to build their CVs and providing work experience that enable them to secure jobs upon graduation.

The scheme is well resourced. Essex's employability and Careers Centre received a 33% budget increase in 2011-12, and it took on a dedicated officer to run the project. The initiative also supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds and will benefit from almost £2 million in access agreement fund by the financial year.

"This is an outstanding initiative, not only one that provides students with paid work during study that gains them relevant experience to seeking employment, but actually enables students to shape the services and the experience for the study body at Essex," said Toni Pearce, a judge and president of the National Union of Students.