Alan Aitken, School of Chemistry
I found that preparing and presenting the short presentation on External Placement and more particularly the subsequent detailed discussions were a useful opportunity for reflection on this long-running activity in Chemistry and to what extent it would or would not be appropriate for implementation in other Schools.

Fiona McCallum, School of International Relations
The School of International Relations is committed to enhancing employability skills of its students and views an external placement module as a potential addition to existing initiatives including School-based internships, the teaching placement module ID4002 and student-led outreach projects in local schools. If an external placement module was to be developed, it is envisaged that it would be optional, taken through selective entry, available at Junior Honours and run in a similar manner to Study Abroad. The Chemistry experience has highlighted the importance of building contacts and networks before implementing a placement module in order to ensure that it is a viable project. The School is keen to develop stronger links with alumni and the possibility of providing external placements could be one of the issues engaged with through an alumni initiative. The School will also consider involving the SSCC and Careers Centre in this preparatory stage by creating a database of internship and volunteer opportunities for students which could be a starting point for an external placement module. It has been helpful to learn further details about the Chemistry model including the distance learning component, placement visits and salary provision for students. These would all be significant when discussing how an external placement module could be adapted to fit the needs of IR. The School perceives this module as a long-term objective and will focus on building networks which could prove useful in implementing an external placement module.

Gerald Prescott, School of Biology
The School of Biology has recently submitted a degree programme proposal for an integrated master’s degree in Biochemistry. This degree proposal includes a 12-month (100-credit) industrial or research placement in the students 4th year. The discussions with the external placements working group have assisted us in developing the detail of how this placement year will be coordinated and assessed. Learning from Chemistry’s experience, all students on placement will receive between 2 and 3 visits from a School of Biology staff member while on placement. These visits will be spread equally over the course of the placement, allowing us to ensure that the student is receiving appropriate training, guidance and support while on placement. The School will also monitor any new companies offering placements before the student starts work, in order to ensure that the placement meets the requirements of the programme. Furthermore, after discussions with the group we will develop fall-back placements within the school for any student who has to leave a placement due to unforeseen difficulties within a company, for example, the company experiencing financial difficulties. Discussions within our group also focused on the difficulty some students experience gaining work visas for a number of countries. As a result of these discussions we will look carefully at the timelines for visa applications and will endeavour to place students in sufficient time
for their visa application to be processed. An interesting aspect of our discussions concerned assessment of the placement year and how this worked with the companies at which the student was placed. These discussions indicated that we need to think carefully about our assessment of the placement year in order to ensure it meets the requirements of all involved. This will be an on-going process as we develop module proposals for the degree programme and will be review regularly once placements commence.

Graham Kirby, School of Computer Science

Computer Science has recently introduced an MSci programme, initially incorporating a 60-credit dissertation module taken full-time in St Andrews over one semester. During the design of the programme the possibility of including an optional external placement module was considered, and the programme requirements have been specified so as to allow this to be introduced in future. Based on previous experience with finding work placements for postgraduate diploma students, we were wary of entering a binding commitment to provide placements. It has therefore been very instructive to learn about the Chemistry experience, in particular relating to alternative options to placement, and to the nature of the process for setting up placements. The advice that shorter placements have been found less satisfactory than full-year is also very useful. All of these points will feed into our ongoing planning process, and we will revisit all options when we review the first delivery of the local MSci dissertation at the end of 2013.

Stephanie Bunn, Department of Social Anthropology

I was unable to attend the second discussion session of my group, which had focussed on work placements. At the initial session, I had joined the group because I had thought that this could be an interesting possibility for some of our Anthropology MRes students. However, I soon realised that this was less practical in Anthropology than in Chemistry because there are unlikley to be many paying placements for anthropology students (as opposed to the industrial sciences such as Chemistry, where some companies depend on postgraduates and are able to pay them a wage), and, furthermore, in discussion with my HoD, we realised that we did not have the man/woman-power at present to set this up.

What we have done instead is to set up a working group on Honours placements, and in consultation with Eric Stoddart are about to establish our participation in the Schools placement scheme, which will include developing a new 15 credit Honours Module to balance with the 15 credit period placement element, which students who so choose, will be able to do as a part of their Social Anthropology Honours degree. This will enable those students who are thinking about a career in Education to do a course which will contribute to their career portfolios. It will also draw upon my experience as a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute's Education Committee, and my involvement with the development of the anthropology A-level in England. Since the RAI are very interested in seeing how Anthropology could be introduced in Scotland as a part of the Highers system, it could be productive here too. It should also be a very useful trial to help us envisage how placements might work at Masters level in future.