

## What is Frontrunners?

Getting on the career ladder is harder than ever in the current economic climate. Employers expect more than ever from graduates and competition to get the best jobs is fierce. Graduates need more than just a decent degree to get a good job now: they need to show they have good employability skills and an understanding of the workplace to give them the edge over other applicants.

The University of Essex has developed a unique **extra-curricular placement and training scheme** to meet this challenge head on. It provides students with the chance to earn money, gain valuable work experience, and contribute to campus life, while also addressing a number of strategic priorities for the sector. Frontrunners deals with all of these things in an efficient, organic way, under a single initiative that could be transferable to any institution.

## How does it work in practice?

Frontrunners funding is open to all University departments and administrative units, and aims to provide a wide range of placement opportunities to students. There is a distinct lifecycle that occurs during each funding round:

- ↓ Applications are judged by a selection panel to ensure they represent a good development opportunity to students.
- ↓ Placements are advertised to all students. Applicants complete a covering letter, application form, and CV. They focus on how they would benefit from the opportunity.
- ↓ The recruitment process is carried out. Students are assessed on their potential to gain from the placement. Unsuccessful applicants are provided with feedback and an open CV and interview surgery.
- ↓ Successful students attend a generic induction programme which explores expectations and covers PDP, health and safety, equality and diversity, web skills.
- ↓ Students begin placements, set objectives, and start ongoing training programmes which develop skills that can be transferred from academic to work situations.
- ↓ At the end of the placement, students undertake an evaluation and write a reflective report about their skills development and their placement "journey"
- ↓ Next steps: students attend a CV workshop to contextualise and build upon their learning experience. Further achievement and employment is tracked.
- ↓ Frontrunners have the opportunity to progress to the next stage of the scheme: Frontrunners Plus.

## frontrunners

### What do staff think?

Frontrunners is as beneficial to staff as it is to students – and the benefits go far beyond the simple pleasure of helping students to gain confidence and skills. Many projects have been enriched by a greater level of student involvement, and many staff have found themselves learning directly from their students. The University as a whole has been enriched by their vibrancy and has embedded the student point-of-view in all areas of its operation, linking everything back to the student.

**“Frontrunners is a good way to help develop students’ skills before they seek full-time employment after university. It is also good management practise for the placement supervisor. The Frontrunners programme is a good development tool for both the frontrunner and the supervisor.”**

**“I have found Frontrunners to be an excellent way of resourcing a project whilst at the same time giving a student the opportunity to develop valuable work-related skills. My frontrunner quickly became a valuable member of the team.”**

### What do students think?

Although students apply for Frontrunners for myriad reasons, the common feeling by the end of the placement is that they have gained something extremely valuable, not only in terms of their immediate personal development but also their plans for the future. Many students feel far more connected to the University and the campus as a result of being involved.

**“The Frontrunners placement scheme has helped me to better understand the professional world, while allowing me the space to develop and even make mistakes and then deal with the consequences.”**

**“Frontrunners is an excellent scheme for students to develop certain skills which will be of great help in the future. And as these are skills not taught in degree courses, they only come with practical experience.”**

