

# Disruptive intakes

A programme to develop the IT leaders of tomorrow takes talented young graduates and puts them on a varied path of experience in GSK. Along the way, some of them aim to bring disruptive technology ideas to the company.

**B**arely out of his teens, the industrial placement student made an impression from the start. There was something different about him, a distinction that was clear throughout his 12 months with GSK before he returned to his final year university studies in IT.

The young man was able to bring new ideas to the intranet sections of the department to which he was allocated. He scripted programs and advised on new ways of approaching website design, helped launch the company's new external corporate website, and assisted the global markets on how to use and adapt website templates for their own needs.

With an obvious if precocious talent and a disarming ease of approach, it was not surprising to see him back when GSK recruited him after graduation as an associate in the company's Information Technology Development Programme (ITDP). If others in his intake and those of previous intakes are of his calibre, then the future of IT in GSK is surely in good hands.

The programme, which aims to develop talented graduates entering GSK to become tomorrow's IT leaders, has been around in various forms for some years. Today, however, with the role of IT in companies such as GSK acknowledged as pivotal and pervasive, investment must be made in the future. ITDP is one such investment.

## Different roles

Each programme lasts for three years, and each annual intake sees 10-15 graduates

in the US and UK signing up to become associates – the term used by HR to make it easier for participants to take up different roles during their tenure.

The ITDP does not focus entirely on IT. Site visits are organised so associates can get a broader experience and knowledge of the company and a better understanding of how IT is used in the different areas of operations. "We are

## Bringing fresh perspectives

looking to gain as much experience and knowledge of the company as possible to help with our development to be leaders of IT," says Angharad Hopkins, who is working with the connectGSK team on Information Workplace after joining from the University of the West of England.

Matt Bartow joined the programme from Pennsylvania State University and is currently on his second rotation, working mainly in clinical disclosure and reporting, clinical metric tools and a new audit management system in Oncology. Matt says: "ITDP associates bring a fresh perspective on ways of working which can be instrumental in developing the way we do business. Technology is always changing and different generations utilise collaboration tools differently. This fresh perspective can be proven valuable to GSK."

Although UK and US focused, ITDP associates can 'go outside'. Derek Brandon, for example, was seconded to help with the implementation of the Information Workplace project in Japan. "It was a tremendous opportunity and experience. My learning and development, especially around forming business relationships and working through challenges of language and cultural barriers, will benefit me throughout my career."

And Sara LaBate, who joined the ITDP in May last year, started a rotation in Japan last month with the IT team there.

"Immersing myself in a different culture to establish a foundation of understanding will hopefully allow me to become a better employee to develop solutions that genuinely address global challenges," says Sara, who is half-Japanese.

Being chosen as an ITDP associate does not necessarily follow the usual interview course. Written essays and IT do not by tradition sit together comfortably, but Chris Higgins found he was required to write about acquisitions and mergers after approaching Ingo Elfering, VP of IT Strategy, for a year's placement as part of the ITDP programme. "Once I completed and submitted the essay, Ingo invited me to a video conference call, and – after the initial ITDP interview – I was surprised to be faced with another formal job interview. Finally after two teleconferences, one video conference, countless emails and an essay I was offered a role."

And if strategic matters are not serious enough, current ITPD associates have been invited to come up with some ideas involving disruptive technology. Despite the name, this is the intriguing concept of an innovation improving a product or service in ways that the market does not expect (see panel).

If GSK is investing so much time and resource in the future of these associates, what is to stop them moving on to other companies after their training? Nothing, it seems. But the fact that a high number of former ITDP participants remain with GSK, often in senior positions, speaks for itself. ☺



## Future faces

Left, from top: Daniel Oatway, Angharad Hopkins and Matt Bartow



## Of the best

Senior leaders in IT have challenged current ITDP associates to show what they are made of by inviting them to suggest some ideas involving disruptive technologies to implement within GSK for its benefit. To be 'disruptive', they must improve a product or service in a way the market is not expecting.

Ideas from the associates ranged from making branded video games to establishing a new network. A Dragons' Den approach was held by the associates themselves to choose the final few to eventually receive a personal stamp of approval from CIO Bill Louv.

One project is called GSKac, short for GSK academic. This aims to provide industrial placement or final year university students in the UK with a real project which creates an innovative business solution for the company or solves some of the issues it faces.

Projects are not limited to IT and can range from research to development. This may include, for example, research into an iPhone application, development of a meeting room booking solution or assistance with implementing a new software package.

"If anybody in GSK is interested in supplying a project to a university student or an existing industrial placement student for them to complete during the 2010/2011 academic year, please get in touch," says Daniel Oatway, who is leading the project. "We look for a commitment of just 30 minutes a week and there are usually no costs involved."

## More information

More information can be found on the ITDP Community on myGSK.

