

Evaluating the 2010 HEFCE-subsidised placement and internship schemes: Legacy and lessons learnt

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Background

During 2010, seventy English higher education institutions (HEIs) or groups secured funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to develop and implement new undergraduate placement and graduate internship schemes. The aims of the initiative were to assist new graduates emerging from university with their transition to employment and to provide additional capacity and expertise for employers in particular sectors, in response to the economic downturn.

Two main streams of activity were funded. 55 HEIs successfully bid for funding to develop internships for graduates within a range of target employment sectors and/or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); this was on the basis of £1600 per placement achieved. 30 HEIs received funding to develop internships (placements) within the professions for undergraduates with disadvantaged backgrounds, funded at £1000 per placement. In most cases most of the funding was used to remunerate the student or graduate and thereby 'subsidise' the costs of the employer in providing a placement or internship paid at national minimum wage level or better.

Objectives

Oakleigh Consulting and CRAC were commissioned by HEFCE to provide a high-level evaluation of the experience of the HEIs, employers and students/graduates participating in these schemes, and an assessment of the impact of the funding upon the wider HE work experience landscape, to support future policy development¹. This paper aims present evidence from the research to answer a series of questions:

- Did the HEFCE funding increase the participation of employers, and will that be sustained beyond the period of funding?
- How successful was the intended targeting, to support particular sectors?
- What are the main barriers for new employers and how to overcome them?
- To what extent did the funding increase or widen participation by graduates in internships?
- Was the funding successful in widening the participation of undergraduates in placements in the professions?

¹ *Increasing opportunities for high quality higher education work experience, HEFCE, 2011*

- What have the HEIs learnt in terms of developing and supporting internship and placement opportunities?
- Is there an identifiable long-term impact on the provision of HE student work experience and internships as a result of the funding?

Research outline

Individual HEIs reported outcomes to HEFCE during the scheme and some conducted their own evaluations. Our wider evaluation study was conducted using that management information plus a series of bespoke online surveys and interviews, in conjunction with 26 of the 30 HEIs running undergraduate placement schemes and 53 of the 55 HEIs running graduate internship schemes under the funding. These generated responses from c.600 participating employers and c.1100 participating students and graduates, which were augmented by 60 in-depth interviews (with HEI coordinators, employers and participating students/graduates). Collectively this provided a rich dataset from which to ascertain trends and develop overall findings.

Summary of scheme outcomes and impacts

Undergraduate internships in the professions

Within the 30 undergraduate schemes, a total of 850 placements were undertaken across a range of employment sectors, as HEIs interpreted the target 'professions' rather liberally. Two thirds of the placements were hosted by SMEs, many of which had not previously engaged with the HEIs. The schemes were specifically intended for students thought less likely to be able to obtain such placements without additional support, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The HEIs interpreted potential target participants in different ways, but many utilised criteria in relation to widening participation initiatives. Placements took place in the 2010 summer vacation, mostly of 4-8 weeks duration (and some of longer duration but on a part-time basis).

The impacts on the student participants were very positively reported. A third were offered extensions to their placement, and almost 20% offered further periods of work experience and 8% a long-term job after graduation, and 55% said they would seek other structured work experience opportunities. In terms of career thinking, 64% reported that the experience confirmed their potential interest in a career in that sector. The majority reported increased confidence in making job applications (70%) and perceived significant development of a series of employability-related skills. The greatest improvements were reported to be in communications, time management, teamworking, problem-solving and prioritisation skills.

Graduate internship schemes

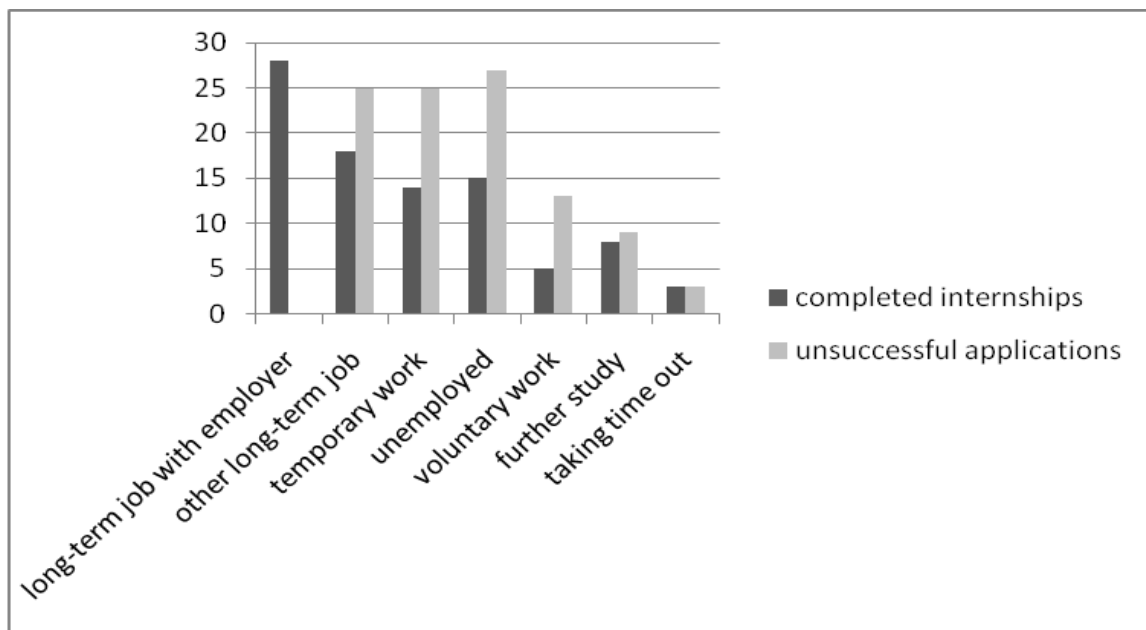
Across the 55 graduate internship schemes, 8500 internships were developed and undertaken by graduates, over 90% of which were hosted by SMEs and half in the target employment sectors. Most were of 8 to 12 weeks duration, although some were extended to up to a year's duration. Overall, 60% of the employers were new to engagement with the HEIs; only 14% had previously offered graduate internships.

The total of 8500 internships represented a significant addition to the extent of internship activity nationally in 2010.

The majority of graduates reported strong perceived development in employability skills, with 30-40% claiming “a great deal” of advance in skills such as time management, communications, prioritisation, problem-solving and teamworking, and 70-80% at least significant development. Over 80% reported increased confidence about their future employability as a result of the internship.

In terms of employment outcomes, when surveyed, nearly half of the graduates who had completed an internship had gained long-term employment either directly with the internship employer (28%) or another employer (18%), and fewer were in temporary employment than before the internship. As shown in Figure 1, the low proportion (15%) reporting being unemployed was significantly lower than the proportion amongst graduates who had sought internships but not obtained one (27%).

Figure 1 Percentages of participants with different employment circumstances, for those who had completed internships and those who had been unsuccessful in securing one



Overall findings

Extent of employer participation

Two key issues we wished to investigate were the extent to which the HEFCE funding increased the participation of employers, and whether that would be sustained beyond the period of funding.

Across the range of graduate internship schemes, based on HEIs’ reporting, an average of 60% of the employers that offered internships were new contacts for the HEI, although this ranged from 20% to 90% for individual HEIs, reflecting their existing levels of engagement. They also reported that their success rate in terms of

obtaining the offer of an internship from the employers they contacted was around 50%, although this also varied strongly between institutions.

Three quarters of the participating employers surveyed had not offered an internship previously (and 84% not in the immediate past), although around 1 in 5 were offering work experience placements to undergraduate students.

This seems strong evidence to demonstrate that activity by the HEIs in developing the internship schemes drew in new employers to offer internship opportunities. The total number of these 'new' employers is estimated to have been several thousand (by extrapolation from our survey data), and perhaps as many again will have had at least some engagement with an HEI even if it did not lead to a specific internship offer on this occasion.

On the critical issue of sustainability, over two thirds of the employers reported that they were now more likely in principle to offer a graduate internship in future (and three quarters of those which had not offered one prior to the HEFCE scheme). When probed on what the position would be if no similar subsidy was available, 48% indicated that they would not offer similar internship vacancies as they had with the funding, 26% that they would offer a reduced number, and 10% that they would continue to offer the same number. These proportions were broadly similar irrespective of whether the employer had offered an internship prior to participating in this scheme. It was interesting to note, however, within open-ended responses made to the survey, that a significant minority said that they might offer unpaid internship opportunities instead of paid, in the absence of financial subsidy.

Again this seems clear evidence that although the level of provision of internship opportunities from these employers would be lower in future years if HEFCE or similar funding was not available, a significant minority would continue to do so. Of course, were similar funding to be available, the proportion continuing would be dramatically higher, particularly of small employers. More detail on attitudes in relation to funding, and other barriers and support, is provided in a later section. However, the conclusion drawn is that most employers appear to have had a positive experience of the value of an internship, and more are likely to offer them in future than would have done had the HEFCE scheme not taken place.

Nature of employers participating in the schemes

Evidence from the surveys of participating employers was analysed to obtain a picture of the nature of the organisations engaged. A particular question to consider was to what extent the intended targeting was successful, as the graduate internship scheme funding was made available partly on grounds of being support to employers in particular sectors.

The graduate internship scheme funding was provided to HEIs on the basis that organisations targeted to provide vacancies should be SMEs and/or within particular employment sectors identified by the previous Government². These had then been considered to be sectors of significance for the UK's future economic prosperity,

² *Building Britain's future: New industries, new jobs*, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2009

most being what would be termed high-technology and/or knowledge-intensive industries, which would benefit from Government support in the economic downturn.

Table 1 summarises the distribution of participating employers in these target sectors (based on our survey data), and the distribution of the internships based on HEI management information. 53% of employers responding to the survey considered that they worked within one or more of the seven target sectors. Many more employers classified themselves within the ‘digital industries’ and ‘professional and financial services’ categories than in the other target sectors, although some identified with more than one sector. The HEIs’ reporting of the numbers of internships obtained broadly followed the same pattern, with over half in these two sectors. The differences between this and the employer reporting may reflect either that some employers will have offered multiple internships or that HEIs’ classification of the employers’ sectors was inaccurate, or both.

Table 1 Distribution of participating employers within target sectors, with number of internships reported by HEIs for comparison

Target sector	% of employers	Number of employers	% of internships
Low-carbon products and services	11	52	7
Digital industry	25	119	27
Life sciences and pharmaceuticals	3	15	3
Advanced manufacturing	5	24	6
Engineering construction	7	31	4
Professional and financial services	16	73	28
Industrial opportunities presented by the ageing society	<2	8	1
Other sectors	47	220	23
Total		542	

Note: percentages of employers sum to over 100% as some employers identified with several sectors

In terms of size, over 91% of the employers would be classified as SMEs; 81% had fewer than 50 employees, 11% had 50-250 employees, and less than 9% over 250 employees. Overall, 75% were in the private sector, 16% were charities or social enterprises, and 8% in the public sector. However, 40% of the large employers were public sector organisations.

This seems to indicate that the targeting was only moderately successful in relation to sectors, with very few in certain sectors, but was successful in relation to size (i.e. intended focus on SMEs). It was also notable that a greater proportion of the larger participating organisations were already active in offering placements or internships.

Further consideration of the sectors of the employers was instructive, however, as they were also asked to select from a more conventional industrial sector breakdown. This showed the largest percentages of employers to have been in advertising and PR, media, the IT sector, manufacturing, education and the creative/cultural sectors. This is very much the pattern of sectors that traditionally offer internships, so the attempted targeting towards certain specific knowledge-intensive sectors, such as advanced manufacturing or pharmaceuticals, appears not to have been particularly effective, and was certainly much less effective than targeting SMEs more generally.

Notably, more of those classifying themselves as 'digital industries' were in the media sector than in the IT sector, and those classifying themselves as in 'professional and financial services' came from a wide spectrum of sectors including human resourcing and advertising. It may be that businesses were unfamiliar with these particular sector groupings, particularly the 'ageing society' category, in comparison with more traditional breakdowns, and interpreted them very loosely.

Within the undergraduate placement schemes, the only targeting specified was that the organisations should be within 'the professions'. This seems to have been interpreted very liberally by the participating HEIs, resulting in a wide distribution of employers across the industrial sectors which typically recruit graduates. The sectors in which there were most opportunities were creative and cultural, the media, and advertising/marketing/public relations, all of which are well-established in terms of offering placements, particularly unpaid. This may reflect that the timescale for developing the opportunities and offering placements was rather short, and so many employers in these sectors were able to respond quickly, or that they were particularly quick to take advantage of the funding and provide paid rather than unpaid positions. Either way, it is clear that more overt guidelines in relation to desired sectors might be more beneficial in future, should distinct targeting of employment sectors be sought.

The conclusion from these observations is that it may not be easy to succeed in targeting particular sectors (in relation to developing new placement or internship opportunities), perhaps partly due to differing cultures and attitudes within particular sectors to issues of this kind. A similar finding emerged from work by the first author in relation to placements and internships in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and related employment sectors³.

Barriers to employer participation and support to overcome them

It should be noted at the outset that the opinions reported here were from employers that participated in the internship schemes, which had presumably decided that the potential value from an internship was greater than the barriers of effort and cost perceived in providing it. As a result they may not be representative of all employers, particularly those which continue not to offer such opportunities.

Within the graduate internship schemes, 66% of the employers surveyed saw cost as the most significant barrier to offering placements or internships, and over 30% concerns about a lack of capacity to plan and set up such a placement and then to supervise the student/intern (Table 2). Fear of inadequate skills or experience amongst the graduates was cited by less than a quarter of the employers, and uncertainty about the business benefit by fewer than 10% (although of course these employers had made a positive judgement to participate). The current economic situation was also seen as an issue by many, and open-ended responses suggested that at this time they either had less or no need to take on interns and/or were struggling to retain their current staff or imposing redundancies. In the latter case they simply felt that offering new internships could be insensitive to their existing staff. The economic downturn may have had the effect of decreasing their willingness

to take risks, of which a 'new' internship could be seen as an avoidable risk and complication.

Table 2 Most significant barriers to offering internships (employers participating in graduate internship schemes)

Barriers	Response %
Cost – offering internships is expensive	66
Organisational issues – lack of supervisory capacity	31
Lack of capacity/time to plan and set up internship	37
Lack of resource/time to promote and recruit for it	18
Recent graduates have insufficient technical knowledge	21
Recent graduates have insufficient commercial skills	24
Level of supervision/management support required is too much	27
Expectation of intern unreliability (e.g. may drop out)	17
We have offered them before and had poor experience	6
Underlying current economic situation	25
We know there is no/little business benefit to our organisation	1
Unable/hard to quantify whether there is a benefit to organisation	8
Number of respondents	423

Further analysis of these data revealed some differences between those employers which had previously offered internships to graduates, and those doing so now for the first time. A higher proportion (of 'experienced' employers) had concerns about the level of effort required to recruit and supervise graduates, and about their lack of technical knowledge, than of 'first time' employers. This may indicate that these barriers are genuine and would tend to persist rather than perceptions that might be overcome with experience.

Employers that participated in the undergraduate placement schemes cited broadly similar barriers along with significant issues around timing (students only being available during vacation periods) and duration (placements likely to be too short to have significant benefit). Some indicated that there was insufficient time to set up a placement, which related to the particular timing of the development of this scheme. Rather more (31%) felt that a lack of technical or commercial skills would reduce the potential benefit, than was the case for graduates.

Having considered some of the barriers that could prevent employers offering (more) internships, we now turn to the support that they might value in doing so.

The overwhelming majority of employers in the graduate internship schemes surveyed (86%) reported that the availability of a wage subsidy or other financial support was a key factor in their participation (89% for first-time providers). For those in the undergraduate schemes this was lower (58%, but 70% of first-time providers) but still the most frequently cited factor. The precise nature of the subsidy or incentive did not seem to matter too much, but the offer of some financial support appeared to 'oil the wheels' sufficiently for an organisation to consider the

³ *Work experience for STEM students and graduates*, The Science Council, 2011

opportunity. Several employers interviewed felt that the subsidy from the HEI enabled them to remunerate an intern, which they felt 'ethically' that they should but would not be able to do otherwise. This was particularly the case for small and third sector employers.

When asked about the most useful support that might be provided which was other than financial, employers' responses were somewhat different from the expectations gleaned from the HEIs. The graduate scheme employers surveyed thought the most important support was in promoting the vacancy widely to relevant graduates and assistance with recruitment (Table 3). Fewer than 1 in 5 cited a need for help in identifying suitable projects or work for the placement, and very few wanted assistance in making the business case, which were potential support areas that the HEIs had thought important. Over a third thought some pre-training of graduates in workplace skills and behaviour would be valuable, which presumably reflects some fear that recent graduates will not readily 'fit in'. This appeared not to have been offered by many HEIs prior to the scheme, or at least where such an offer had had made it had not been taken up by the employer. A higher proportion of employers who had previously offered internships prior to the HEFCE schemes cited support in promotion and recruitment, and pre-training of graduates, as important, than of those offering internships for the first time.

Table 3 Employers' views of most useful support (graduate scheme participants)

Support options	Response %
Advertising/promotional support (promoting the vacancy more widely to relevant graduates)	55
Recruitment/selection support (e.g. application sorting or shortlisting)	42
Help in identifying projects appropriate for an intern	18
Assistance in making the business case for an internship to organisation management	7
Best practice guidance on how to manage internships	24
Pre-training of graduates in general workplace skills and behavior	37
Provision of learning support or mentoring by university	16
Tax breaks to offset cost of offering internships	51
Number of respondents	434

Employers involved in the undergraduate schemes also thought the most useful non-financial support was in relation to identifying potential student applicants (72%) and recruitment (57%). Many more of these employers reported that they would find help in identifying projects of mutual benefit useful, and pre-training of students in workplace skills and behaviour (each 58%), than of graduate internship employers. This reflects quite well their views on the barriers to offering undergraduate placements.

Some of the more innovative structures and processes offered by certain participating HEIs offered additional benefits to small employers in particular. Some HEIs employed the graduates themselves, effectively seconding them to the employers, which reduced the risk and effort involved by the employer; this was particularly appealing to very small employers with limited management capacity.

Others used a range of flexible and/or part-time working arrangements which suited certain employers. This seems to suggest that offering a flexible range of models could increase the range of employers that might participate.

Collectively these results appear to show some small but consistent differences in the types of support that employers believe they will need prior to engagement and those they find important with some experience. In general, with experience they seem to recognise more need for support in promotion, recruitment and supervision of the student/intern, and pre-training in workplace skills, than they may previously have expected, suggesting that these are the most critical areas for assistance in sustained HEI-employer relationships supporting placements or internships.

Widening student participation

The 850 placements developed in the undergraduate schemes represent a relatively modest addition to the total extent of structured undergraduate work experience nationally, so the key issue to consider is how effective the schemes were in achieving a widening of student participation. An overt goal of the undergraduate placement schemes was to develop placements for 'disadvantaged' students who might otherwise have opportunity to undertake placements in, broadly, 'the professions'. Better access to internships in the professions has been identified as a potential mechanism through which to improve social mobility⁴.

HEFCE was not prescriptive about the nature of students that could benefit (other than being nationals of EU countries). HEIs identified the following main groups:

- Students that would not normally be provided with placements as an integral part of their course;
- Students largely dependent on paid work to finance their time at university/college.;
- Disabled students; and
- Students with ethnic minority backgrounds with socio-economic disadvantage.

Some HEIs promoted their scheme widely and invited eligible students to apply, while others attempted to target promotions to 'disadvantaged' groups. However, some of the latter found that (un)availability and accuracy of student records hampered identification of target students, and some students were reluctant to disclose this type of information – i.e. to identify themselves as 'disadvantaged'. Also, partly due to the timing of the scheme, in some cases vacancies were opened up more widely in an effort to fill the places (and not all available places were eventually filled), which detracted from the overall targeting effect achieved.

Respondents to the survey of participating undergraduates provided their parents' occupation(s), which were coded broadly as 'professional' or 'non-professional'. Around 45% of those providing this information came from a 'non-professional' occupational background. For comparison, HESA data suggests that 31% of young full-time first degree entrants have parents in the corresponding National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) occupations. Although our coding of

⁴ *Unleashing Aspiration. Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*, chaired by Alan Milburn MP, 2009

parental occupation is a very rough proxy, this does suggest that a higher proportion of scheme participants were from 'socio-economic disadvantaged' backgrounds than in the overall student cohort.

Around 30% of the survey respondents were of ethnic minority background (9% Black, 16% Asian and 4% Mixed Race groupings). This is higher than HESA 2009/10 student record data, which report 21% of first degree students to have ethnic minority backgrounds, and suggests that students of ethnic minority background were over-represented in the HEFCE scheme (as had been intended).

Perhaps more critical for this scheme was whether participants had previously undertaken structured work experience during their higher education. Overall, 33% had undertaken a structured work experience placement prior to taking part in the scheme. This was 38% amongst White students and 21% amongst those of ethnic minority background. 27% (overall) had tried to get a placement but failed, and 41% had not previously tried.

On the other hand, over half (52%) of respondents undertook part-time paid work during term-time and 44% during holidays, with only 16% stating that they did no paid or voluntary work. Therefore almost all participants had some prior experience of 'subsistence' work.

The HEFCE schemes do therefore seem to have been at least partially successful in providing structured placements for many students who had not otherwise had the opportunity, i.e. widening participation. It might be that in any future initiatives of this kind, an alternative strategy could simply be to target students who have not undertaken structured work experience previously, rather than concentrating solely on background characteristics, particularly if students are reluctant to acknowledge or reveal any 'disadvantaged' status.

Increasing or widening graduate participation?

In parallel with the previous section, we wished to investigate the nature of recent graduates participating in the internships schemes, to consider the extent to which the HEFCE funding increased or widened participation by graduates. The large number (8500) of internships immediately suggests a significant increase in participation, as this is a very substantial addition to the total number of internships undertaken nationally (believed to be around 30,000 annually, outside the HEFCE schemes).

Unlike the undergraduate placement schemes, HEIs did not seek to target particular groups of graduates, other than that they should have graduated since 2008. Interestingly, not all restricted their schemes to their own graduates, a minority opening vacancies to any locally-based recent graduate.

Based on survey respondents, applicants to the graduate internship schemes were a rather high-achieving group academically. Of the two-thirds who were recent first degree graduates, 78% had obtained a 1st or 2.1 class, well above the proportion within the overall UK cohort. Amongst the remainder, almost all had postgraduate Masters degrees.

By gender, just over half (51%) were female, while in terms of ethnicity 28% were of a minority background (6% Black, 15% Asian, 3% Chinese and 4% of mixed race), which is higher than the 21% reported amongst all UK full-time first degree students. Amongst those of Asian background, there were three times as many male students as females, and Asian male students formed a high proportion of those with a Masters degree.

The sample was not large enough to conduct analysis at individual degree subject level, but suggested that about 28% had studied a STEM subject, 43% a business or social-related subject, and 29% an arts/humanities/creative subject.

In Table 4, the profile of HEFCE scheme respondents is compared with that recorded in an evaluation of participants in the Graduate Talent Pool⁵, which is an open aggregation of commercially available vacancies (i.e. without subsidy or HEI support), and with figures for the full-time undergraduate cohort. This demonstrates, in relation to the national student cohort, proportionally more of those participating in internships:

- have achieved high degree classes
- are of ethnic minority background (especially Asian background)
- have studied degree disciplines other than STEM subjects.

Table 4 Key characteristics of participants (respondents), compared with Graduate Talent Pool participants and national cohort figures

	HEFCE scheme respondents %	GTP participants %	FT UG cohort 2009
First degree	67	77	n/a
% of first degrees with 1 st or 2.1 class	78	66	57
Masters or other higher degree	29	20	n/a
Female	51	50	54
White	72	69	80
Black	6	7	5
Asian	15	15	10
STEM subject	28	30	43
Business/social subject	43	42	31
Arts/humanities/creative subject	29	28	22
<i>Number in sample (N)</i>	903	579	

When respondents were analysed by whether they had successfully obtained an internship or had been an unsuccessful applicant, it appeared that, proportionally:

- higher proportions of those with high (1st or 2.1) degree classes were successful than those with lower degree classes
- a higher proportion of female participants were successful than of males
- white British graduates were more successful than those of ethnic minority background
- there was no difference by participants' broad subject grouping or broad parental occupational background.

⁵ *Evaluation of the Graduate Talent Pool internships: experiences of graduates*, BIS, 2011

Perhaps just as crucial, the proportion of graduates surveyed reporting that they had previously undertaken structured or degree-related work experience was just under 20% (and 8% had undertaken a sandwich year placement). This appears to be somewhat low compared with the level of work experience believed to exist amongst students. Surprisingly, 69% of the respondents reported that they had not made applications for other internships (i.e. outside the HEFCE-funded internship schemes).

Based on the last point in particular, the conclusion is that the schemes drew in many graduates who were not otherwise applying for graduate internships, which points to an increase in participation. This is reinforced by the finding that the graduates involved have relatively little prior work experience. On the other hand, the evidence for widening of participation is mixed, as 'successful' applicants (i.e. the interns) tended to be high achievers academically who might be attractive to employers seeking to employ graduates. The high participation of graduates of ethnic minority background – at least in applying for vacancies – suggests a potential 'widening' participation or even social mobility benefit, but both this research and the evaluation of the Graduate Talent Pool appear to show that applicants with these backgrounds are disproportionately less successful in obtaining the internships.

Conclusions: immediate outcomes and overall legacy

The substantial Government investment through HEFCE (around £15M) funding this initiative would be expected to have some long-term impact and legacy, beyond the immediate outcomes and impact for the graduate and employer participants. In the short term, over 9000 placements/internships were undertaken that probably would not have taken place without the funding, through which perhaps 2500 graduates gained long-term jobs with those employers and another 1500 or more were assisted to gain other long-term jobs. Of course, with time, many of these could become significant long-term gains for the graduates and their employers, with positive returns to society and the economy. At the same time, several thousand employers will have gained in staff capacity and graduate expertise at low cost.

The participation of 8500 graduates in these internships represents a significant increase in internship participation during 2010, with many graduates taking part who would not otherwise have gained internships. Although at a smaller scale, a distinct if somewhat imprecise 'widening' impact was generated through the undergraduate schemes, which might lead to some potential social mobility benefit.

In the longer term, over half of the employers participating in the undergraduate scheme and 70% in the graduate internship scheme reported that they were more likely to offer similar placements or internships in the future, and 10% irrespective of whether there was any support funding available. Potentially that should mean a minimum of 1000 (and conceivably several thousand) internships annually, on an ongoing basis, which had not existed previously.

For the HEIs, opportunities now existed for further engagement of different kinds with several thousand employers, with most of which they had not previously been engaged. At least 10 institutions reported that they would offer similar internship

schemes to graduates in future even in the absence of funding from HEFCE or another source (and far more would do so if funding was available).

Internally, many HEIs had made structural changes or new appointments in their employability or employment units, or careers services, particularly to recruit and engage employers. Many expected these posts to continue, funded by commercial graduate recruitment support. Reflection on their own experiences and evaluations, and the overall evaluation for HEFCE, offers them the opportunity to learn which support mechanisms employers and graduates genuinely prefer or need, which could enhance their effectiveness in future activity.

For some HEIs, development of a scheme represented a step-change in their enthusiasm and capacity to deliver student placement opportunities or internships for their graduates, through which they felt they had significantly enhanced their support for graduate employment, and in so doing made an overt response to their institutional employability strategy. Several reported that they felt the undergraduate schemes had raised the level of understanding of work placements in relation to widening participation and social mobility, and built new links between academic schools and the units supporting placements and employment.

It seems unlikely that HEFCE or others will be able to provide similar funding support again in the foreseeable future, so it will be important to embed these longer-term benefits within future activity and support. The funding provided a potential kick-start to the careers of a large number of graduates and, at the same time, if considered an 'experiment', has provided considerable learning in relation to universities' employer engagement and support for graduate employability.

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