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Undergraduate Placements in Computer Science Uncovering the Offer and Learning Best Practice

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Keywords
Placements, higher education, computer science, employability, graduate skills

Abstract
With the growing importance of employability in higher education, there has been an increasing interest in the role of work placements in developing students’ employability skills and allowing a successful transition into the labour market. Employability of young computer scientists is of a particular concern with high unemployment of young graduates in a market where skills needs are pressing.

While the scale of the employability needs of young computer graduates is well known, the scale and quality of placements that are currently being offered and undertaken is unknown. To fill this gap in evidence, the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) was commissioned by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to carry a dedicated study of the availability and take up of computer science placements for undergraduates in the UK, using quantitative and qualitative evidence and analysis.

The study provides evidence from forty universities across the UK on the range and quantity of placements being offered to and undertaken by computing students and the relationships between universities and employers that support them. By understanding the landscape and sharing best-practice in computing placements we aim to inform and influence future policies that are aiming to improve the range and quality of computer science placements.

Presentation
Undergraduate Placements in Computer Science: Uncovering the offer and learning best practice

Tuesday 2nd September 2014

Olivia Jones, Project Manager – Talent, Enterprise & Development
Inga Sileryte, Research Assistant

Our Research Project
Undergraduate Placements in Computer Science: Uncovering the offer and learning best practice

- Commissions by The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Computer Science graduates have the highest level of graduate unemployment six months after graduation despite evidence of a skills shortage in the Computing industry.
- Placements give students the skills and experience to facilitate the route into work on graduation.
- NCUB’s role
  - Placements: university-business collaboration
  - Improving employability skills to meet a business need
  - www.ncub.co.uk/qualityplacements

Aim & Objectives

- Establish the quantity and range of placements offered to and undertaken by computer science undergraduates in the UK
- Investigate policies and practices
- Examine how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are engaging with students and employers
- Identify features of good-quality placements
- Provide a baseline from which appropriate improvement measures can be recommended

Our Approach - Methodology

Collecting evidence in two stages:
1. Quantitative data collection
   - Electronic questionnaire
   - Follow-up questionnaire (telephone)
   - Confidentiality
2. Qualitative data collection
   - In-depth interviews (telephone and face-to-face)

Evidence gathered

- Quantitative evidence from 40 HEIs
  - 38% of computer science students in the UK in 2012/13 (all years)
  - 9 HEIs in the London area, 24 from other areas of England and 7 from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
  - 5 HEIs in the Russell Group and 35 ‘post-92’ universities
- In-depth interviews with 13 HEIs
- Case studies from 10 HEIs
- Business views from 3 large employers

Our Approach - Definitions

Placement
Any type of work experience that has been organised through the university and undertaken by students during their university years, accredited or not, including but not limited to sandwich years, shorter work placements integral to a course, vacation internships, and other work related activities.

Computer Science Undergraduates
A ‘computing undergraduate’ is any student in HE enrolled on a degree course within the Joint Academic Coding System’s ‘Computer Science’ subject group.

Findings

I. Number and type of computing placements in higher education
II. Placement take-up
III. Quality
IV. Business views
Growing 21% The majority of recorded placements are sandwich placements. HEIs believe long-term placements bring greater benefits to students than short-term. Few HEIs record short-term placements. Growing interest in short-term placements. No recorded data to ascertain the total number of computer scientists that graduate having undertaken a placement.

Placement records

Characteristics of computing placements

Placement take-up

What limits the take-up?

Supply - Placement providers

The private sector is the most common provider of computing placements (84%).

Supply - Placement providers

Computing placements were undertaken in companies of all sizes, with the majority (46%) being undertaken in large companies.

Number and type of computing placements

The distribution of computing placements across HEIs ranges from 288 to 0. On average 6% of computing undergraduates (all years) undertook a placement in 2012/13. 96% of computing placements in our sample were accredited. 94% of the placements in our sample were over 24 weeks long. 96% of computing placements were undertaken during term time. 96% of the placements accounted for were taken during the 3rd year of the degree.
Differences
Businesses: consider earlier involvement to encourage student uptake

Introduce an additional question in the DLHE survey

HEIs: consider how they can implement procedures for recording all placements

Real work is carried out - adds value to both the student and employer

The employer provides support through a committed resource

Students develop both academically and personally

The best indicator of a high quality placement: an extended relationship with the employer...ideally a graduate job!

Factors affecting student demand
- Placement application process
- Confidence
- Financial pressures

HEI actions to increase student demand
- A dedicated resource
- Compulsory enrolment
- Placement modules
- Social media

Quality assurance processes demonstrate the importance of HEI involvement in placements:
- Ensure legal requirements are fulfilled
- Set criteria and technical requirements
- Set clear objectives and manage student and employer expectations
- Academic staff visits to placement students
- Placement evaluation

Recruitment processes
- Optimum placement duration
- Student skills valued by industry

Feedback to HEIs
- HEI staff visits to placement students are important
- Better alignment needed between academic and business calendars
- Create a single point of reference

Benefits
- Recruitment
- Academic connections

Findings – To sum up
I. Number and type of computing placements in higher education
   - The quantity and characteristics of recorded placements
II. Placement take-up
   - Supply of placements from business
   - Demand for placements from students
III. Quality
   - Quality assurance processes
   - Features of good quality placements
IV. Business views

Recommendations
1. Replicate good practice
   - Share best practice case studies to encourage others
2. Identify gaps in evidence
   - Introduce an additional question in the DLHE survey
   - Further research: barriers to student take-up & are they specific to computer scientists?
3. Identify problems to address
   - HEIs: consider how they can implement procedures for recording all placements
   - HEIs: consider quantifying the relative effectiveness of student engagement strategies
   - HEI careers services: examine use by computer science students
   - Businesses: consider earlier involvement to encourage student uptake
Questions and feedback

Contact us: olivia.jones@ncub.co.uk
Report due to be published in October

Visit www.ncub.co.uk to find out more
Renewing the employability agenda: learning to understand graduate readiness from an employer perspective

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Keywords
Employability, work-based learning, work experience, institutional connectivity, employment readiness

Abstract
The benefits to student employability of work based learning are well documented (Harvey et al 1997, Johnson and Burden 2003). These work-based experiences can take a number of forms from organised work experience as part of a programme of study to ad-hoc external experiences (Little et al 2006). However, the benefits to Higher Education Institutions (HEI), other than increasing their employability KIS data, of engaging in the process in less well evidenced. This paper presents the case of a university work opportunity initiative, the Xchange. Established early in 2012, the Xchange is a web based service that matches employers voluntary job-specific work opportunities with students wishing to enhance and demonstrate their employability skills. After providing over 200 students with work opportunities and connecting with 160 employers who had no previous experience of offering traditional placements to HE students, valuable insights have been gained. Critically the academic and non-academic project team have developed a deeper understanding of employer requirements. This has led to significant revisions to the way two UG degree programmes are structured and delivered. Additionally, the project has begun to bridge the language gap between institutional and employer understanding of employment ready graduates.

Project Context
The MMU Xchange was developed in April 2012 and launched to students in September of the same year. The purpose was to link employers in the North West who could provide unpaid work opportunities with students who wanted career specific work experience. It was considered different to existing University volunteering opportunities because it was focused on business and commercial roles rather than generic traditional volunteering activities. The Xchange activities were confined to the Faculty of Business and Law and as such the opportunities had to be related to the

The Xchange runs through a dedicated website which employers and students register with and matches the opportunity to appropriate individuals (www.mmuxchange.com). The web service is based on a standard volunteering platform provided by an external supplier, which has been adapted and modified to suit the needs of a HEI. In essence it works as a ‘dating agency’ with employers registering their profile and details of the opportunity and then matching that with the students profiles. The students are then notified of the vacancy via text message and email so they can apply. Initially this was done direct with the employer but as is discussed later an intermediary was introduced early on in the project so students applied for opportunities to the Xchange initially and then the Xchange passed on the most suitable applicants.

So far, the Xchange has placed 288 undergraduate and postgraduate students from a range of programmes as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of students placed in work opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of students placed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Management</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting &amp; Finance</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>288</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The criteria for the opportunities are;

- All of the opportunities are unpaid.
- Each opportunity is a maximum of 20 days but very often less.
- Projects may be part-time during term-time (e.g. 1 day per week for 10 weeks) or they may be full-time during the holidays (e.g. working Monday to Friday for 2 weeks)
- They must provide genuine work experience and not replace full-time paid roles within the organisation.

Research Context

Graduate Employability

It is difficult to define employability concisely (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008, Lowden et al. (2011), however, it broadly relates to an individual’s ability to gain and maintain employment throughout
their adult life (Finn, 2000; Gore, 2005) with account being taken of the interaction between personal characteristics and the labour market (Weinert 2001). Employability includes many interlocking factors including skills, qualifications, attitude labour market conditions, and Government policy. Consequently, employers' demand for labour and understanding of graduates' employability is a complex and 'multifaceted concept' (Gore, 2005, p.342). The prevailing assumption has been that if individuals increase their employability they can expect to be employed (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008). However, employers do not only focus on an individual’s skills and competencies, they are also influenced by their perceptions about which groups of workers, such as HE students will fill gaps in their organisations most effectively (Lucas and Langlois, 2000). Traditionally within the UK the focus has been on the individually and placing the responsibility for accessing a job on their shoulders, what they need to learn and what they need to do to make themselves more employable i.e. a supply-led perspective. An understanding of the needs of employers and what they consider important in graduates or others securing employment is becoming increasingly important i.e. a demand-led perspective.

**Skill Development for Employability**

Employability skills are the skills that are directly relevant to a graduate obtaining work and continuing in work (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). What compromises a particular set of skills and the definition itself is complex issue. Underpinning these definitions often lies a set of beliefs concerning the inherent ‘elitism’ of valuing some forms of skill above others, the terminology high and low skilled only have to be considered to illustrate this point. This point is illustrated well by Anderson and Jayaweer (2008) and Ruhs and Anderson (2011 p.2) who argue that; “skills is a very vague term”. In relation to employability skills they are comprised of the generic transferable skills, discipline-specific skills and job search and acquisition skills or career management skills (Bridgstock 2009) such as the ability to locate jobs and use networks to promote ones career. Due to this complex nature of what skills actually are, there is no definitive list of transferable skills. However, most lists contain some or all of the following elements; of written and oral communication skills, ICT skills, problem solving skills, with elements of self-management for example time management perhaps the ability to speak a foreign language and, interpersonal skills (Bennet et al 2000). Included in the latter is the added complication of employability skills encompassing soft skills. The recent 21st Century Leaders publication from the CMI (2014) broke the soft skills required by employers into thirteen different elements including areas such as emotional intelligence and team-building. What many HEIs are inclined towards now is using the professional publications such as those from the CBI Working towards your future report (CBI 2011) to gain
insight into what transferable work-related skills their graduates need to acquire to be successful in the labour market.

To add to the general confusion and interchangeable terminology used to describe the ability of graduates to find and maintain careers is work readiness. Work Readiness is a recently introduced term, which contains similar elements to those of employability or employability skills. It is “the extent to which graduate applicants possess the skills and attributes that make them "prepared" or "ready" for success in today's rapidly changing work environment. (Caballero and Walker, 2010 p.16). According to Caballero et al. (2011) work readiness encompasses organisational acumen, social intelligence, personal characteristics and work competence. This appears to remove the notion of job-search and job acquisition skills from the arena of employability, focusing more on what employers expect from graduates within the workplace rather than the skills needed to find and secure the role in the first place.

**Confidence**

To add to the confusion of what comprises employability or employability skills and the attributes or personality traits that graduates require are the factors of self-confidence self-belief or self-efficacy. It is reported that these are qualities employers value not only in a selection process but also in terms of the behaviour required in the work place. The argument for the link between employability and self-belief in higher education students is made by Turner (2014) and is acknowledged in two recent models of employability. Firstly, Yorke and Knight (2007) developed a model and defined employability as a set of student attributes encompassing, skills efficacy beliefs and metacognition. A model of employability developed by Pool and Sewell (2007) from an employer perspective in relation to the recruitment of graduates acknowledged some different individual characteristics that are considered important. These are factors such as self-confidence, self-esteem and emotional intelligence, seen as key to gaining employment in the graduate market place. As Rae (2007 p.607) states “a graduate, is not simply the carrier of a set of “skills, knowledge and personal attributes”. Their own unique identity, personality and motivation, going beyond “personal attributes”, which often change markedly during the HE experience, are also likely to be factors”.

Part of the personality and identity will be the level of trust in their own abilities or self-confidence that each individual student possesses. According to Goleman (1998) people with self-confidence are able to present themselves better and with a level of self-assurance that those lacking in it cannot achieve, something a potential employer would obviously value, therefore making students with self-confidence more employable. Related to this is the term self-efficacy, which has been defined as a person's belief in his or her capability to perform a task (Gist, 1987). According to Bandura (1995) mastery experiences are the most effective way of developing self-efficacy and this
occurs when people are given the opportunity to try a task for themselves. In the case of HE students and employability skills one way this would occur would be when they have the opportunity to gain work experience (Pool and Sewell 2007).

**Work-based learning**
The benefits of work experience and work-based learning for HE students have been highlighted in a number of studies and reports (Harvey 1997, Johnson and Burden 2003) particularly when employability is approached from an employer perspective. Work experience has generally been seen to take three distinct forms. Organised work experience as part of a programme of study, organised work experience external to a programme of study or ad hoc work experience external to a programme of study (Little et al 2006). The benefits to the students engaged in work-based learning are both internal, i.e. their skills and attributes are enhanced and external in terms of their marketability in the graduate labour market. Work based learning (WBL) has strong links with constructivist and problem based learning (Savery and Duffy, 1995). WBL is designed to extend the knowledge and skills of the individual students whilst concurrently offering benefits to an organisation (Boud & Solomon, 2001).

**Institutional connectivity**
One challenge acknowledged by Rae (2007) for HEIs is what is termed “institutional connectivity”. Due to the way universities are structured and also the ever increasing size of them can lead to a disjoined approach to employability. Employability, can be a product of not only the learning that occurs across different units or even programmes but can also be extra-curricular and be the responsibility of central university services as well as academic departments. Not only is this potentially challenging for the student in gaining a holistic experience but can also be challenging for staff members as well. This point was also reinforced recently by Pegg et al (2012) who stated that the way in which careers services interact with academic subject departments will shape the delivery of employability. Not only will staff have problems in joining up all the employability components together but they be unaware themselves of what all the components are. As Rae (2007) precisely illustrates these problems can be deeply culturally embedded and not easily overcome.

**Methods**
This exploratory research was underpinned by an interpretive approach. The researchers were seeking an understanding of the value of Xchange opportunities from the subjective view of both students and opportunity providers (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A qualitative survey was adopted as the data collection tool for understanding students perceptions of their experience. This self-
evaluation had been built into the online Xchange tool and every student completing an opportunity was therefore asked (but not required) to complete it. The questionnaire used a five-point scale to assess the extent to which student agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

I. My confidence has increased
II. The experience has improved my commercial awareness
III. The experience has improved my understanding of the requirements of working in an organisation
IV. The experience has helped me understand the skills I need to develop
V. I received positive employer feedback

The basis of the data collection with opportunity providers was qualitative analysis of structured telephone interview with the named manager of the student. From the 164 opportunity providers registered, 60 were selected as a sample. The basis for selection was that i) they had provided more than one opportunity with the Xchange; ii) at least one opportunity had been fully completed and; iii) that at least one opportunity had been placed in the previous six months. From the sample of 60 contacted, 49 providers were willing to participate. In order to gain an understanding of their perceptions about the experience, the following questions were asked:

I. Do you believe the students were work ready when they came to you for a work opportunity?
II. What is the main thing the students have learnt whilst having a work opportunity with you?
III. Would you be more inclined to recruit a graduate subsequent to your experiences with the Xchange?

In order to ascertain providers’ perception of the students’ skills, the following question was also asked:

I. Were you satisfied with the skills the students had when taking up an opportunity with you?

Respondents were then asked about each the specific CBI employability skills (2011) I.e. where you satisfied with the student’s

- Use of IT
- Basic numeracy
- Positive attitude to work
- Basic literacy
- Problem solving
- Team working
- Knowledge about the job
- Self-Management
- Business Awareness

Responses were analysed and grouped into positive or negative responses, in order to present the findings in satisfaction percentages. These findings are now provided below, along with illustrative comments from participants.

Findings: Student feedback

All the students who take up an opportunity with the Xchange are asked to complete a questionnaire about their experiences, what they have learnt and the benefits they have gained. With the exception of eight students, all the other students felt they gained something from the work experience; even it was just the realisation that their CV was enhanced.

In terms of employability and the reasons the Xchange was initially established, 89% of students believed the experience had improved their chances of getting a job. The reasons behind this were drawn from the following responses to the questions asked:

Table 2. Student Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of respondents who Agreed or Strongly Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My confidence has increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience has improved my commercial awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience has improved my understanding of the requirements of working in an organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience has helped me understand the skills I need to develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive employer feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The feedback from employers was not always provided officially through the Xchange system but was often given informally to the students in terms of praise and a job well done.

The results though show the benefits of extra-curricular work-based schemes for students, particularly in terms of developing their confidence and self-belief in their ability to get a job and understanding the requirements of being in work.
The disappointing statistic as far as the university staff were concerned was the students understanding of what skills they had developed and what they needed to learn moving forward. Further research is about to be undertaken in the forthcoming academic year related to this to uncover more of the reasons behind why students have not understood the skills they need to develop. Students did not need to demonstrate other or higher level skills whilst fulfilling the roles. What was apparent from the research was the importance of the opportunities in relation to increasing student confidence and the emphasis placed on this by employers. If 74% of students felt that the work experience had improved their confidence. Whilst this is satisfying for the Xchange team, it also a cause for concern as students not taking advantage of work based opportunities may have low confidence when entering the graduate job market. We therefore need to look at other strategies for improving confidence throughout the student body.

The following two quotes from students engaged in the project sum up the overall feeling towards securing work opportunities:

“It gave me a greater insight on what it is like working in a team on creative ideas; this was my favourite part, bouncing ideas between the team to reach a final outcome. I also enjoyed the fact that we were given the freedom and that I constantly got feedback. There was enough help available to give us clear guidance, but at the same time we were able to work creatively without limits”. (Business Management student)

“Good experience to put on your CV. I have recently been offered an internship at a marketing agency, and much of the interview consisted of questions relating to the experience I have had at Company X and what I have learnt from it.” (Marketing Management Student)

**Findings: Employer feedback**

Employer feedback on the Xchange has been entirely positive with many feeling it has given them a way of linking with HE that they previously did not have and given them access to HE students without a financial outlay that was previously beyond their means. A number of the opportunity providers have since gone on to offer part-time paid work to students that they have worked with through the Xchange, now offer a one year placement or (in three cases) have employed the student they worked with in a full-time basis upon completion of their studies.

A common comment made by employers was that it was “good” or “about time” that universities came to them to find out what they wanted or to engage them in HE rather than the other way around. Of those interviewed 67% stated that they had not offered work-based opportunities in any form to students in the past for the following reasons;

I. They were not aware of the options available to them.

II. They had tried but were passed around from person-to-person.
III. They had a poor understanding what was required or they needed to do.
IV. They had never thought about it.

Work Readiness

In terms work readiness, 68% of providers believed the students placed with them had been work ready in their opinion. As educators, this is a promising finding. However, it is also worth noting that the selection process also supports this. Employers selected the students they felt best able to carry out the role. Additionally, it could be argued that the most capable (in terms of work readiness) students are applying for the roles because they understand the benefits of work experience and/or have work experience. Comments such as those below were representative from employers;

“Yes she has been brilliant, her ideas have really helped our company. Her contribution has been invaluable.” (Provider 10 Marketing Agency)

“I couldn’t believe how professional all three of the students were.” (Provider 34 Coaching company)

The students that the opportunity providers were more critical of and would have probably not considered to be work ready had they secured an opportunity were screened out at interview by the employers. The response by provider 19, a charity, was representative of a number of comments leading to this conclusion.

“The first three I interviewed were great but I couldn’t employ them because they didn’t know how to have a conversation with me.” (Provider 19, Charity)

All the students who received this type of feedback were referred to the University Careers and Employment service to receive training in interview techniques.

Whilst over half of employers thought that the students were work ready, the main issue that came to the fore was the students’ lack of confidence. This concept was mentioned by 43% of opportunity providers in relation to either the work readiness of students or their skills.

“Yes they were eager and very hard workers, however they lacked a bit of confidence in the work place.” (Provider 38 HRM)

“In some ways yes but in others no. She was a great source of ideas but initially lacked the confidence to put them forward.” (Provider 3 Marketing)

“The student was conscientious and committed, who really cares about the work she does she just needed to understand that she needs to push herself forward.” (Provider 35 Sports Marketing)
“Her work and her attitude were great. Her ideas were really creative but I always had to ask for them rather than her offering them, it’s just a confidence thing.” (Provider 18 Digital Marketing).

This concept of student confidence was also picked up in the next question about their level of satisfaction the employers had with the skills the students already had. Using CBI employability research (2011) employers were generally satisfied with student skills;

- Use of IT – 98%
- Basic numeracy – 82%
- Positive attitude to work – 92%
- Basic literacy – 90%
- Problem solving – 85%
- Team working – 83%
- Knowledge about the job – 79%
- Self-Management – 78%
- Business Awareness – 64%

However, a key themes that emerged from the interviews were that respondents felt students lacked the ability to work under pressure, the ability to meet deadlines and self-confidence. Opportunity providers also felt that the students skills were enhanced by having the opportunity to put theory into practice and understand what they had been taught in the classroom could actually benefit a business.

It was interesting that again the concept of self-confidence was a theme emerging from the employer data and that it was raised under the heading of skills by the opportunity providers.

The good news for the University and the graduates of MMU was that in response to the final question (whether opportunity providers would be inclined to recruit a graduate), the response was overwhelmingly positive, with a yes from 98% of those interviewed.

Organisational Learning

As members of the Xchange project team and educators of the graduates entering the work place it is important to reflect on what we have learnt so far from an evaluation of the results of the research.

Lesson 1: The Xchange works

The Xchange acts as a means of engaging increased numbers of students and employers who may not have previously engaged with a HEI. In the academic years 2012/13 and 2013/14 over 285 students have secured relevant opportunities to gain work based experience in a flexible manner.
that fits around their studies. At the current time there are 92 providers who are considered to be active using the Xchange to post opportunities and a large proportion have had limited or no engagement with a HEI previously.

The feedback from students and employers has been overwhelmingly positive and the Faculty had agreed to fund the Xchange project for a further two years.

**Lesson 2: Bring in a specialist**

Initially, academic staff managed the contact with employers and students. It quickly became obvious that this was unsustainable for two main reasons. Firstly, the time implications of sourcing new businesses to engage with the Xchange and subsequently manage the relationships amounted to 2-3 days a week and were unmanageable. Secondly, the skills and knowledge required to perform the sales element of the job role was better suited to someone with a different skill set. This led to an ex-recruitment consultant being appointed on a part-time basis to take up the position of Business Development Manager for the Xchange from October 2012. This appointment has been pivotal in the success of the project to date.

**Lesson 3: Skill development is good, focus on confidence now**

The research indicates that in the Faculty of Business and Law the focus we have on skill development does appear to be working with the employers responding that they felt in terms of their skills the graduates they recruited were work ready and had the necessary skills to carry out the roles the were given. Both in-curriculum and extra-curricular there is an emphasis on developing students job search and work related skills such as team building, communication, problem solving and enterprise. What as an institution we are becoming more aware of is the need to build confidence more in our students and give them the belief that they do have the skills not only to find a job but be successful within it.

Students acquiring further work opportunities are seen as central to building their confidence in their own abilities so a number of strategies are being attempted to give students access to this type of opportunity. One such scheme has been embedded in a Level 6 unit on the BA (Hons) Sports Management degree whereby the CEO of local Community Leisure Trust was asked to supply details of a strategic issue he was currently facing and a case study was prepared based on those issues. The CEO delivered a guest lecture on the strategic issue, the students were given a portfolio assessment brief, and taken on a site visit to gather information from their answers and then the CEO gave feedback to the students on their proposed solutions to the issue. As part of the portfolio assessment students in groups were given a topic such as how to increase revenue which they had to present recommendations on and then they mentored other student groups on implementing
those recommendations. This was seen as a means of compulsorily engaging all students in a real world scenario and with a local employer in order to increase their confidence in their own abilities. The average grade on the unit increased by 6% and feedback from students was very positive so a similar approach is to be taken on units on other degrees.

Lesson 4: Institutional connectivity is a problem

One of the biggest challenges faced by the Xchange team was bringing together the different Departments and functions within the Faculty to develop a coherent approach to providing work opportunities to the students. The academic departments are all responsible for their own KIS and NSS data and such have their priorities when it comes to relaying information to students. At the same time a high level of protectionism comes into play from service providers within the University when an outward facing project is launched which is deemed to be a threat to their operations.

The concern from the Placements team within the Faculty was that employers would start to use voluntary work opportunities instead of offering one year placements so they were against the project. This proved to be unfounded and in reality a small number of employers who have used the Xchange have gone the other way and now offer a placement rather than use the Xchange.

The central volunteering service within the University saw it as unnecessary because they provided ‘volunteering’ opportunities for students. However, the argument was made that the service provided by the Xchange was for work related opportunities rather than volunteering per se. This situation has remained unresolved and the two services work completely independently of each other causing a level of confusion for students and opportunity providers.

Whilst initially being reluctant to support the work of the Xchange the Careers and Employment service in the University has become very supportive of the project. The two services have worked in close collaboration to offer workshops to students in CV writing and interview skills, employer cafes, skills development sessions and sharing external employer contacts.

The main connectivity required for the Xchange to be successful was between academic departments, academic staff and students. Not only is communication to students essential to the success of such projects but enthusiastic communication about the benefits of voluntarily engaging in work based activity is crucial if students are to engage. Experience suggests the best placed people to do this are lecturers who regularly come into contact with students on their degree programmes. Whilst this was a problem in their first year of the Xchange, in September 2013 each Department nominated a ‘Champion’ to ensure this was happening and support other academic staff. The numbers of students registering and applying for opportunities in the second year of the project suggests this has been a successful approach and is being continued this academic year.
Lesson 5: SMEs are ideal

Initially contact was made with the traditional graduate employers in the North West to engage them with the project and to see if they would be willing to provide opportunities. This proved to be completely unsuccessful with the common response being that they offer traditional placements and/or internships and they were satisfied with that situation. Attention was then turned to SMEs employing up to 250 people and rather than using existing contacts that were used for placements, the Xchange team made contact with employers not on the database.

This proved to be very successful and a relationship was established with a number of employers in the region that the University had previously not had any involvement with, including a number of charity organisations.

Lesson 6: Competition has advantages and disadvantages

By offering a range of attractive opportunities for students and having a large number of students searching for opportunities the Xchange roles become competitive and replicate the situation in the graduate job market. The advantages of this are that students understand some of the pressures and requirements in order to secure a job offer, a large number of students develop their CV’s in response to a single opportunity and so enhance the employability and they get to practice their selection skills in a real-world scenario. The disadvantage is that students who are not selected on a number of occasions have their confidence knocked and may be less likely to continue applying. The Xchange staff monitor the situation in relation to who applies for opportunities and who is unsuccessful. After three unsuccessful attempts, the student is offered the chance to go on an Xchange sponsored programme with the Careers and Employability service to improve their employability skills.

Future Work

The XChange initiative is now entering its third year and, whilst being considered a success, there remains a number of improvements to be made. This initial review of work to date has highlighted four key areas for development over the coming academic year.

Tell students what they are learning

From the data it appears that there is a disconnect between what how employable the students believe they are i.e. the skills they have and how employers view them as having the necessary skills and being work ready. The next stage in the research is to survey the students about to embark on a work opportunity as to what skills they believe they have and compare this to feedback from employers on what skills they believe the student to have.
At the same time an initiative within the Faculty is being launched to reinforce the skills development that students are already being engaged in. This involves breaking the outcomes of lectures and tutorials into knowledge and skills development outcomes and colour coding the skills in line with either the UG or PG traits descriptors used within MMU. This way students are made aware of the skills being developed within the particular lesson can build confidence from the knowledge that they should have developed a greater level of proficiency.

One-stop shop is the way forward

There is an opportunity to increase the level of institutional connectivity by bringing together many of the services on offer to employers and students and building a coherent package. This has institutional support following the appointment of an Associate Head for Employability within the Faculty. It is envisaged that the Xchange will be brought together with the Placements team and the Faculty representative from Careers and Employability to create a one-stop shop which can offer employers a range of opportunities to students and students can select the type of opportunity to suit them.

More work-based learning opportunities in the curriculum as well as extra-curricular

In order to offer more students the chance to engage in some form of work-based learning more, and a wider range of, opportunities are needed. These could take the form of placements, internships, short-term work opportunities or employer engagement in curriculum, as per the Sports Management example previously reported. This approach needs careful management and monitoring. However, it is seen as necessary in order to reach students who feel less confident or do not feel they have the abilities that an employer would want (i.e. the least confident are the least likely to apply for traditional work opportunities). By gradually introducing them to employers and receiving positive feedback on their abilities, they may be more inclined to take bigger steps into the world of work experience. By developing more curriculum based work experience assessments with employer engagement or implementing ‘live learning’, students’ confidence may increase as they become aware of the skills they have and those that require further development.

Provide a tool for students to record skills and evidence it to an employer

In line with the view of Kolb (1984), this initial research has shown that systematic reflection is needed to support the translation of Xchange experiences into learning. The student responses suggest that the ability to reflect on skills developed (and therefore their self-efficacy and confidence of those skills) is a key development area. As part of a Faculty review of professional development, the university is due to begin the promotion of portfolio tools to students. The Xchange team will
also be promising this to students and looking at how one specific tool can be linked to the current Xchange processes and systems. Providing a portfolio tool to support this reflection will have the added benefit of being a repository of evidence to share with future (potential) employers (Kelnowski et al, 2007; Baume & Yorke, 2002).

**Conclusions and Future Research**

Experience in the work-place undoubtedly leads to learning for the students involved. However, engagement with employers with limited levels of involvement with a HEI can lead to new insights into employability and new ways of working for university staff. These include the challenges of institutional interconnectivity (Rae 2007), teaching of subject knowledge, the ‘best’ people to engage with students and employers and the signals work experience sends out.

From this study, it was clear that whilst Xchange placements were providing many student and employer benefits, over half the students surveyed considered they had increased their skills. The project team plan to research this further in the forthcoming academic year. This research will draw from the following heuristic assumptions, developed through informal dialogue with students over the course of the past two years;

I. Students have already acquired many of the basic skills they require to be successful in their early careers.
II. Students are limited in their ability to reflect on skill development.
III. Opportunity providers are satisfied with the level of skills and knowledge that the students possess for the level of job roles they are being given.
IV. Opportunity providers’ expectations are low, so they give positive feedback to students on their skills.

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Who Has Heard About the HEAR?
Evaluation of initial employer impact of the Higher Education Achievement Record

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HEAR; employer survey; employer impact

Introduction
Regardless of whether strategy/ policy on graduate employability originates from the Government, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, or students, the associated rhetoric is remarkable by it’s inter-changeability. Notions of ‘... Competitiveness within a ‘knowledge’ economy and (global) labour market’ (Wright, Brinkley & Clayton, 2010) and the employable graduate as ‘Future Fit’ (CBI/Universities UK, 2009) recognise perceptions of the contribution that graduates make to (inter)national economic growth and broader social and cultural development (HEFCE, 2011). This level of agreement between all stakeholders is positive in the context of recent recession and higher costs raising both concerns and the importance of employability to undergraduates (Wheeler, Austin & Glass, 2012).

From 2010 each English HEI has been required to articulate their position in relation to student employability through the provision of an ‘employability statement’ for prospective students available on both the Unistats and UCAS websites (Pegg et al., 2012). In March 2011 the CBI, working with the NUS, produced a report (CBI/NUS, 2011) which included case studies that demonstrated the importance of recognising ‘added value’ alongside the HE experience, and this was emphasised by employers seeking graduates ‘who stand out from the crowd’ (Wheeler, Austin & Glass, 2012).

Reviewing the honours classification system
The conclusion from the Burgess Group Report - the report of the scoping group looking at ‘Measuring and Recording Student Achievement’ - was that the system for classifying UK honours degrees was no longer ‘fit for purpose’ and the case for change was established (Universities UK and SCOP, 2004). Subsequent debate about what kind of system might supplement or even replace the honours classification system focused on how ‘student achievement might be recorded and communicated in a more informative way’ (QAA, 2011). The later Burgess Group Report - ‘beyond the honours degree classification’ - declared that the honours classification system was at odds with
lifelong learning and articulated an imperative to do justice to the full range of student experience by allowing a wider recognition of achievement (Universities UK and GuildHE, 2007). The report signalled the need for ‘radical reform, replacing the honours classification system with a more detailed set of information’ (Oliver, 2011). Burgess proposed that by 2010/11 the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) would be ‘the central vehicle for recording all university-level undergraduate higher education student achievement in all UK higher education institutions’ (Universities UK and GuildHE, 2007).

The HEAR

The HEAR enables a ‘richer picture’ of the student to be captured and addresses the ‘absence of a consistent cross sector record of student development and achievement...’ (Wilson, 2012). The HEAR contains a range information for both academic and ‘non-academic’ activities, skills, graduate attributes, achievements and experience ‘which the institution is prepared to verify’ (Universities UK and GuildHE, 2007). Examples of information included are; detailed module and programme/course information, Academic Prizes/Awards, Placement/WBL (Work Based Learning) information, Course/Programme Representation and aspects of delivery that contribute to outcomes and skills such as Problem Based Learning (PBL) or industrial visits. The HEAR ‘will give future employers detailed information on the skills, progress and attainment of their prospective employee’ (Wilson, 2012).

As Wilson (2012) describes, the HEAR document can be considered both formative and summative; having the ability to evolve ‘throughout the students experience at university’ and will enable students to better understand how they can capture their employer-related experience and ensure they have authentic evidence of their employability. Therefore, implementing the HEAR affords HEIs a significant opportunity to progress the employability agenda via systemising recognition of far more from the HE experience than narrowly focussed formal academic attainment.

Following the final report of the Burgess Groups (Universities UK and GuildHE, 2012) a pilot scheme for the HEAR was funded at 18 HEIs (BBC, 2008; The Higher Education Academy, 2014) including Northumbria University. The Vice President for Activities and Development, from Northumbria Student Union (SU), with representative responsibility for employability, was a key member of the relevant University group and support from senior management at the University was also necessary to ensure the University could learn from, and progress with the HEAR following the pilot scheme. An extended transcript was produced for students on programmes in Biological Sciences (n=69) and issued in October 2010. There were very positive outcomes of the HEARs which for all students included detailed programme and module specification information, a graduate attribute statement, project title and synopsis, placement/WBL information, academic prizes/awards and student
representation/peer mentoring role statements. Academic staff had consulted students and relevant employers in the lead-up to its issue and this development was very well-received, but the employer sample was small. In contrast, a survey undertaken by Southampton University (which also did not achieve a viable response rate) achieved positive feedback but indicated that employers were not sure what the benefits would be. The pilot highlighted the considerable logistical and systems based challenges associated with HEAR relevant data capture and verification and, out of the 18 HEIs which participated in HEAR pilot, only 2 relatively small and specialist institutes successfully produced the HEAR for large numbers of students (Northumbria University, 2011)

Developing a supporting pedagogy

Burgess remains a high profile champion of the HEAR as the key vehicle for measuring and recording undergraduate achievement and continues to promote the HEAR as something additional that students will receive for higher fees. The Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration also concluded that the HEAR provides 'a far greater granularity of achievement and currency than the blunt instruments of UCAS points or projected degree classification' (Wilson, 2012). Wilson (2012) also recommended that at ‘the earliest opportunity employers should use HEAR as a reference base for evaluating student achievement and skills’.

As 2012-2013 was the first academic year in which the HEAR was widely implemented across the UK HEI sector, robust research has not yet been conducted in terms of employer support; this research project therefore aimed to explore the concept of the HEAR with employers to reveal its initial impact.

This paper complements and facilitates evaluation of a BIS [Department of Business, Innovation and Skills] funded project led by the Association of Graduate Recruiters [AGR] which focused on degree classification and social mobility (Association of Graduate Recruiters, 2012). The AGR were funded in 2012 to raise awareness of the HEAR among employers and to encourage the use of the HEAR in graduate recruitment processes.

The potential impact of HEAR upon the efficiency and effectiveness of graduate recruitment is significant. However Wilson (2012) recognises that the ‘systems deployed by companies, especially the large corporate graduate recruiters, will require adaption to exploit this potential’. HEI practitioners have a role to play regarding developing the pedagogy surrounding the HEAR and it is valid that, as key stakeholders, pedagogy should be informed by employer perspective.

HEI’s also have responsibility to adapt to the HEAR, as graduate employability is a measure which features in HEI league tables and has gained further prominence with the publication of Key Information Set [KIS] data at programme level (HEFCE, 2013).
However, a clear tension exists between aspiration and reality given the range of competing priorities HEIs are currently required to engage with, not least pressure on expenditure. The HEAR report ‘Bringing it all together’ (Universities UK and GuildHE, 2012) documents some of the issues and challenges that were considered by the Burgess Group such as the ownership, technical implementation and the cost for institutions. Clear benefit for HEI (and student) investment therefore needs to be demonstrated during the initial years of the HEAR implementation. It is also important for HEIs to both work with employers and to raise awareness of the potential of the HEAR and to understand how and why employers will use the information in their decision making.

As one of the main risks to HEIs of not implementing the HEAR effectively is the employability of their graduates, the findings from the project have immediate significance and are therefore likely to influence institutional policy and practice in this ‘transitional’ period where HEIs are still learning from initial implementation and are open to evidence based recommendations.

The main aim of this paper is to determine initial employment impact that the HEAR has had. Within this research the notion of ‘employment impact’ assumes that employers have bought into the HEAR concept and will use it effectively in making recruitment decisions.

4 Methodology

A questionnaire was designed to collect employment impact data from employers. The survey was created using the ‘Survey Monkey’ software (available at URL: [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) as it has a range of tools which let users choose how to collect survey responses and also has user–friendly reporting tools. A link to the survey was sent to graduate employers and organizations of different size and focus, using pre-existing and active internal networks, including placement providers, WBL hosts/contacts and organisations funding part time students etc. and also to post-graduate course admissions tutors/supervisors. A large effort was made to personalise emailed invites to drive up response rate. A second tranche of postal surveys were sent predominantly to small employers due to underrepresentation in the initial web based data set.

The survey of 10 questions, designed using a logic tree approach to avoid respondents being asked irrelevant questions. Respondents were given access to a HEAR exemplar as part of the survey.

The survey questions are listed below:

- When did your company/ organisation last recruit graduates? (tick all that apply)
- What evidence do you require before you would consider recruiting a graduate (tick all that apply)
- Please list the FIVE most important criteria which graduate applicants must meet to be employed by your company/organisation (with 1 being the most important). This can include specific knowledge, skills, abilities, experience or personal characteristics (please be as specific as possible).
- Is there any information on graduate applicants you would ideally like to see at an earlier stage in the recruitment process?
- Are you interested in extra-curricula activities graduate applicants are involved in?
- Were you aware of the HEAR?
- Are you using HEARS to support recruitment?
- Do you think the HEAR would enhance your recruitment procedure?
- What key information would you be looking for on a HEAR?
- At what stage in the recruitment process would you want to see a HEAR?

In depth semi-structured interviews were individually conducted with five employers who provided their contact details for a follow up discussion of the HEAR. Contemporaneous notes were subsequently transcribed into NVivo (10) software and coded to aid a thematic analysis.

5 Results

5.1 Results of the web based employer survey

42 responses were initially received from the survey monkey questionnaire (although 2 were excluded from analysis as they were very incomplete), 28 from companies or organisations and 12 were returned from post-graduate education contacts at HEIs. The results presented in this paper focus on the data from the sample of companies and organisations who responded; to enable evaluation of the main aim of determining employer impact and engagement with the HEAR process. Of the employers who responded; 14 were in the field of Engineering, 5 were Food/Nutrition employers and 9 were considered as ‘General’ (where they could recruit any graduates, including STEM (e.g. council) or where the firm was unclear (e.g. recruitment specialist).

To determine the predominant routes used for graduate recruitment within the sample set employers were asked to score a selection of routes from most to least important. Table 1 indicates the recruitment routes considered to be most important or important by a number of employers. The percentage of employers (n given in brackets) is shown for those routes; the number of employers who also felt the routes were less or least important is included for comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following routes does your company/organisation use for graduate recruitment?</th>
<th>Level of importance % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment fairs</td>
<td>22 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Agencies</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Advertisements</td>
<td>20 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Advertisements</td>
<td>28 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct contact with Universities</td>
<td>32 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most prominent result is the value placed by employers on direct contact with universities and/or university staff. Other methods which were identified by employers were graduate recruitment web sites (n = 7) and the LinkedIn business oriented social network (n = 1).

Tables 2 and 3 show the likelihood of graduate recruitment by the companies and organisations who participated in the survey and the evidence that they would require for recruitment to take place. A very positive picture was painted regarding current graduate recruitment, with 66% of employers just recently having recruited, or in the process of, or aiming to recruit soon.

**Table 2. Recent/Planned Graduate Recruitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. When did your company/organisation last recruit graduates? (tick all that apply)</th>
<th>Response % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aiming to recruit in next 12 months</td>
<td>17 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in the process</td>
<td>15 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited within last 12 months</td>
<td>34 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last recruited &gt;12 months ago</td>
<td>21 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company/organisation recruits annually</td>
<td>13 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that CVs and application forms dominate the recruitment process (Table 3) demonstrates what is expected from a traditional recruitment process and highlights the general procedures and documents that the HEAR must be integrated into, in order to be effective. One very detailed reply was received regarding the importance of cover letters for assessing written communication skills and cross referencing the application with person specification/job description:

**Table 3. Evidence Required Before Recruitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. What evidence do you require before you would consider recruiting a graduate (tick all that apply)</th>
<th>Response % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>30 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>18 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application form</td>
<td>26 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychometric testing</td>
<td>11 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (cover letter; VISA/ work permit/ qualifications; assessment centers; work experience)</td>
<td>16 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most important criteria employers expect graduates to meet before they would be considered for employment are summarised in Table 4. Respondents were asked to be as specific as possible and advised this could include specific knowledge, skills, abilities, experience or personal characteristics. There was some variance in the way this question was completed, some respondents failed to give five responses and others gave more answers. The table therefore shows how each applicant criteria was rated (with 1 being most important to 5 being least). For each of the scores on
the rating scale the percentage of respondents (and number) is given e.g. four different criteria were listed at most important by varying numbers of respondents.

Table 4. Most Important Applicant Criteria

| Q. Please list the FIVE most important criteria which graduate applicants must meet to be employed by your company/organisation | Rating % (n) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Academic qualifications, including reference to academic threshold e.g. ‘2.1 or better’, ‘within top 20% in academic achievement measures’ etc. | 47 (9) | 11 (3) | 26 (5) | 19 (5) |
| Specific technical knowledge/ skills | 26 (5) | 22 (6) | 37 (7) |
| Drive/ enthusiasm/ passion/ self motivation | 16 (3) | 26 (7) | 16 (3) |
| Presentation skills | 11 (2) | 7 (2) | 26 (5) | 8 (2) |
| Relevant work experience | 22 (6) | 11 (2) | 11 (2) | 19 (5) |
| Team work/ inter personnel skills | 11 (3) | 16 (3) | 16 (3) | 27 (7) |
| Personal attributes | 11 (2) | 11 (2) | 8 (2) |
| other | 11 (2) | 11 (2) | 8 (2) |
| | 22 (4) |

Data indicates that most employers afford importance to the specific numerical value of the degree classification and for some the focus was degree class in combination with the perceived quality of the awarding institute- ‘A 2.1 or better from a good University’. The most important criteria which graduates must meet is a minimum degree award (criteria 1 AND appearing in criteria 2, 3 and 5), closely followed by specific academic and technical/ practical features of the degree programme. Others also listed things like ‘passion for…’, ‘a genuine interest in…’ ‘drive/enthusiasm’, ‘self motivation’, ‘personal attributes’, ‘likeable’ ‘will fit in with and get on with small team’, ‘committed to their own development’, ‘desire to learn and develop’. Therefore despite ‘the good degree’ dominating criteria 1 and 2, this was within a broader context of much more HEAR relevant criteria (criteria 3-5).

In depth interviews with employers illustrated that they are looking at the degree and classification as part of a graduate recruitment ‘sifting process’. Employers held mixed views on the balance of skills and knowledge they wanted evidenced in a graduate application and a HEAR. Where employers wanted to recruit on evidence of general skills and abilities they indicated that they take responsibility for the specific knowledge they require, so evidence of ability to learn is more important than what has been learned and this was reflected in perceptions of the HEAR as a “good idea to show students are well rounded”. However, the more specialist technical employers indicated that (engineering) “knowledge is paramount” and perceived the main value of the HEAR as ‘...it’s about Academic performance’ and such employers were very interested in the ability that the HEAR could provide to drill down to attainment at the level of the specific module ‘marks in individual modules is a useful feature of the HEAR’.
When asked if there is any information employers would like at an earlier stage in the recruitment process 29% said yes and listed that they would like: ‘Predicted Degree Class’, ‘Career Aspirations’, ‘Course Content’, ‘Eligibility To Work In UK’ and ‘Work Experience’. Again, this demonstrates the strong focus on the traditional expectation for a good degree is still prominent with many employers, but this is considered along with other HEAR relevant criteria such as work experience and communication skills.

46% of respondents answered yes to the question “Are you interested in extra-curricula activities graduate applicants are involved in?” and responses could be categorised into employers who agreed that they were interested in activities which showed team-working, taking responsibility, leading, and 'going the extra mile' as these are likely to be associated with people who are the most personable, self- motivated and self- reliant’ (suggesting that an applicant who has ‘gone the extra mile’ whilst at university, was more likely to repeat this once employed). In contrast other employers were interested in what the student had done at university that was relevant to their specific application (a more business focussed level of scrutiny), such as relevant work experience: ‘We normally look for individuals who have utilised their time at University well, and have supplemented their studies with appropriate work experience or have undertaken activities such as voluntary or charitable work that have developed their interpersonal skills and knowledge of business activities’.

The additional significance of extra curricular activities undertaken by applicants lacking work experience was also highlighted ‘... but if graduates have a lack of work experience, then any extra-curricula activities become more important to help judge a graduates background, interests, work ethic etc.’.

When asked the question “Were you aware of the HEAR?” only one (4%) employer answered yes. Further, the HEAR was not currently being used by any (0%) of the respondents to support recruitment; One respondent did qualify their answer with the statement that ‘...last recruitment predated the HEAR’. This data indicates that, overall, the sample of employers surveyed cannot be described as well aware of the HEAR.

On a more positive note, 64% of companies/organisations indicated that they thought the HEAR would enhance their recruitment procedure as the HEAR was considered to offer: ‘Useful & relevant information not normally covered in CV/application form’, and that it could ‘give us a better idea of the candidates strengths [sic] and weaknesses [sic] of the units studied’, or it could allow companies to ‘pick the most relevant [sic].’ In summary one employer stated ‘Any information that helps us to identify the talent that we seek, through the recruitment process, or before, would have potential to be very useful for us’. Some employers had unrealistic ideas regarding information that could be included on a HEAR ‘for completeness, I think .... 'Placement/Work Experience' could include more
Of the 46% of employers who indicated that they did not think that the HEAR would be useful, one qualified the fact that they wouldn’t use it with the statement ‘Although admittedly I don’t know enough about it’, two qualified by saying they were restricted to the use of NHS jobs for all recruitment; one stated that although it seemed good, they were unsure that the web based nature of information was compliant with company data protection policy and would increase workload for admin/HR in preparation for shortlisting/ interview panel.

This data reinforces the general conclusions of the institutional HEAR pilot; most employers were broadly positive about the potential impact of University accredited information which was not normally collected via CV/application form in a good level of detail on their recruitment processes. The information that employers indicated that they would value on a HEAR consists of a mix of data that is relatively straightforward to include (such as detailed module and programme information) and data that remains highly challenging and logistically complex to capture and verify, such as individual project/dissertation information, specific details of WBL/placement experience etc.

The one employer who had heard about the HEAR had given its use in context some consideration and made reference to looking at the HEAR from the start of the academic journey on an applicant to determine evidence of personal development: ‘I would like to see the HEAR document at the end of each year, but especially at the start of the process (year 1)....’.

When considering the timing of the HEAR, 86% felt they would like to see the HEAR from the outset of the recruitment process and 14% felt they would want it at the selection stage for interview. There was a general consensus amongst interviewees about the main use of the HEAR being at the first interview after graduation, ‘the HEAR is a one-off.......but 18 months later what credence would it have?’ Some interviewees expressed concern surrounding the timing of HEAR being out of step with their recruitment activity (the recruitment cycles of employers who expressed concern closed from March-May); The HEAR ‘...would be handy in advance to compare applications early’ and ‘it could be a fantastic tool ..... if we had it at application stage’ so, ‘it is useless where it is at the
moment’ ie. accessible after graduation and that ‘If the HEAR wasn’t available it wouldn’t be the be all and end all’. Two interviewees did not express such concern and indicated that their recruitment goes alongside ‘peaks and troughs in workload’ and there was no one time in the year when they recruited additional concerns articulated by interviewees focussed on the HEAR containing ‘lots of information that was irrelevant’; ‘Doesn’t bother me if they’ve been on the student council... not a great believer in the hobbies section in a CV’ including non-academic experiences ‘this would not be considered if hiring a graduate’. The online nature of the HEAR was perceived as problematic by some employers, and others moderated their initial enthusiasm and qualified initial ideas about use of the HEAR from the outset of recruitment to applicant(s) ‘in the mix already and reached final stage..., could go to the trouble to log in, a worthy use of 5 minutes’; ‘If its online, then only if we couldn’t separate 3 applicants then we may go to the HEAR for module information’.

A main interest expressed by interviewees related to the additional detail of programme and module content it would make available which would reduce the time spent trying to find module level information eg. on university web sites - ‘which is possible for some... and not for others’ the availability of a programme specification and module descriptors was seen as being desired- ‘might mean a bit more transparency’ in the recruitment process and that the HEAR would ‘support interview questions e.g. why was that your best module, why did you choose that dissertation topic?’

A consensus surrounding the value of industrial placement and project/dissertation to the selection process also emerged amongst interviewees, as students who had discipline specific work experience were perceived as ‘more alive to the problems’ of companies and ‘different to those with work experience from bars... where they have developed team work skills. Both... have a very different outlook to those without any work experience’ and ‘Particular attention is given to any industrial placement and project/dissertation work done as an individual, so if this were available on a HEAR at intermediate stages, so including a placement and level 6 results for MEng students, it would be of high value...’ to the selection process.

6 Conclusions
This research has evaluated the feedback from a sample of employers drawn from companies and organisations of different size and focus and obtained through an online survey.
Results demonstrate that within the sample there is broad and positive support for the concept of the HEAR, but is very little/no current knowledge or use of the HEAR and suggests that the information about the HEAR being disseminated by AGR has not had significant impact on employers, to date.

‘At least a 2.1’ is considered to be one of the most important criteria for recruiting graduates, but this is set within a broader context of far more HEAR relevant criteria, highlighting real scope for the HEAR to make a significant and positive impact on employer recruitment processes.

These data highlight a real tension between employability aspirations and rhetoric of HEIs in the general context of severe pressure on expenditure and competing priorities, especially for very large and complex institutes. For example, the inclusion of individual information that is logistically challenging to capture and verify was identified as valuable by employers, but how much of a priority the collection of such data can be given remains unresolved in this initial phase of HEAR implementation.

Evaluation of this initial data set highlights an evidence base from employers which support continued implementation of the HEAR and the scope it has to make a positive impact on graduate recruitment processes. The data places emphasis on the development of best practice to enhance student engagement with the principles underpinning the HEAR and both institutions and practitioners have a role to play in the continued development of a supporting pedagogy. Relevant activity includes support of WBL, placements, volunteering and project/dissertation.

An implicit impact of the collaborative nature of this paper is that knowledge of the HEAR has been obtained by academics in different disciplines. This knowledge will subsequently inform the career planning and lifelong learning conversations and teaching activities the staff conduct, allowing them to emphasise the relevance of student actions.

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Exploring barriers to the uptake of international work placements

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Keywords
International Placements, Global Mindset, Barriers

Abstract
Having facilitated a European Regional Development funded International work placement opportunity for students this academic year - Graduate and Apprenticeship Placement Scheme (GAPS), the University was surprised at the limited take up of students applying for the Cross Border programme. This paper explores the barriers students may experience when considering an international work placement. The initial quantitative research engaged with students who were considering a work placement in the year ahead and also those students who had either completed or opted out of a work placement opportunity this current academic year. With all students having the opportunity to carry out a work placement abroad, the research approach focused on exploring what got in the way for those who did not embrace this opportunity. Further qualitative research enabled those who had been or were preparing to go on work placements abroad to share their insights. Additionally those who had opted to have nationally based placements were able to share thoughts around the subject. Results indicate seven areas of concern for students which merit particular attention and the paper concludes with some initial suggestions for practical interventions.

Background
When considering the context of work placements in the curriculum, there appears to be an emerging consensus both in research and policy that reveals the important positive connection between higher education students gaining work experience and their graduate employment outcomes. The Wilson Review (2012, p.40) states that “Ideally, every full-time undergraduate student should have the opportunity to experience a structured university-approved undergraduate internship during their period of study.”
Added to this is the demand from employers that graduates also are able to demonstrate a ‘global mindset’ (Osland, et al. 2006). Bone (2009) states “The importance of future graduates being at ease with different cultures.”

With the establishment of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 (Bologna Process 1999), their objectives are firmly grounded to support a vision that “In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad”. UK HEIs are encouraged to achieve this by ensuring the quality of their international programmes and subsequent mobility. Foot (2009) further argued “It will require long-term collaboration between UK and European HEIs, the managed expansion of internships and work placements, and a strategic approach – otherwise UK graduates will lose out to those from elsewhere.”

As global competition continues to intensify, global mindset has emerged as a key source of long-term competitive advantage in the global marketplace (Levy et al., 2007). To consider what this requires from an employability skill-set perspective, managerial complexity is required with senior managers in multinational companies (MNCs) finding a balance between competing country, business, and functional concerns (Evans and Doz, 1993; Murtha et al., 1998). Bartlett and Ghoshal (1990), further argue, “Senior managers need to integrate and coordinate geographically dispersed operations and a culturally diverse workforce”.

Terms such as ‘global mindset’ (Rhinesmith, 1992), ‘transnational mentality’ (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989), and ‘multinational mindset’ (Caproni et al., 1992) have gained increasing cachet in both the academic and popular presses in recent years (Levy et al., 2007). Doz and Prahalad (1991) states “managers who have developed a global mindset are better equipped to deal with the complexity wrought by multiple organisational environments, structural indeterminacy, and cultural heterogeneity – all of which characterise contemporary multinational companies”.

Human capital theory (Becker 1964) predicts that international experience has positive long-term effects on objective career success if the outcome in terms of new knowledge and skills is superior to domestic work experience and would therefore pay off in subsequent positions (Bolino 2007; Benson and Pattie 2008). Biemann and Braakmann (2013), argue “from a human capital perspective, international experience increases the value of a person’s knowledge and skills on the labour market, which in turn, increases their objective career success, as they will be rewarded with higher wages in their subsequent career”. Hall (2001) suggests “a cyclical model in which career success enhances a person’s level of self-esteem and increases involvement in that area of career work, which in turn, positively affects objective career success, thereby creating a success cycle that links successful career outcomes”.

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Northumbria University, City Campus, 2nd – 4th September 2014
Black et al, (1999), (cited in Konapaske et al, 1999) further endorsed managers taking up an international assignment as the single most powerful experience in shaping the perspective and capabilities of effective leaders. However the researchers also acknowledged emerging evidence that some MNC’s are challenged by an unwillingness from internal employees to accept traditional multi-year international assignments. Individual (adventurousness and destination country), family (elderly, children at home, community involvement), their partners willingness to relocate, organisational (rewards/benefits) factors often played a part in influencing managerial willingness to accept assignments abroad.

With such a compelling case for the benefits of international work placement on employability, the University embarked on a Partnership arrangement with Wessex Enterprise Ltd., to facilitate the GAPS scheme. This provided four fully EU funded student places across France and The Netherlands. The limited uptake in this programme with only four students expressing interest for the four places to work abroad has sparked this research opportunity for the researcher to learn more about the barriers to students working internationally. The cohort participating in this study comprised of 200 level four/five students. To meet the European Higher Education Area target of 20% of students on international placements by 2020, it would require an increase to approximately 40 students on international placements.

**Methodology**

The researchers identified five areas to explore by questionnaire. These originated from experience and practice as educators and covered:

- Personal Circumstances
- Confidence
- Skills
- The nature of the opportunity
- The perceived value of the experience

A number of statements were devised which mapped onto these five key areas. Also at the end of the questionnaire a free text box invited participants to express any reason which the researcher may have overlooked. Including the free text box twenty items were designed along with questions establishing gender, age and nature of experience of work placements. An online questionnaire was then devised with the twenty items as statements to which the participant was required to select one of five choices:

1. strongly agree
2. agree
3. neither agree nor disagree
4. disagree
5. strongly disagree

Sample group:
Level 5 students from one Business School course “BA (Hons) Business Management” were selected as they had recently had the opportunity to either:

Undertake a UK based 13 week placement
Undertake an international 13 week placement
Undertake an alternative assessed project

The questionnaire was sent out by email to approximately 200 students. 14 responses were received of which one was an incomplete record. The sample for the study was therefore thirteen (N=13) students of which:

Three (N=3) had been on an international placement,
Ten (N=10) had not been on an international placement

Responses were analysed with a particular interest in items over which the two groups had opposing response patterns.

A focus group group (N=4) was also held with the purpose of exploring more deeply some of the issues raised by the questionnaire. Of the attendees two (N=2) had been on an international placement and two (N=2) had been on UK based placements.

Results
The graph below shows the comparison results of the two sample groups. The agree-disagree responses have been converted to positive and negative scores with negative scores representing disagreement with the statement and positive score representing agreement.
It can be seen that there are five of the statements in which the two groups diverge, with one group generally agreeing and the other group generally disagreeing.

These are:

**Q2 “I have home based work Commitments that I don’t want to give up on, as these help fund my studies”**
Those with no international experience slightly agreed with this statement (mean rating = 0.1) and those with international experience disagreed (mean rating = -1.0) implying that those who did on an international placement did not see home based work commitments as a barrier.

**Q9 “I have sufficient language skills to consider an international placement”**
Those with no international experience neither agreed nor disagreed, but participants who did have an international experience agreed (mean rating = 0.66). This implies that those who did have an international placement felt confident with their language skills.
Q12 “I am aware of many overseas placement opportunities”
Those with no international experience tended to disagree with this statement (mean rating = -0.9) where those with international experience tended to agree (mean rating = 1.33) implying that those who did travel easily found international opportunities.

Q14 “I would only consider going to an English speaking country”
Those with no international experience tended to slightly agree with this statement (mean rating = 0.2) whereas those who did have international experience disagreed (mean rating -1.33) implying that those who travelled did not restrict themselves to English speaking countries.

Q15 “I would be more likely to be interested in a high profile destination”
Those who did have international experience neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement whereas those who had no international experience tended to slightly agree (mean rating = 0.33) implying that the profile of the destination did not play an important role for those who did have international experience.

Issues in which both groups agreed, but to differing degrees:
The following three items are topics which both groups tended either to agree on. However there was a difference of intensity of agreement (the mean scores differed by 1.0 or more)

Q4 “The thought of working/living abroad is daunting for me”
Those who did an international placement tended to disagree more strongly than those who did not have an international experience (mean rating -1.66 vs mean rating -0.6). This implies that those who did chose one felt less daunted.

Q10 “I understand international business cultures”
Similar to the responses to Q7 those who had not been away expressed more confidence in understanding international business culture, again indicating that this was not featuring as a barrier to this sample group (mean rating 0.3 vs 1.33).

Q16 “I believe that employers would be more likely to employ me with some international experience”
Again those who went abroad for their placements were more convinced of the value. (mean rating 0.7 vs 2.0)
Results from the focus group:
The seven themes arising from the seven significant questions were then explored within the focus group.

Theme 1 – Having a part time job
Although the questionnaire showed a difference in attitude between those who had been on an international placement and those who had not, all participants agreed that they would prioritise a placement over a part time job when pushed. However they all had flexible employers who worked around their placement. They were also all confident that they could find another part time job when they got back from their placement if they had had to give one up to go.

Theme 2 – Sufficient Language Skills
Both participants who had travelled abroad saw it as an interesting challenge. One ‘loved to learn languages’ the other found that whilst his language skills were not strong he was popular with local employees he met on his international placement who wished to try out their English language skills. The two who took UK placements felt they had insufficient language skills.

Theme 3 – Awareness of opportunities
Again, despite the divergence of opinion in the questionnaire the group did not express difficulty in finding international opportunities. One participant who stayed in the UK said there were “so many opportunities on the internet it was overwhelming”.

Theme 4 – English speaking countries
This discussion confirmed the findings of the questionnaire. The two participants who did travel abroad “Would choose a non-English speaking country over an English speaking one for the challenge”. The two who stayed in the UK thought that language would be problematic when “dealing with situations”.

Theme 5- Perceived importance of destination country
The small differences in score in the questionnaire were reflected in the discussion which shed light on the complexity of this issue. Participants suggested that rather than general country profile it was the significance of the country for the individual’s future. One participant gave the example that both America and China are high profile, but that she chose China as more useful for her own career goals. Participants also took into account their own travel ambitions, and would be tempted by a country which is on their ‘travel list’ even if not important from a career perspective.
Theme 6 – Being daunted
All participants agreed that it was daunting, again reflecting the finding of the questionnaire. In particular participants discussed logistics and travel arrangements. One participant suggested “it would be helpful if someone could talk you through it all” and another who did take up an international placement said that most daunting was “knowing how to get around “and logistics. Both participants who did go abroad did so with other students and had arrangements made for them and a mentor to talk to when they arrived. One participant also pointed out that it’s also daunting for the parents – they like to be reassured that someone will be looking after you when you are there.

Theme 7 – International Business Cultures
In the questionnaire it was the group who did not travel abroad that expressed most confidence in understanding international business cultures. Both group participants who had taken an international placement shared stories of unexpected cultural challenges such as the ‘hand-shaking culture’ of French business.

Theme 8 – Will employers value it
All participants thought that an employer would value international work experience because it shows:
You can take a risk
You can work with other cultures and languages
You are more independent
You have gone out of your way
You gain skills and meet’ loads of new people’
You can say that you have local contacts and local knowledge

Discussion
Methodological considerations:
The numbers of participants in both the questionnaire sample and the focus group were very small (N=13 and N=4 respectively). The small numbers meant that results do not have statistical significance, rather they represent response patterns which may indicate potential areas of concern. Furthermore about half of the survey respondents had already taken up a placement opportunity either in the UK or abroad. Of the 13 questionnaire respondents seven had already completed a placement. This raises the question of whether the attitudes being expressed by some of the participants were influenced by having had the placement experience. For example the students
who had been on an international placement expressed higher concern about their personal safety and were also more modest about their understanding of international business cultures than those who had not had an international placement. This seemingly anomalous finding suggests that responses were informed by the experience of travelling abroad.

In order to avoid responses which are informed by placement experiences it would be necessary to survey only students in advance of their taking up a placement. If this were to be undertaken a more accurate picture of how pre-placements beliefs and attitudes influence the decision to go abroad could be gauged.

**General findings:**

Bearing the limitations outlined (above) there emerges a profile of students who took up an international placement as not worried about their part time jobs and confident that they could either negotiate with their employer or find another job on return. They may or may not have language skills but either way saw language as an exciting challenge and were not shy of going to non-English speaking countries. They were aware of the opportunities available to them and made nuanced choices based on their own career goals. They very much valued having the logistical support, accommodation arrangements, and peer support available to them and strongly believed that employers valued the international experience they were gaining.

**Comparison with other studies**

The EHEA study (EHEA 1999) also lists reasons for students not taking up international placements which include:

“Students perceive the mobility experience as more costly, particularly since many now need part-time employment to help fund their study”

“Widening access means that increasing numbers of students do not have the social or cultural support and encouragement to undertake mobility. For them leaving the support of home, friends and their HEI is perceived to be threatening”

“Many students lack skills in another language and this is presented as a reason for not taking advantage of the opportunities for mobility”

“Concern at the possible impact on their final qualification, if the credits from the host institution are not recognised or if they are awarded low grades, or if they fail is another suggested reason.”
The first three findings coincide closely with the findings of this study. The concern about impact on future grades was not mentioned by Solent students. Research undertaken by Driffield et al. (2011) confounds this last point demonstrating that a placement will raise a final degree classification.

A related study on the mobility and willingness of international managers from MNCs to undertake international assignments also mentions profile of the destination country (Komopaske e.t. a.l 2009). A strong consideration in this study was also family commitments which may be indicative of life stage.

Table 1 (below) brings together the findings of the three studies by listing the potential barriers identified by this study and illustrating where they are also identified in the EHEA and MNC studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>This Study</th>
<th>EHEA</th>
<th>MNC managers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part time work constraints</td>
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<td>Language skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness of opportunities</td>
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<td>Preference for English speaking countries</td>
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<td>Profile of destination country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being daunted</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Business Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valued by Employers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Occurrence of themes in other related studies.*

**Practical implications**

In order to meet the EHEA published target (Leuven Communiqué, 2009) that 20% of European undergraduate students will be taking an international placement by 2020, the researchers realise that a large increase in uptake of international placement opportunities will be required. The following are suggested as practical actions that might be taken within the researcher’s own institution and are informed by the research findings in this paper.

- Target the most likely students. A survey could now be designed to test student’s attitudes towards the key factors established by the research in this paper. Such a survey could help identify students most likely to be interested or willing to undertake an international placement.
• Promote early. Lack of awareness of opportunities would suggest that the possibility of international placements would need to be raised at a much earlier stage, potentially towards the end of the first year of study and endorsed again at the beginning of the second year of study.

• Identify Highly Structured opportunities. As all students expressed that arranging logistics and accommodation along with travelling alone presented a large barrier it is better to promote a small number of highly structured opportunities such as GAPS, Erasmus+, CCRC Asia to name a few.

• Include opportunities in English Speaking countries. This might include Scandinavian countries as well as ex-commonwealth countries.

• Use international peer leaders. Building on an existing peer leading programme, recruit level 6 students who have been on an international placement to encourage and support other students.

• Encourage students to talk to their employer. Having the confidence to approach their part-time work employer to ask for a study break may be something that students did not consider yet which employers appear to have been willing to support.

With these initiatives in place, the researchers feel confident a higher volume of placements would be achieved in the international arena and subsequently support higher levels of employability for their institutions graduates.
References


Preparing for placement and shaping ‘Brand Me’ - The importance of being a professional digital citizen and managing your online digital footprint

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Key words
Social Media; Digital Footprint; Personal Branding; Brand Me; Placement; Professional Digital Citizen

Abstract
The data presented in this study was collected as part of an integrated communication programme which specifically created resources with the main objective to help students make good judgements around their online presence and provide a positive approach on how social media and managing their online digital footprint can be used to professional advantage in developing a ‘Brand Me’. The use of social media is becoming an integral part of personal branding and where employers increasingly view an online digital footprint as part of the selection process.

The majority of undergraduate courses at Harper Adams University include a compulsory year-long industrial placement period and where many students will use social media as part of their social life and also in their role during placement.

In order to keep abreast of the importance of social media in the workplace and career management, resources were developed to encourage students to be professional in their use of social media as a means of communication - in effect to be a professional citizen, and to raise the awareness of the part it plays in personal branding for students both pre-placement and post-placement. Whilst this work is still evolving, it is hoped that it would lead to a decline in the incidences of poor professional online digital practice occurring before and during placement.

In order to measure the impact of these resources, a pre-test questionnaire was carried out with a group of almost 300 students preparing for placement to determine their use of social media and management of their digital online footprint. Following the presentation of resources, a post-test questionnaire was conducted to the same group of students to identify if they would use social media tools in a more professional way in the future. A similar method was used with a group of
final year students to compare if their use and attitudes towards social media were different post placement and whether they had any advice to give to students pre-placement.

The pre and post-test questionnaires provided a useful insight on the impact of the resources created and social media tools used. Whilst a full set of result data is provided in the paper, the integrated communication programme of resources appeared to have positively raised the awareness and level of understanding of the term ‘digital footprint’, the benefits of using social media to build a professional profile and impact on personal branding, and how inappropriate use could affect their career. Indeed, as part of the process for preparing students for placement and the world of work, these materials have led to over two thirds of the respondents saying that their approach to using social media will change in the future.

**Introduction**

The internet and use of social media is becoming an integral part of personal branding and where employers increasingly view an online digital footprint as part of recruitment and in the selection process. The majority of undergraduate courses at Harper Adams University include a compulsory year-long industrial placement period and where many students will use social media as part of their social life and also in their role during placement. The integral industrial placement year is a unique feature of the courses provided at Harper Adams University and is believed to have a positive impact on the final year degree mark classification and employability.

The data presented in this paper was collected as part of an integrated communication programme which specifically created resources with the main objective to help students make good judgements around their online presence and provide a positive approach on how social media and managing their online digital footprint can be used to professional advantage in developing a ‘Brand Me’.

The main aim is to encourage students to be professional in their use of social media as a means of communication - in effect to be a professional citizen. In particular, students are reminded by Placement Managers in preparation of placement to be careful when using Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media and to manage their digital footprint. Instances of poor professional behaviour in the use of social media has been seen both pre-placement and during placement which has in some instances affected the progress of the student. Instead of the Placement Managers and Placement Office constantly issuing reminders to students ‘be careful…’, it was felt pertinent to develop materials which could be used to guide students on how to be a professional digital citizen and embrace some of the positive aspects of this form of communication as part of their career
development. This report will focus on the preparation of students pre-placement, to begin, however, it is useful to consider what is meant by the concept of social media and its role in ‘shaping brand-me’.

Social media and shaping ‘brand-me’

Brands manage to create a collective understanding and communicate the expected benefits clearly and concisely, in effect a ‘promise’ and it follows that people can be thought of as brands too. We can think about job searching and career management as being about sales and the product on offer is the person – each with very unique qualities. Self-promotion is a crucial element to the success of getting the job one wants and Wust (2014) suggests that to convince others of your competences and strengths requires a clear cut profile and attractive personal brand. Everything we do sends a signal, how we appear, speak and dress, how we behave, the contacts made and how we approach and deal with people, and in self-branding, these many individual elements will come together to shape an image. A personal brand is how the world perceives an individual and having a consistent offering, showing the personal brand elements and a cluster of functional and emotional values is part of the brand ‘promise’ (de Chernatony et al 2013). Some of the communicated identity may be derived from ‘non-controllable’ communications (Jobber, 2013) and may influence the conceived identity and perceptions of others. There are many windows through which an individual can be viewed, (CV’s, interviews, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In) and with the blurring of lines between personal and professional use it is important for the student to be consistent in shaping their personal brand to avoid the focus by others being made on the unimportant.

A survey undertaken by YouGov (2014) looking at social media in the workplace and career progression showed that social media was mainly used in the work place for keeping up to date with news, keeping in touch with people outside the organisation and in building a professional network and with almost three-quarters of the respondents indicating that they have separate personal use of social media from professional use. Linked-In was the favoured social media website used to look for a job followed by Facebook. Searching candidates on the internet to dig up ‘digital dirt’ is also a way of business for many recruiters (Rutledge, 2008) in the selection process although not everyone agrees with the activity and claim that it is an invasion of privacy. A ‘digital shadow’ may be created without the person being aware. Conversations in social media communities are happening whether a student is engaged with social media or not and others’ personal ethics can influence and affect a brand (Evans, 2010) as, without any counter involvement, members of a community can only judge by what other members post. This emphasises the need to take responsibility in shaping the information available.
Background to the study and results
In order to keep abreast of the importance of social media in the workplace and career management, resources were developed to encourage students to be professional in their use of social media as a means of communication - in effect to be a professional citizen, and to raise the awareness of the part it plays in personal branding for students both pre-placement and post-placement. Whilst this work is still evolving, it is hoped that it would lead to a decline in the incidences of poor professional online digital practice occurring before and during placement.

A ‘Managing Social Media’ learning site was created on the Learning Hub at the university which would hold materials created and enable it to be accessed by both staff and students. An integrated communication programme was developed which specifically created resources and attempted to progressively highlight some of the positive aspects of using social media tools. It sought to provide a positive approach on how social media and digital footprint can be used to a professional advantage and see it as a personal strategy in shaping ‘brand me’ rather than from a policy or disciplinary focus.

Materials were created in the form of a short video to provide an overview as to why it is important to think about a digital footprint in general terms; a power-point with voice over using examples to explore what happens when you don’t think about a digital footprint and provide real-life student examples and the impact on their professional career path; a power-point with voiceover showing top tips on managing social media; materials offering advice on personal strategies for managing an online presence; a home for a selection of collated materials already available; videoed case studies capturing information from final year students in the form of 4/5 mini case studies showing their experiences on managing social media as part of their role on placement and career development; and a self-assessment quiz to be used before placement.

Methodology
The key objective of the programme is to create resources to help students make good judgements around their online presence and measure the impact this has made to their use of social media. In order to measure the impact of these resources, a quantitative pre-test questionnaire was carried out with a group of almost 300 students preparing for placement to determine their use of social media and management of their digital online footprint. The materials were then shown to the students by course specific Placement Managers as part of the preparing for placement briefing sessions. Following the presentation of resources, a quantitative post-test questionnaire was conducted to the same group of students to measure the impact of the usefulness of the resources and to students to identify if they will now use social media tools in a more professional way as a
result of viewing the materials. A similar method was used with a group of final year students to compare if their use and attitudes towards social media were different post placement and whether they had any advice to give to students pre-placement.

The results shown in this paper are from 294 students surveyed who were preparing to go on a year-long placement starting in July 2014 and are across several cohorts and courses such as Agriculture, Agribusiness, Agri-food, Food, Animal welfare, Vet Nursing, and Countryside and Wildlife.

The use of social media by students at present
A review of the various social media tools and sites used by students and how they were used was undertaken. Results showed that Facebook was used by 97.3% of the students and used daily by 90% of the students. The main use was for personal/social and leisure use with friends although over a quarter used it to follow businesses and 9% used it for professional work activities. Four students had separate personal and business accounts.

The next two popular social media tools used were Twitter which was used by 49% of the students with 24% using it daily, mainly for personal and leisure use (although 18% used Twitter to follow businesses and 6 students had separate personal and business accounts). Instagram was used by 37.5% of the students with 22.3% using it daily and mainly for personal leisure use with friends. Other social media tools were mentioned but of minor importance. LinkedIn was used by only 8.8% of the students in the survey. Uploading photographs and videos of oneself and also friends was undertaken by 85% of the students, with 25% uploading photographs of the workplace.

Questions relating to the importance of a set of attributes when using social media tools was asked on a five point scale where 1 = Not very important and 5 = Very important. A mean score for each factor was calculated and ranked in order of importance, where scores nearer 5 are seen to be of more importance and shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Factors of importance when using social media
(Showing mean values where 5 = Very important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate/socialise with friends</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share photos</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create/ attend events</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow businesses</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing opinions</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from the data in Table 1, communicating and socialising with friends is seen to be of most importance and focus for the students. Using social media to assist with job hunting, sharing opinions, following businesses and market research was on lesser importance.

### Review of security settings

The survey reviewed current practice with regards to security or privacy settings and showed that 73% of students had recently reviewed the security or privacy settings (conversely, 27% had not reviewed security settings).

When asked what best describes how they manage their privacy settings, 8% said they did not really worry about privacy settings at all, whilst 48% had concerns about privacy and 43% were very concerned about privacy settings (two students said they were so concerned that they did not use social media). In the main, the majority of students have some level of concern about privacy settings and when asked if there were any particular aspects they were concerned about, the following concerns were raised:

- ‘Inappropriate pictures/posts and people uploading photos of me (4)’
- ‘Who, other than friends, can see my profile and account (4)’
- ‘Prospective employers accessing photos (3)’
- ‘Information where I live’ and that ‘It’s not always easy to find these settings!’

It was on the final point where the students expressed that it was not always easy to find these settings that extra support was made by the University to assist students with managing their privacy settings.

### Understanding of the term online digital footprint

Whilst the phrase ‘online digital footprint’ is relatively new, the survey sought to ascertain the student understanding of this term and consequently if it had any impact on how it may influence their use of social media. The list below is ordered in the number of similar statements given by the respondents of their understanding of the term ‘online digital footprint’ and their responses are shown to the question “What is your understanding of the term 'online digital footprint'?” (n= base numbers shown in brackets):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To have separate personal and business accounts</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help with job hunting</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market research</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding accommodation</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow celebrities</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do not know / No idea (83)
Online data trail/ traceability of any activity you undertake online that people can follow and see past and present (67)
Everything we upload/write online stays there forever and can be traced back (42)
What you post online reflects you, the information/impression you leave about yourself on the internet and with your social media profiles and how you are viewed, people’s perception of you (28)
What can be seen of you by others online (24)
History of what you have done through photos, profiles and comments etc. (19)
The photos and personal information you write remain on the internet forever (19)

The responses showed that 28% surveyed had no idea what was meant by the term ‘online digital footprint’ while the remaining students offered explanations connected with it being a ‘data trail/traceability’ which stays ‘forever’ that it is a ‘history’ and that it ‘reflects you and peoples’ perception of you’.

Interesting singular comments were also made which are noteworthy and describe the term online digital footprint as being ‘it is like the carbon footprint - people care but you can’t get rid of it’ and also that it is ‘similar to or same as a reputation’; and finally it was described as ‘Using the web to create a strategy for networking’.

Post Survey – Views and action to be taken by students
The students were familiarised with the materials developed in regard to be a professional digital citizen, and having seen these materials it was pertinent to seek the views of students and whether it would influence their use of social media in the future and its impact on them.

Students were asked to comment on whether there was anything they would change or take action on in the way they may use social media from now on. The survey showed that almost a third of the students indicated that they would not change what they are doing now as they were already taking due care, however, over two thirds (67.4%) said they would be taking action on how they use social media from now on having seen the presentation and materials. The action the respondents indicated they would be taking is shown below (n= base number shown in brackets):

- Review, check and change my privacy settings (143)
- Check through photos/videos to check appropriateness (32)
- I already have set tight privacy settings and will do nothing (25)
- Be more careful and untag myself from bad pictures (16)
- Checking what other people can see on the internet and my profile online which includes checking status and picture profiles and tweets, what I have ‘liked’, language, spelling and grammar (16)
- Think about what I am posting /writing (11)
- Manage and check who I am friends with and followers (9) (I will not add my boss or colleagues on Facebook)
- Be aware of what I say about placement/work related issues/ask employers permission before uploading pictures from the workplace (9)
- Create a business/professional account for myself/two accounts (5)
- Build on my professional profile/going onto LinkedIn, follow twitter Agri-talks (5)
- Check my Facebook profile for anything that would not set a good impression for an employer (2)

What is pleasing to note is that the materials presented prompted the students to recognise areas themselves for where they needed to review and check moving forward; some mentioned that they would seek to ‘change their conduct when using Facebook’, and another commented that they were going to do a ‘full scale lock down’.

In addition, the survey included a set of questions which were asked in order to gather data relating to the student perceptions and attitudes to social media. A standard five point Likert Scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree was used. The overall responses are shown in Figure 1 with over 65% strongly in agreement that they are aware how inappropriate use of social media could affect their career.

![Figure 1. Social Media and Me](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This presentation has been useful to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely considered the consequences when using social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A regular self-search on my online presence is useful to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see the benefit of using social media to build my professional profile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware how inappropriate use of social media could affect my career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware how important it is to manage my online digital footprint</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may need to change my privacy settings when using social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My approach to using social media will change in light of the presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This type of data may be further analysed by the use of a ‘balance of opinions’ approach which seeks to measure the strength of opinion towards the various statements. This method has the advantage of trading-off agree and disagree data, and also removes the impact of the “don’t know” responses in order to determine a net strength of opinion value. A more detailed explanation of the approach can be found in Walley et al (2009). Table 2 shows the strength of opinion to the statements presented and the higher the percentage, the more the responses are in agreement with the statement.

### Table 2 The use of social media in career development (balance of opinion).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance of Opinion</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am aware how inappropriate use of social media could affect my career</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware how important it is to manage my online digital footprint</td>
<td>89.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see the benefit of using social media to build my professional profile</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A regular self-search on my online presence is useful to do.</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This presentation has been useful to me</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My approach to using social media will change in light of the presentation</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may need to change my privacy settings when using social media.</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely considered the consequences when using social media</td>
<td>-20.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent from Table 2 that students are in agreement that they are very aware how inappropriate use of social media could affect their career and how important it is to manage the online digital footprint (despite some not sure what the term meant at the start of the programme and evidence of inappropriate materials shown online). In connection with this, there was strong disagreement with the last statement ‘I rarely considered the consequences when using social media’ scoring a negative -20.4%.

It was positive to note that the presentation was useful for two thirds of the students and whilst disagreement was shown in the last statement the materials developed has prompted a significant number of students to change their approach when using social media in the future.

**Top Tips when using social media**

Students were asked to suggest their top three tips when using social media and the list shown in Table 3 shows the most frequently suggested top tips that could be offered to students when using social media.
Table 3 Students’ Top Three Tips when using social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Always check privacy settings and who you are ‘friends’ with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Be careful what you write</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Don’t post anything negative, offensive, inappropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Think about what you are uploading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Google yourself to see what others can view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Manage friends, and what you ‘tag’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Have professional and personal accounts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Don’t post anything about your work, placement, role or other colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Use the social media sites as an extension of your CV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Choose who you are linked with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top tips offered by the student body were broadly grouped into personal and professional advice and will be used by the Placement Managers in the future to subsequent students preparing for placement.

Moving Forward
What has been clear from some of the experiences of Placement Managers at Harper Adams is that we need to find ways to support the students in raising their awareness of the professional and personal social media overlap. It is tempting for educational institutions to develop policies to manage this overlap, but what may be seen more positive is to create a positive supportive strategy in helping students to be a more professional digital citizen. The popularity of Facebook and other mediums have risen through the culture of the personal/social and leisure aspect of young people’s lives – often creating a deep online digital footprint before the student even enters the university. The students have been used to freely sharing photographs, making comments on Facebook and Twitter without regard of consequences or confusion about the extent to which the information is private. This culture change of freedom, to one of being cautious and its impact on their careers, is a different cultural dimension which needs managing sensitively and positively.

The way in which social media tools can be useful in building ‘Brand-me’ may not be a conscious decision for many students. However with support, and with a carefully thought out strategy and consideration given on whose attention is being sought, what sites to use, who has access to the pages, then the use of blogs, networking and a selection of social media tools may be of enormous value and either an addition, or replacement for the Curriculum Vitae. Social media isn’t a fad; it’s a fundamental shift in the way we communicate according to Qualman (2013). Searching candidates
on the internet to dig up ‘digital dirt’ is a way of business for many recruiters (Rutledge, 2008) although not everyone agrees with the activity and claim that it is an invasion of privacy.

Being more strategic in supporting students to think about being a professional digital citizen and shaping ‘brand-me’ does pose challenges for academics - should this be brought into the curriculum; and how equipped and joined up are the support systems in universities between the departments in careers, placement, course management and module delivery and acceptance of social media in learning.

The materials created in this study were created as part of preparing for placement, however, what is clear is that support and materials need to be made available on entry to the university in order to self-manage their online footprint at an earlier stage and be strategic in shaping ‘Brand-me’.

Moving forward, at Harper Adams, the Social Media site on the Learning Hub will be updated and further materials developed providing wider access to all students from year 1 in an attempt to raise the importance of their digital footprint and how it can be used for personal benefit. Students have noted the difficulty in ascertaining the levels of privacy settings and computer support will be provided to help with this.

**Conclusion**

A proactive approach to supporting students in the use of social media is considered to be more beneficial than admonishment.

The pre and post-test questionnaires provided a useful insight on the impact of the resources created and social media tools used. The development of materials (albeit rustic) was well received by both students and Placement Managers in supporting them in their role. The integrated communication programme of resources appeared to have positively raised the awareness and level of understanding of the term ‘digital footprint’, the benefits of using social media to build a professional profile and impact on personal branding, and how inappropriate use could affect their career. It was believed to be important that the resources attempted to progressively highlight some of the positive aspects of using social media tools and to provide a positive approach on how social media and digital footprint can be used to a professional advantage and see it as a personal strategy in shaping ‘brand me’ rather than from a policy or disciplinary focus.

Indeed, as part of the process for preparing students for placement and the world of work, these materials have led to over two thirds of the respondents saying that their approach to using social media will change in the future.
References


Understanding the Challenges that Business Undergraduates face when transitioning into Work

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Placement, qualitative research, phenomenology, work experience, accounting education

Abstract
This paper explores the perceived experiences of one cohort of Business Studies students as they transition onto their work placement. A questionnaire was sent to students (n=182) who were undertaking a compulsory forty week work placement in year three of a four year degree.

Previous literature mainly considers the post placement impact, so this study aimed to explore the initial transition from university onto placement and identify factors which might influence how well students transition. The results indicate that whilst half the students found the transition into work more difficult than they expected, the majority of students (78%) were enjoying their placement and were confident that they were performing to the required standard. However four factors seem to influence how well students managed the transition: gender, nationality, career compromise and the number of other students working at the placement company.

Introduction
Enhancing undergraduate’s exposure to and experience of work became a significant recommendation to universities following the Dearing Report (1997). Subsequent government and business reports (Lambert, R: 2003, Leitch: 2006, CBI: 2011) have concurred, which has led to a number of universities introducing employability led initiatives. As a significant number of the post 1992 universities already include a work placement as an integral part of their course, the value of a sandwich degree has been deliberated regularly.

The debate on the benefits of a work placement has concentrated mainly on its impact post work: the effect on degree classification, employability skills gained and the transfer of knowledge, Green (2010), Bullock, Gould, Hejmadi and Lock (2009), Duignan (2003) Blackwell, Bowes and Harvey (2001). The intention of this research is to gain insights solely into the student’s transition onto their
work placement. These factors might include gender, socio economic group and practical considerations such as the number of other placement students working within a company and the length of time travelling to a company. For the purpose of this paper, the transition period is defined as the first three months of the work placement.

Work Placements

William Bridges (2009) suggests that transition is a “process that people go through as they internalise and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about.” Many students about to embark on a work placement have already undertaken at least one transition within their life; going to university, which Mann (2001) likens to “crossing borders into a new country”. Having completed one transition successfully, does this make a second transition easier or are they all similar to experiencing a new country or culture?

Bullock et al (2009:491) in their research into Bioscience and Engineering students discovered some students found the transition onto placement and back to university difficult. The main reasons suggested were anxiety from feeling so far away from the university and having to deal with practical matters such as finding accommodation.

The Transition Model of the Placement Experience (Auburn, Ley and Arnold:1993) proposes a means of ensuring that the transition is as smooth as possible, by suggesting that work experience should be connected to other components of the course both preceding and post the placement in a multi stage process. This model suggests a useful means of integrating the placement within the degree course to help theory inform active learning and vice versa. Perhaps the model may be a little simplistic as it does not take into account the range of scenario’s which different students will undertake. For example, whilst students who have found work placements before the end of their second year are often able to think about their upcoming role in the context of some theories, for those students struggling to find a placement, the reality seems a long way off. However this model does have the benefit of treating the placement year as one element of the student’s development and not a standalone or bolt on process.

However Duignan (2002) suggests that work placement students are in “transient” roles because companies and universities will have different value and reward systems. He suggests in a later paper (2003) that host companies are running a business and their priorities are not to provide the student with the teaching or learning that they have become used to. This may be why students have sometimes seen the placement year as “very different and unconnected” (Auburn 2007:128).
John Duignan’s “Models of Placements” (2003: 339) suggests two different models of work placement which may influence how well prepared students feel at the start of their work placement.

**Work Environment Model** whereby the university prepares students for placement and aims for the student to meet company requirements.

**Learning Environment Model** whereby students are offered support prior, during and after their placement to ensure maximum learning and development.

The Learning Environment Model has similarities to the Transition Model, (Auburn et al, 1993), although they differ slightly as Duignan (2003) concentrates specifically on work related learning, rather than the continuous learning found throughout the degree. Like Auburn (1993) this model does not take into account individual differences, but does offer a good overview.

For some students, struggling to find a placement may be their first real experience of career compromise. Gottfredson (1996) suggests that individuals pass through age based circumscription stages in which they narrow the options available to them until they discard desirable outcomes for those which they may find easier to achieve. If a student has compromised on their work placement do they find the transition onto placement harder or as Gottfredson suggests are students able to discard their original choice and be content with their new choice?

**Industry Viewpoint**

Richardson, Jackling, Henschke and Tempone (2013) research discovered that whilst Australian universities spent a great deal of time and effort building relationships with companies to ensure that there were ample placement opportunities; little support was given to companies post recruitment. Their research discovered that employers would like universities to engage in more pre placement support to help students assimilate the changes that are about to occur.

As the placement year is often viewed as a “talent pipeline” there is a valid reason for companies to ensure a strong transition onto placement. Research by Meyer and Allen (1988:204), regarding American graduate’s commitment to employers after graduation, discovered that “employee’s experiences immediately following entry into an organization are instrumental in shaping their commitment to that organization”. This suggests that the transition period (initial socialization period), is crucial in shaping graduates commitment to their company and it therefore becomes crucial for both students and companies to ensure that the “onboarding process” creates a positive socialization into work and hopefully builds a mutual commitment.
From the review of the literature, it is clear that there are a number of factors which may influence a students work placement, but very little has been written about the formative transition period. By undertaking this research I hope to discover more about the student’s view of their transition and uncover any factors which may affect it. This may then be a benefit to not only the students and placement teams, but to other key stakeholders.

The Study
This research will focus on a cohort of undergraduate business studies students (n=182) who are required to undertake a compulsory placement as part of their degree course at Bournemouth University. The aim is to provide a snapshot of one group of students which may be used to inform the pre placement strategy of the university and placement team rather than to make generalisations about all students who undertake work placements. The aim of this paper is to explicate what Bournemouth University Business Studies placement students think about their placement transition.

Method
The data collected was via an online survey which was sent to students who had completed between three to six months of their work placement. A survey was used partly to capture the viewpoints of this cohort, but also for the practical consideration that they were located across England and parts of Europe. The survey was completed online via Bristol Online Surveys and was sent to the students via the University internal messaging system. I used a Likert scale to gain students perceptions of their transition onto placement with a text box for additional comments. The scales changed direction after every three questions to ensure that the students being surveyed avoid acquiescence bias. In addition direct questions were asked to ascertain which factors might influence the student’s transitions, such as “Where did you live on your placement year”

The survey was sent to all one hundred and eighty two placement students of which 40% of students replied. The gender mix is similar to the cohort population (Survey completion - 39.7% females / 60.3% males vs cohort -37% females/63% males) and the percentage of students from outside of the United Kingdom (17%), was also representative of the total cohort.

The data from the questionnaire was analysed using both the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the analysis tools found within the Bristol Online Surveys package. The factors were crossed referenced against the results within the Likert scale questions and correlations and themes were developed. Comments from each section were analysed and grouped to enable a better understanding of the data and the student’s viewpoints.
Survey Findings

The aim of this research was to explore BU Business Students views regarding their transition onto placement.

The overall results suggest that students thought their placement company provided them with a good level of support during the transition period with 87.6% agreeing or definitely agreeing that their placement company/line manager encouraged their learning and development and 85% agreeing that there was someone at the company who could advise or mentor them. Almost all students had received some form of an induction (69 out of 73 students).

Duignan (2003) suggested that as companies may have different value and reward systems, they may not provide the teaching and learning that students are used to, however, these results suggest that during the transition period, students were happy with the support received.

Students also agreed or definitely agreed that by the end of the transition period, they were producing work to the required standard (79.5%), had built strong relationships with colleagues (83.6%) and were able to work independently (89%). 78.1% of students agreed or definitely agreed that they were enjoying their placement.

However, the survey also suggested that the transition onto placement is not all plain sailing with only 57.5% agreeing or definitely agreeing with the statement “The transition onto placement was easier than expected.” Bullock et al (2009) found that 10% of students found the transition onto placement hard due to emotional and practical reasons, and some emotional reasons were mentioned by BU students:

“Didn’t expect to be so tired!”

There was some evidence to concur with Auburn (2007) who suggested that the placement year can feel unconnected with the rest of the student’s degree course with only 57.9% of students definitely agreeing or agreeing that the placement year feels connected to the rest of the course. However, some students did suggest that they are two very separate experiences, so perhaps there will always be some difficulties in providing a seamless experience:

“It is hard to say yet. But work and the university are hugely different.”

Question six asked students “With the benefit of hindsight, what might have helped your transition onto your work placement?” and this suggested three main themes:

Firstly students would like some pre-placement contact from their placement company in the form of company information or a chance to meet the team:
“I think more information from the employer prior to starting work would be beneficial such as information about the company and the business context and the ability to work on the business acumen and be prepared when starting work”

Secondly more experience on IT in particular excel skills. The lack of excel skills had already been commented on by employers and the following cohort has been given extra training, so it was interesting to see that the students were aware of this:

ICT workshops (excel in particular)

The third theme was pre placement support from the university covering the working environment:

“More insight into the “real life” working environment in terms of workload, working hours, work-life balance and making the best first impressions to existing employers”

The final point was interesting as almost all of the students had some sort of previous work experience. However perhaps some students are unable to transfer experiences from one context into another.

The results do partly suggest that universities and placement teams could provide more pre placement support to companies (Richardson et al: 2013), this was mainly applicable to smaller companies or those in which there was only one student placed. The results did suggest that the placement team could provide some additional support to students as whilst 72% of students definitely agreed or agreed that “Bournemouth University had helped me prepare for my work placement” there was general consensus that this was mainly around support of the recruitment process, but not work.

“A lot of help was provided with CV’s and Cover Letters but not the preparation of work itself”

In addition to these three key themes, four different factors also emerged which suggested some influence on the results; gender, nationality, career compromise and the number of other students working at the placement company. As the questions covered a variety of different areas, these themes cannot be judged in isolation and it is likely that other areas may have had some influence.

Other European and International students (Eu/I)

Other European and International students (n=13) represented 17% of the responses. Whilst this is a small number, it is representative of the total cohort.
46.1% of EU/I students were in an unpaid or an expenses only placement compared to 5% for UK Student’s. This may be partly due to some students returning to their home countries to complete their work placement where there isn’t always a culture of paying students for internships. However generally these students struggled to find work placements perhaps for the reasons suggested in a survey by the University of Northampton (2007) which discovered that some of the barriers that held back employers from recruiting students from overseas were the perceived weaker English skills and the difficulty adapting to another culture.

The level of support that EU/I students perceived that they received from their placement company in the first three months was also below the perceived experiences of the UK students (table one). As 23.1% of students were the only placement student within a company, there is the suggestion that as the company may be smaller so the procedures become less formal. Alternatively this may be due to cultural differences, for example perhaps they were less confident in asking for feedback. Kim, Atkinson and Umemoto (2001: 575) identified fourteen characteristics of Asian cultural values, one of which “Ability to resolve psychological problems on one’s own” may mean that students are less likely to ask for feedback if it is not volunteered.

Table One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the first three months of placement:</th>
<th>UK Students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
<th>European &amp; International students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My placement company/line manager encouraged my learning and development</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My placement company were clear in their expectations</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I received feedback about the quality of my work</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was someone at the company who could advise or mentor me</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was someone at BU who I felt I could contact</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the results differ when looking at student’s perception of their performance after the transition period (table two) which demonstrates a high level of confidence.

“I consider the Placement year to be the best thing happened in my career life. I have learned to be very independent, sociable and it was great opportunity to experience the real world.”
Table Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of the first three months:</th>
<th>UK Students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
<th>European &amp; International students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt confident that I was producing work to the required standard</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had built strong relationships with colleagues</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to work independently</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was enjoying my placement</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results suggest that the EU/I students from this cohort are not “sojourners” (Bochner 1994: 246) therefore perhaps not mentally anchored to another country whilst on work placement, but full engaged within their placement and have a lot to offer potential placement companies.

Gender

There were some noticeable gender themes (table three) which suggest that the level of support that females (n=29) believed that they received and the confidence that they had in their own ability was lower than for the male students.

There is very little research which compares gender and work placements to make a comparison however Gammie, E, Paver, Gammie, R and Duncan, (2003) suggested that male students were “all very enthusiastic about their placement employment and put in a lot of effort as they wanted to get a good review” which may suggest a reason why more male students responded positively.

Gracia (2010) suggested that female students’ accounts of their expectations of work include lots of emotional language. She suggested that Universities should discuss the role of emotions within transitions as well as a cognitive approach.

Table Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the first three months of placement:</th>
<th>Female Students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
<th>Male Students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I received feedback about the quality of my work</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was someone at the company who could advise or mentor me</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By the end of the first three months:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
<th>Male students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt confident that I was producing work to the required standard</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had built strong relationships with colleagues</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to work independently</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was enjoying my placement</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, table four suggests that male students found the transition onto placement more difficult than female students. A transition survey at Nottingham Trent University (Foster and Lefever: 2010) suggested that male students rated their transition into university more negatively than females (on average 5%) which aren’t suggested here. Perhaps the transition onto placement has now made the transition to university easier than they previously thought?

### Table Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Female Students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
<th>Male students Agreed or Definitely Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The transition onto placement was easier than I expected</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transition to university from School/College/Work was easier than I expected</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transition onto my work placement was easier than the transition to the first year of university</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Career Compromise

Only 26% (n=19) of students suggested that they compromised on their placement choice. As business studies students apply for on average twenty different placement roles, it seems likely that a higher number than suggested have compromised and modified their career plans. This is in line with Gottfredson’s (2003) suggestion that people who have narrowed their choices to a career which is achievable were able to transition as well as others.

Students who felt that they had compromised on their placement choice suggested a variety of different reasons for this, although compromising on the job role for location and salary was mentioned several times. Other reasons included running out of time or compromising on pay to work in certain industry sectors.
From the results in table five, those students who feel that they had compromised on placement choice found the transition far more difficult.

**Table Five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>No Compromise</th>
<th>Compromise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The transition onto placement was easier than I expected</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transition to university from School/College/Work was easier than I expected</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transition onto my work placement was easier than the transition to the first year of university</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These students were more likely to feel that they had prepared well (84.3% vs. did not compromise group 71.7%), but some results again concur with (Gottfredson, 1996, 2005) who suggests that there may be some negative impact for people at work who feel that they have compromised in their career (table six).

**Table Six**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The first three months of placement:</th>
<th>No Compromise</th>
<th>Compromise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My placement company/line manager encouraged my learning and development</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My placement company were clear in their expectations</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I received feedback about the quality of my work</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These students were more likely to work in a company with fewer placement students (79% worked with fewer than twelve other placement students compared to 50% for those students who didn’t compromise) and more likely to be unpaid/expenses only (31.6% vs. 4.6%) which suggest that other factors played a part.

“Failed a unit at uni and so took what I was offered.”
Number of other placement students in company

The number of other placement students within the company was the final factor to suggest differences. For the purpose of this research, I have split these into three groups:

Less than 12 other placement students within the company (n=42)
Between 13 and 50 other placement students within the company (n=12)
Over 51 other placement students within the company (n=19)

It is probably not surprising that those students who worked in companies with a larger number of placement students experienced more encouragement and feedback from their company/line manager in the first three months compared to other students, as larger companies tend to have a variety of systems in place to provide both structure and feedback (table seven).

Table Seven

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the first three months of placement:</th>
<th>Less than 12 other placement students in company</th>
<th>13-50 other placement students in company</th>
<th>Over 51 other placement students in company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreed or Definitely Agreed</td>
<td>Agreed or Definitely Agreed</td>
<td>Agreed or Definitely Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My placement company/line manager encouraged my learning and development</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My placement company were clear in their expectations</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I received feedback about the quality of my work</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt confident that I was producing work to the required standard</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had built strong relationships with colleagues</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to work independently</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was enjoying my placement</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is interesting is that those students who worked for companies with between thirteen and fifty other placement students felt the most confident and settled by the end of the three month period.

Whilst the differences are not huge, there may be an element of “small fish in a big pond” for those students who were based in a company with a large number of other placement students. It is also unexpected that the majority of those students who worked with less than twelve other placement students had a high degree of learning and development. This is counterintuitive with our expectation that smaller companies does not provide as much learning and development.
Students in the mid ranging group were less likely to live at home (16.7%) and more likely to have a journey time of less than fifteen minutes (41.7%) once again suggesting that other factors also play a part.

Limitations

The objective of this survey was to ask this particular cohort of students for their opinions on their transition onto placements which would inform how we supported these students ahead of work. As this research is interpreting student’s feelings, it may not be representative to all students on different courses at other universities.

The timing of the study, which was around three to six months after the end of the transition period, may also provide students with false memories. If the survey is repeated, I would ensure that it was carried out immediately after the three month time period.

A Chi Square test was completed and confirmed that the sample size was too small to test for goodness of fit in the distribution across categorical responses. Therefore any responses cannot be generalised to other cohorts of students in a similar position. However, this was expected to occur and the intention was never to make generalisations.

Finally one of the questions “My placement met my expectations of work” did not allow for the fact that a “No” answer could be both positive and negative. It is therefore difficult to ascertain what percentage of students felt their placement fell below their expectations against those students whose placement exceeded their expectations.

Discussion

This study concurs with previous studies which suggest that the transition onto placement can be a difficult for some students. Overall as most students experience was extremely positive, it may be reasonable to suggest that students are no different to other employees who take time to settle into a new role.

However, by studying the transition in more depth, we are now able to enhance the students experience by better preparation pre placement. These findings suggest that a process of triangulation between the university, the student and the company would ensure that the student is better prepared for the initial “culture shock”.

Universities should firstly consider how to incorporate placement preparation during the academic year to ensure that students meaningfully consider work prior to their start date and secondly to integrate IT skills such as excel within the curriculum. By educating students of the need for preparation we can help focus their minds and channel any nerves into a more positive direction.
may be useful for the following cohort of students to disseminate these findings as a way of motivating them to complete their own preparation ahead of their start date.

Furthermore it would be a benefit to those groups of students whose results showed some undesirable differences in the survey to understand the potential pitfalls and actively seek out solutions with the guidance of placement staff.

Additionally, whilst many companies have excellent inductions, there is a benefit in placement staff encouraging companies to consider an onboarding process that starts proceeding the first day. This could be as simple as an email with some company reports to read or a line manager ringing the student a few weeks in advance of the start date to welcome them to the team. Companies who are hiring their first placement student could be encouraged to think about the students learning in advance of their start date. This could be particularly helpful for smaller companies or departments with one placement student.

**Conclusions**

This research was undertaken to discuss an area of work placements which has not been previously covered in any great depth; possible factors that may impact how a student manages the transition period of their work placement. The results suggest that whilst most students (78.1%) agreed or definitely agreed that by the end of the first three months they were enjoying their placement, only just over half of the students (57.5%) agreed or definitely agreed that the transition onto placement was easier than expected. This result is unsurprising as transitions are generally not easy and it backs up previous findings (Bullock et al: 2009), however this research goes one step further to assess the possible reasons why.

This research has highlighted four factors which seem to influence how well a student manages the transition onto work placement, namely; gender, nationality, career compromise and the number of other students within a placement company. None of these factors can be looked at solely in isolation and there are indeed overlaps with other factors which need to be researched further.

The survey also emphasises the need to do more pre placement preparation. Therefore the implications that this has for Bournemouth University and its placement team is that we need to ensure that our students are better educated ahead of their placement. I would encourage other universities and placement teams to also look at their pre placement education to ensure that that is becomes more tailored. In the same way that universities now try to manage student’s transition into university, we should become more open about the possible challenges involved with the transition onto placement and offer strategies to ensure students become better equipped.
Further research would establish which factors in particular play a part in the student’s transition onto their work placement and may also help universities and employers help manage the student’s next big transition into their graduate role.

References


**Bibliography**


Appendices
Appendix One: Survey & overall results
The transition onto work placements 2013-2014 results

Section 1: Your Placement Experience

1. Pre Placement
1.a. I had prepared for my work placement in advance of my start date
(Tags: 12345)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Agree:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree:</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
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<td>15.3%</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Disagree:</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.a.i. I had prepared for my work placement in advance of my start date

Submit - There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

1.b. Bournemouth University had helped me prepare for my work placement
(Tags: 12345)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Agree:</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree:</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree:</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
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<td>Definitely Disagree:</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1.b.i. Bournemouth University had helped me prepare for my work placement

View All Responses - There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

2. My induction included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Induction pack/company information:</th>
<th>n/a</th>
<th>63</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational chart:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company expectations/etiquette:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; safety information:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to role/on the job training:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>60</td>
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</table>
### 3. Thinking back to your first three months of placement:

#### 3.a. My placement company/line manager encouraged my learning and development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<td>42</td>
</tr>
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<td>22</td>
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**Comments**

As a result I proactively asked my line manager for a meeting to discuss my role and how they thought I was getting on.

Yes, but there is free reign on this somewhat - they recognise that it is also my year to learn, develop, grow

#### 3.b. My placement company were clear in their expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Comments**

As a result I proactively asked my line manager for a meeting to discuss my role and how they thought I was getting on.

Yes, but there is free reign on this somewhat - they recognise that it is also my year to learn, develop, grow

#### 3.c. I received feedback about the quality of my work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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</table>
### 3.c.i. I received feedback about the quality of my work -- Comments

There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

### 3.d. My placement met my expectations of work (Tags: 54321)

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</table>

### 3.d.i. My placement met my expectations of work -- Comments

There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

### 3.e. There was someone at the company who could advise or mentor me (Tags: 54321)

<table>
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<th>Option</th>
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### 3.e.i. There was someone at the company who could advise or mentor me -- Comments

There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

### 3.f. There was someone at BU who I felt I could contact (Tags: 54321)

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### 3.f.i. There was someone at BU who I felt I could contact

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<tr>
<td>Definitely Disagree:</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### 4. By the end of the first three months:

#### 4.a. I felt confident that I was producing work to the required standard

(Tags: 12345)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
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#### 4.a.i. I felt confident that I was producing work to the required standard

Getting there

#### 4.b. I had built strong relationships with colleagues

(Tags: 12345)

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#### 4.b.i. I had built strong relationships with colleagues

#### 4.c. I was able to work independently

(Tags: 12345)

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<td>0</td>
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#### 4.c.i. I was able to work independently

Have to in my job

My work involves a lot of politics which I am not directly involved in making some decisions beyond my jurisdiction. Therefore in most cases I can and others I cannot

#### 4.d. I was enjoying my placement

(Tags: 12345)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Agree:</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.d.i. I was enjoying my placement

| Agree: | 46.6% | 34 |
| Neither Agree or Disagree: | 15.1% | 11 |
| Disagree: | 4.1% | 3 |
| Definitely Disagree: | 2.7% | 2 |

5. Transitions

5.a. The transition onto placement was easier than I expected (Tags: 12345)

| Definitely Agree: | 12.3% | 9 |
| Agree: | 45.2% | 33 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree: | 21.9% | 16 |
| Disagree: | 17.8% | 13 |
| Definitely Disagree: | 2.7% | 2 |

5.a.i. The transition onto placement was easier than I expected -- Comments

- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

5.b. The transition to university from School/College/Work was easier than I expected (Tags: 12345)

| Definitely Agree: | 16.4% | 12 |
| Agree: | 45.2% | 33 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree: | 20.5% | 15 |
| Disagree: | 15.1% | 11 |
| Definitely Disagree: | 2.7% | 2 |

5.b.i. The transition to university from School/College/Work was easier than I expected -- Comments

- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

5.c. The transition onto my work placement was easier than the transition to the first year of university (Tags: 12345)

| Definitely Agree: | 17.8% | 13 |
| Agree: | 27.4% | 20 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree: | 15.1% | 11 |
| Disagree: | 35.6% | 26 |
| Definitely Disagree: | 4.1% | 3 |
5.c.i. The transition onto my work placement was easier than the transition to the first year of university -- Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View All Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.d. The placement year feels connected to the rest of my course (Tags: 12345)

| Definitely Agree: | 13.7% | 10 |
| Agree: | 43.8% | 32 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree: | 13.7% | 10 |
| Disagree: | 23.3% | 17 |
| Definitely Disagree: | 5.5% | 4 |

5.d.i. The placement year feels connected to the rest of my course -- Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View All Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. With the benefit of hindsight, what might have helped your transition onto your work placement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View All Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 2: About you

7. Where did you live on your placement year?

| Family home: | 41.1% | 30 |
| Shared accommodation with other BU students: | 6.8% | 5 |
| Share accommodation with students from my placement company: | 27.4% | 20 |
| Shared accommodation: | 19.2% | 14 |
| Lived alone: | 5.5% | 4 |

8. Were you required to find your own accommodation?

| Yes: | 58.9% | 43 |
| No: | 28.8% | 21 |
| Some support from my placement company: | 12.3% | 9 |

8.a. Comments
## 9. How long was your journey to work EACH way on average?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 15 mins</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30 mins</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45 mins</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 mins - 60 minutes</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-90 Minutes</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 90 minutes</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9.a. Comments

- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

## 10. How many other placement students worked at your company?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-25</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 11. In the first three months would you have liked to socialise more with your work mates?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 11.a. If yes, what stopped you from doing so?

- There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

## 12. In what month did you find your work placement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept - Dec 2012</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2013</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2013</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 13. Did you compromise on your choice of placement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No:</th>
<th>Yes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 13.a. If you answered Yes In what way did you compromise and for what reason?

- [View All Responses](#) - There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

### 14. What was your placement salary at the start of your placement?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid:</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses only:</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £9,999:</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£10,00-14,999:</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£15,000-19,999:</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £20,000:</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 15. How soon after you received a placement offer did you start work?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One day:</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-6 days:</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-13 days:</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 weeks:</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 months:</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3 months:</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 16. Did you attend the Pre Placement Seminar in May 2013?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes:</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No:</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 17. Gender

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 18. Your age on 1 June 2013?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 19. What pathway did you follow in level I (second year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Small Business Management</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing &amp; International Management</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations and Project Management</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 20. Before you studied at Bournemouth University, did you work in a full time role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 21. Do you have any previous paid work experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part time work whilst at university</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time work during the holidays</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary work</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time work</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No previous work experience</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 22. Nationality (please state)

- View All Responses - There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.

### 23. Any other comments?

- View All Responses - There are too many responses to display on this page and so all the responses to this question are available on a separate page.
Is it the placement that counts? A small scale phenomenological study of ‘gap year’ accounting and finance students

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Keywords
Placement, qualitative research, phenomenology, work experience, accounting education

Abstract
This research came about through my interest in students’ learning whilst on periods of work experience as part of their four year accountancy and finance undergraduate degree programme. Approximately half of students studying the degree at my own institution opt to undertake a period of formal university approved work experience between the second and final year of the degree (sandwich placement). A small proportion of students who have opted to take the placement route are unsuccessful in securing a university approved placement and return to their final year having engaged in various activities (previously largely unknown to university staff) during this ‘gap year’. As far as I have been able to establish, no previous research has been undertaken on this particular group of students. Importantly, given that a growing body of literature points to the “good news story” of placement (Auburn, 2007:119), are we in danger of attributing an impact to the placement year that may have come about irrespectively of the experience? My research investigates the extent to which the experiences of gap year students compare to those reported in previous research concerned with placement students.

Much previous work exploring the impact of the placement has sought to establish quantitative relationships between students who undertake a placement and their subsequent academic performance. This small-scale research project is an anti-positivist, qualitative research inquiry employing elements of the transcendental phenomenological approach originating from Husserl (1859-1938) to uncover the essences of student experiences during their gap year. Rather than seeking to interpret the experiences of the students involved, the research aims to provide a description which accurately portrays how students experience their gap year from their point of view (Denscombe, 2007).
Four semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with gap year students, transcribed and analysed in order to understand what these students were engaged in during their gap year and the implications of this for their approach to the final year of their degree. A phenomenological analysis following Moustakas (1994) was adopted and eight themes emerged: an inability to articulate ‘skills’; a sense of growing up/maturing; increased motivation; greater focus and discipline; difficulty associated with the working environment; wanting to get a ‘good’ degree; and development of thinking. Overall the findings indicate that similar improvements to academic practices are found by students who have had a gap year to those previously reported from students who have undertaken a placement.

Introduction

The current concern within Higher Education (HE) with graduate employability has focused interest on the placement and other forms of work experience. There is a growing body of research that points to the fact that undertaking a placement is not only significant in terms of employability but also in terms of ultimate academic performance (vide Mandilaras, 2004; Gomez et al., 2004; Rawlings et al., 2005; Mendez, 2008; Bullock et al., 2009; Surridge, 2009; Driffield et al., 2011; Patel et al., 2012). Research concerned with the relationship between placement and academic performance has overwhelmingly adopted a quantitative approach and sought to establish a causal link between participation on placement (or not) and improved academic performance, by looking either at the final examination performance of placement versus non-placement students, or the ‘distance travelled’ (i.e. the difference between second year and final year results) for these two distinct cohorts of students. However adopting quantitative techniques to establish causal relationships between variables does nothing to illuminate why these results are found. Indeed the adoption of quantitative techniques to explore the relationship between placement and academic results necessitates treating students as objects in complex statistical formulas where all uniqueness of these individual students is lost. The ontological position adopted in this research draws upon the phenomenological tradition, where my interest in the relationship between a period of work experience and academic performance lies in seeing this from the eyes of the students involved. A small number of qualitative studies are relevant to my research and are summarised below.

Little and Harvey (2006) interviewed a total of 82 placement students from a range of disciplines, in a study designed to investigate students’ perceptions of learning from placements and the extent to which they transfer and build on such learning in subsequent stages of their degree. The analysis of interviews identified three broad clusters of skills that students discussed (ibid: 29); ‘interpersonal’ (consisting of the particular skills of oral and/or written communication, networking, reporting to
senior management, liaising with clients, and telephone and e-mail protocols; ‘personal’
(confidence, personal organisation, time management, adaptability, flexibility and maturity); and
‘intellectual’ (subject knowledge, confidence with subject matter, project management, and to a
lesser extent analysis and synthesis). The authors found that students tended to emphasise the
development of their confidence and interpersonal skills, their organisation and time-management
rather than their intellectual development (ibid: 45).

Similar findings within the accountancy and finance area were found by Lucas and Tan (2009) who
undertook semi-structured interviews with 17 students in order to illuminate the nature and
development of students’ reflective capacity during placement. In common with the findings of
Little and Harvey (2006), students in Lucas and Tang’s (2009) study did not articulate changes in
what Lucas and Tang describe as “the cognitive aspect” (ibid: 41) associated with developing “an
independent way of knowing” (ibid: 41). Lucas and Tang (2009: 12) concluded that improvement in
academic performance by placement students in their final year seems to arise from a “developing
sense of self that leads to a more focused application towards their learning. There was a strong
motivation to achieve a good degree and consequently students organised their own learning so as
to closely meet assessment requirements”.

Finally, Surridge (2011) undertook 16 semi-structured interviews with business and accounting
students where the focus of questions was on the role of work placement and university in
developing students’ self-efficacy beliefs. The research takes self-efficacy from the work of Bandura
that placement develops self-regulatory skills (such as planning, organising, self-management, taking
responsibility and working independently) better than university. The self-efficacy beliefs
(confidence) in these particular skills, are also developed more on placement than at university, and
the placement “represents a transforming experience for the students, raising their general self-
efficacy beliefs (general self-confidence)” (ibid: 1). In common with Little and Harvey (2006) and
Lucas and Tang (2009), placement students commonly talked about the way in which the routine
and discipline of a 9-5 day job affected their approach to the final year in terms of increased
motivation to study.

What has been assumed in these studies is that it is the placement experience itself, the structured
university approved work experience that has resulted in the reported findings. As far as I have
been able to establish, no previous research has investigated whether similar articulated benefits of
placement work experience are also articulated by students who have not undertaken a subject-specific university approved placement but had a gap year in their studies. My research addresses the paucity of research that investigates the relationship between work experience and subsequent university study through the eyes of the students themselves, moreover its unique contribution to knowledge in the field is through its illumination of the opinion of a previously un-researched group of students (gap year) rather than on the more commonly researched placement students. The findings from this research will be of use to those with an interest in the relationship between academic performance and work experience, and will also have significant implications for professional practice. For instance, the conclusions of the research could impact on policy decisions concerning approving work experience, or in terms of decisions regarding students’ transfer between full-time and sandwich route programmes.

**Methodology**

Given that my research seeks to understand the nature of things from the perceivers’ point of view, I consider that the most appropriate way to achieve this is through undertaking in-depth interviews with students; a technique commonly associated with the phenomenological tradition (Bogan and Taylor, 1975). There were 28 accountancy and finance students in their final year who had undertaken a gap year. I gained access to eight of these students through attending a specific teaching session where I distributed a short questionnaire seeking their views on what they did during their year out, their reasons for choosing the sandwich (rather than full-time) route, and why they thought they ended up without a placement. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain some initial information about the student sample, but importantly, the questionnaire asked students whether they would be interested in “helping me further by undertaking a short one-to-one interview”. Four students indicated their willingness to take part and were subsequently interviewed, thus students self-selected to the study.

Arksey and Knight (2007: 58) highlight that there may be differences between people who volunteer for research and those who do not, suggesting that “volunteering might make them the minority in the group in which you are interested”. The potential for ‘unrepresentative’ views being offered by those who have self-selected is not considered to be an issue for my research since my concern is with gaining in-depth description from a small number of students in order to understand the research phenomenon fully, rather than seeking theory that can be generalised from my sample to a wider population. The fact that students have volunteered their time freely rather than being
encouraged to take part, I feel is advantageous in terms of the potential for generating rich and interesting data.

All interviewees signed an informed consent form prior to the interview taking place and interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed in full. The table below indicates the age and sex of the interviewees as well as a brief description of what each participant did during their gap year, and a reference by which they can be identified in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant reference</th>
<th>Sex and age</th>
<th>Summary of gap year activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>M, 21</td>
<td>Worked at a local City Council within the finance section on a voluntary basis for six months and also undertook some voluntary work at his Temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>M, 22</td>
<td>Worked as a banking advisor for the full 12 month period (in a sales rather than accounting/finance position). Continued this work on a part time basis into the final year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>F, 22</td>
<td>Worked for the full 12 months at a local financial institution (but not at an appropriate level for it to be approved by the university).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>M, 23</td>
<td>Raised funds to go travelling to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal for six months, working in each country (teaching) for a number of weeks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A phenomenological approach to analysis that follows Moustakas (1994) was adopted. Moustakas (1994: 103) sets out “methods and procedures” for conducting phenomenological analysis, in which he suggests that all written transcripts are read several times to obtain an overall feeling for them, then, from each transcript, significant phrases or sentences are identified and meanings created which can be clustered into themes.

**Analysis and discussion**

There were eight key themes identified through the analysis which are discussed below:

**Theme 1: Inability to articulate ‘skills’**

Much of the literature promoting the undergraduate sandwich placement does so from a ‘skills’ perspective, which is often tied into discourses within education on employability and graduate
attributes. In essence the thinking is that employers are looking for graduates to display certain generic skills, and periods of supervised work experience are a good means of equipping students with these skills. What emerged from my interviews was that students within this small sample did not find it easy to articulate what these skills were. An example is provided by S who stated;

There was quite a few skills, I don’t know how I could say I could put it all into one. This is the first time I’ve actually thought about it properly, but I do feel that everything I did there helped me a lot, with everything I’m going to do now and into the future.

It was in the area of communication that students were able to articulate an improvement in skill. M refers to learning “how to talk to people on different levels”, and S comments that communication was “a big thing that I wasn’t really that good with before. I just used to do what I want and say what I want which was bad.” He acknowledges that “meeting people from all over the world” helped his communication skills. R also discusses the ways in which his communication skills improved during the year; “Communication wise you have to like adapt to like your surroundings and kind of suss people out and tailor your communication style to what they want and stuff… It was a new experience just talking with a lot more mature people who have been through a lot more life experience than yourself”.

While P did not specifically mention communication as an area she felt she improved in, the following extract is taken from her reply to the open question “in what ways do you think you have changed as a result of the year?”, and demonstrates an increased awareness of how she is expected to behave within the workplace, including the ways she should communicate with others. It also illustrates another theme to emerge from the interviews – that of growing up/maturing, which is turned to next.

I became more mature I guess. A little bit. I went from uni and I was just thrown straight into that environment and that was quite – that was a big change. You have to watch what you say, you have to be really formal about everything so. University you chill back, you say whatever you want, you relax and then you’re just put in that environment and you’re like, I’ve got to be mature here. I have to be quite quiet, I’ve got to watch what I do and say. So that was a bit crazy. But I think it helped me. It did help me develop as a
person. And I thought, wow, this is what the rest of my life is going to be like. So it was a bit, woe, a bit of a shock. So it did mature me a bit. I thought, this is what I need to do. It helped me just kind of develop a little bit and realise what I need to do before I start working.

Theme 2: Growing up/maturing
Growing up and maturing during the year was raised by a number of the students interviewed. Related to the fact that they considered they had grown up themselves, was the fact that the workplace allowed them opportunities to be around other people who were more ‘grown up’ than them. This is illustrated within the extract above from R concerning his communication skills, and in the extracts below;

I think some of the skills as well that you gained through just growing up really round the work place, actually to work with people who are a lot more career minded and you go back to university and you kind of, you just kind of grow up a little bit and focus that little bit more and you probably wouldn’t have done that in the first and second years. (M)

they’re all a lot older than me I think, whoever you’re with you end up being a bit more like them and learning some of their characteristics (P)

it doesn’t matter what placement you do it does help cause you’ll have that bit extra confidence to go out and source information because you’ll have been in the workplace for so long, talking about stuff in general discussion or presentations or whatever it is (M)

Theme 3: Increased motivation
A common theme identified from each interview was the recognition that students returned to university more motivated in their final year. This increased motivation was specifically directed towards studying as illustrated in the following extracts;

Coming back I did have the motivation – it was so fresh as well, and I started studying straight away. It was quite hard, getting back into education mode again from being across the world and stuff, but it worked straight away, and I was getting high 60s and firsts all the time. (S)

When I got here I was like, yeah I’m ready to work, I can do this, I got right back into it, whereas if I’d just been in second year and then gone into third year, I’d
have been oh this is a repeat, I don’t think I would have been so determined to do it. So I did have a little break and it made me a bit more focussed, I was like, I’ve had a break, I can do it. (P)

The reasons expressed to account for this increased motivation were different, for instance, for S who had travelled, it was described “cause I saw the struggles going on in those countries, and I saw the fact that they take education so seriously and we take it for granted”. This is quite a ‘profound’ observation to make, to recognise the value that education now held given what he had observed oversees. Other examples of the extent to which this student’s unique experiences impacted on him are provided later in this commentary.

For others, such as the example taken from P above, increased motivation seems to have come about due to having had some time away from the university engaged in a different activity. The repetition of “I can do this/it” within P’s extract above I think illustrates the strength of feeling this student has in her abilities returning to study.

When pressed further as to whether students would be similarly motivated had they not had a gap year, they unanimously thought that would not be the case. Clearly they considered that it was their period of absence from university that had resulted in their increased motivation on return.

Mandilaras (2004) speculated that the increased motivation and focussed attitude of placement students could explain their better academic performance, and Little and Harvey (2006), Lucas and Tang (2009), and Surridge (2011), all refer to the increased motivation of placement students in their interview studies. This increased motivation was found in previous studies to lead to a “more focused application towards learning” (to borrow from Lucas and Tang, 2009: 12), which was also a common theme from my interviews.

Theme 4: Focus/discipline/routine

Students articulated the ways in which the routine and structure of their work experiences impacted on their approach to the final year as the following extracts illustrate;

It was the routine of the 9-5 that helped me with this year definitely. I think in first year and second year, morning lectures I was just, can’t be bothered to go,
I’ll read the slides, but I went to everything this year. I was in a routine. It’s there for a reason, I should just do it. So it made me a bit more disciplined and go to my lectures and seminars. (P)

In my first two years it was kind of just, kind of, yeah whatever, this is uni, but when I came back I had my mind set like I knew I didn’t do as well second year but kind of said look this is what I’m going to do, like have a schedule, you revise on this day you take a break, just balance it out a bit better and stuff. (R)

This application of discipline to the final year was not just a “work mode” (M) resulting from being engaged in full time employment, since similar ideas were expressed by S who had gone travelling;

like before I used to be like cram it all in at the end, but this year I was much more on the ball...so I’d be organised straight away, I knew what books I needed to get and what additional reading I needed to do. (S)

The routine and discipline of these gap year students is contrasted to the full-time route, or full-time colleagues. For instance P referred to being more “laid back” and “relaxed” about the final year had she not had the gap year. In referring to full-time students, S described them as “more chilled out” and “not really that bothered”. M refers to having his ‘head in the clouds’ if he hadn’t had his gap year in the extract below;

I wouldn’t have had that focus, [if hadn’t had gap year] I would have probably been a bit more head in the clouds on how easy it is to get jobs, or how hard it is, and I would have thought I’d just fall into one, I’ll just make a few applications, and it’s just not like that at all, it’s not like that. (M)

As with Little and Harvey (2006) and Lucas and Tang (2009), since no full-time final year students were also interviewed, it cannot be said whether similar findings would be articulated in this case. Clearly the increased significance of the final year academic mark (in my university, in common with many, the final year accounts for 75% of the overall mark), may have contributed towards all students applying a more focussed approach to their work in the final year. However, for the students interviewed, they each expressed that they would not have felt so motivated to work hard had they gone straight to the final year. In common with Surridge (2011) for instance, having a 9am-5pm routine at work was specifically commented upon (which clearly resulted from the work...
experience). However, my results are significant in demonstrating that similar articulations concerning a more focussed approach to work were also expressed by a student who had been travelling in his gap year rather than in full-time employment.

**Theme 5: Difficulty associated with the working environment**

The repetition in the above extract seems to emphasise how surprised this student was with the difficulty he experienced in gaining employment, and this was a common theme within students’ accounts. R recalls his struggles with making applications for (placement) jobs;

> I made so many applications it was just unbelievable, maybe a hundred applications ... Between 5 and 10 I’d got to the later stages and I was just like what is happening and my Mum even says, she says [R] it’s not your fault, like, don’t worry. (R)

M recalls seeing lawyers “with ten years of experience” applying for junior banking positions within the company he was working. He recounts “they were in their 30s and I was just, I really do feel for you guys cause I know how hard it is. You’re doing nothing related to your career, you don’t want to do that job, that’s just how hard it is now”. P recounts “if I want to get a good job I’ve got to work hard, I’ve got to put in my hours”.

The difficulty associated with the working environment has not been identified as a theme in previous literature. This may be due to the fact that the previous qualitative studies referred to (Little and Harvey, 2006, Lucas and Tang, 2009, Surridge, 2011) have had a specific focus for their research (more around the articulated skills and learning of placement students), rather than adopting a phenomenological approach that allows themes to show themselves and emerge from the interviews in the way I have. Pragmatically it is also pertinent to note that the historical timing of my interviews, following a prolonged recession, is likely to have resulted in the emergence of this theme and it is quite possible that should the research be repeated when the economy and labour market are more buoyant, this theme may not emerge.

**Theme 6: Wanting to get a ‘good’ degree**

In common with Lucas and Tang (2009) gap year students expressed their desire to do well academically, for instance P stated “I think it has made me more determined to do well in my exams this year”. Doing well was determined by getting an upper second or first degree classification; “If
you don’t get a good grade, if you don’t get a 2:1 or a 1st you’re not going to be able to get jobs” (P). The continual repetition of 2:1 within the following extract demonstrates just how important this degree classification is to M;

_I don’t want to not get a 2:1 at the end of this year, otherwise you’ve just wasted my time. A complete waste of three years and money etc so I’ve got to get a 2:1. Just to get my foot in the door I have to have a 2:1 just to speak to them so there’s no way I was going to, touch wood, not get a 2:1. Hopefully I’ll get a 2:1 so. If I don’t then it’s like what have I done for three years, it’s not going to reflect [pause] I feel as though I should get a 2:1, I think I deserve it, it’s just a bit of luck I suppose at the end of the day._

Rather than seeing the degree programme as an opportunity for learning and development, as a process, the small sample of students spoken with, are very focussed on the end result, the product, in terms of degree classification output. Related to this, it was surprising to hear many students refer to ‘getting the degree over with’ in their accounts, as the following passages demonstrate;

_Sometimes I do wish that I had just carried on because then I would have had my university degree done by then and by this year I would have been in employment. (S)_

_If you can’t get that job then you’d want to get your degree over with...you want to get it over with cause that’s why you’re there. (S)_

_But in some respects I kind of wish I did it [full time route] just to get the degree over and done with so I can concentrate on work full time... just get uni out the way and do it (M)_

_You just wanted to finish it over and done with. (R)_

**Theme 7: Benefits of the gap year/comparison to placement**

The penultimate theme has been described as _benefits of the gap year/comparison to placement_ and as such sums up the essence of the research aim for my study. Both R and M talked about how the experiences of the gap year directly helped them to complete a dissertation module on the final year (which involved primary research). S talked about how he “brought in so many examples from my year out” to an exam in Accounting and Accountability. Students’ articulations of their maturing/growing up and also of being more focussed and disciplined within their study were always
attributed to the year off rather than being something that they felt would have come about
anyway. It seems therefore that perhaps it is the immersion in practice in its various contexts that is
important, and the exact form the practice takes is of less importance. This point is discussed
further in considering the final theme, development of thinking.

Theme 8: Development in thinking
The final theme gathers together those examples provided by students that illustrate how their
thinking seems to have changed as a result of the gap year. By far the most extensive examples of
this were provided by the student who went travelling, S, as the extracts below illustrate;

This degree that we’re studying, Business degrees, and going into the financial
world, they kind of brain wash you into a corporate mechanism, where you’re
only told to think in one way. So for me going out and looking at it in a
different way, and coming back, it allowed me to be a lot more critical. And
just looking at things from different aspects. You just look at things so much
more differently than just what a teacher wants you to look at. Those are part
of being critical, evaluative, being able to synthesise, analysis and all those.
I started looking at my subject from an outside perspective instead of just what
they are teaching us.
I see things from different perspectives now. Just generally, like even when I
see a story in the news, I don’t see it from the way they see it, I try to see
what’s not there, why have they put that in the paper?, being a lot more
critical.
Like I said it opens your mind to thinking differently and be critical and bringing
different perspectives – it [gap year] did really help.
it was more I wanted to do well, not just so I’ll come out and get a good job, it
was more, I wanted to do well for myself and my family, I dunno, to be a better
person in a way.

These comments appear to demonstrate that the student found his gap year something of a
transformational experience in a similar way to that found by Surridge (2011) for placement
students. This is in contrast to Little and Harvey (2006) who identified a lack of articulation of what
they termed intellectual development, particularly in the areas of analysis and synthesis, and
similarly Lucas and Tang (2009) concluded that the students they interviewed had not developed in what they termed ‘the cognitive aspect’.

While the students who had been in employment provided less comprehensive examples demonstrating a change in thinking, references were made to “changing my attitude” (P), and being “more open minded” (M) and (R). It appears that immersion in practice may have gone some way to moving students away from the notion that the teacher provides all the answers, as demonstrated in the following quotation;

_I’m more open minded, seeing things differently than I was before. You only have one point of view and when you go into the workplace you actually see the broader picture of everything, like you take into account so many other things_ (R).

**Conclusion**

As far as I have been able to establish, my research is the first to consider the views of gap year, rather than placement students. Through undertaking a small number of semi-structured interviews with gap year students, I have adopted a phenomenological approach that let themes emerge from the transcriptions. I found that although the prevalent discourses around work experience within HE are often framed in terms of skill development, with the exception of communication, skills were not easily articulated by students within my sample. Students did however, routinely refer to their gap year making them more motivated on return to university. This motivation manifested itself in a more focussed and disciplined attitude towards studying and students commonly referred to the routine established in work being applied to university. The small sample of students interviewed were particularly focused and motivated towards obtaining a ‘good’ degree classification. In all of these themes, the findings from my interviews accord with the findings of other researchers who have interviewed placement students. In this way, similar articulated benefits were expressed by gap year students to those previously reported as attributed to placement students. This finding has implications for practice within the field of placement and work experience, since it suggests that it is the engagement with workplace practice in its various forms that is important to students’ development, rather than the specific, structured, university approved programmes of experience that we as educators provide.
References


Towards the sustainability of Work Based Learning Curriculum in Europe

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Keywords
'Higher Education reform in Europe', 'work based learning', 'work integrated learning', 'curriculum development', 'Intellectual capital', 'university-industry partnerships'.

Abstract
The Europe 2020 strategy puts the relevance of education systems at the heart of European Union efforts to improve competitiveness and achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Work based learning (WBL) has a key role to play and it has been a central element of Higher Education programmes in areas such as medicine and teaching for many years. However WBL remains a relatively small part of Higher Education (HE) systems and there remain a number of institutional, pedagogical and ideological objections which continue to hamper its wider development in most EU States.

This paper draws on a review of the literature and fifteen case studies from across Europe to identify a framework and a set of factors that may be used to underpin the development and sustainability of WBL programmes. The case studies reflect a range of specific programmes and more general provision across a wide range of disciplines, at various levels (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate) and duration (2-4 years). A cross case analysis is undertaken using the key elements of a systemic curriculum development cycle (identification of labour market need, planning, delivery and evaluation) and the concept of intellectual capital (Stewart 1997) is used to identify a set of factors to support the development and sustainability of WBL.

The analysis highlights curriculum as a dynamic framework integrating employer interests and guiding teaching and learning processes as well as acting as a steering mechanism for the quality of specific programmes. The analysis suggests some variation between member States in Europe, particularly related to the national regulatory environment guiding curriculum development. However, there are also many similarities in the factors which impact on the successful development
and implementation of WBL which can be used to support the partnership, structural and human capital necessary to develop and sustain WBL.

This workshop provides an opportunity to introduce and discuss the framework developed through the EU funded Work-Based Learning as an Integrated Curriculum project (http://wblic.org.uk) and to explore further the implications for course development in our national context.

Presentation

Towards the sustainability of Work Based Learning in Europe
Dr David Devins, Leeds Metropolitan University
Presentation at the ASET Annual Conference, September 2-4th 2014
Northumbria University Business School

Aim of the presentation

- Aim: To identify a framework and a set of factors that may be used to underpin the development and sustainability of WBL in Higher Education
- Structure
  - Policy Context
  - Methodology
  - Data analysis and reporting
  - Findings and discussion
  - Conclusions

European Policy Context

- The Bruges Communiqué (2010) identified WBL as one of the areas that requires increased political attention and strategic action to take the education and skills agenda forward
- The Bucharest Communiqué (2012) suggests that curricular should involve employers and labour institutions and respond quicker to the changing needs of the economy
- BUT
  - Challenge is how to achieve new curricula, new courses and new ways of delivering education
  - Education and training systems have been slow to respond failing to adapt curricula and programmes to the changing needs of the economy and labour market

Introduction

- Work Based Learning as an Integrated Curriculum (WBIC) EU Erasmus Funded Project (2011-2013)
- Partners
  - Austria (3s, FH Joanneum), Czech (Czech Technical University in Prague), England (Leeds Metropolitan University), Finland (Vassa UAS), Germany (DAA), Poland (Cracow University of Economics), Spain (University Jaume 1)
- Project Aims
  - Examine the range of definition and forms of WBIC
  - Undertake case studies in different European states which manifest integration between universities and the labour market in the curriculum development and delivery of the learning experience
  - Distil the characteristic features of these forms and identify distinctive and shared elements which suggest best practice
  - Challenge the relevance of these principles through mini-conferences in 3 additional states (Austria, Poland, Czech)

POLICY CONTEXT

Some of the drivers underpinning the development of WBL

- There are big skills gaps and mismatches in the economy that need to be overcome to achieve smart, sustainable economic growth
- WBL is seen as one of the best ways of smoothing the transition between the worlds of education and work
- In an ageing society, WBL presents opportunities for learning at work and lifelong learning
- Businesses are a key to effective governance of the system
- EU Funding e.g. Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020

Various sources cited at the 1st European Monitoring Conference WBL and Apprenticeships, Brussels, Feb 2014
Two major trends across Europe

- **Flexibility**
  - Individualised learning paths contributing to a more learner-centred system (e.g. Use of RPL, Modular programmes, Learning outcomes)
  - Curricula are more responsive to learner and employer interests
- **Curriculum ‘enrichment’**
  - Curricula no longer ‘syllabus’ - increasingly viewed as policy instruments setting the framework for education and training stakeholders

Source: Cedefop 2010

Some of the challenges

- Education and training systems have been slow to respond failing to adapt curricula and programmes to the changing needs of the economy and labour market
- EU discourse tends to emphasize VET and apprenticeships
- The role of WBL in Higher Education (HE) systems is generally less pronounced
- ‘Lower’ status of WBL in some HE systems and Institutions
- Cost-benefit and scalability

Various sources cited at the 1st European Monitoring Conference WBL and Apprenticeships, Brussels, Feb 2014

METHODOLOGY

- Underpinned by an approach ‘best’ described as pragmatic (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998)
- Develop a shared understanding of multiple realities of WBL in HE amongst multi-national research team
- Development of 15 multi-layered case studies at the programme level in Austria, Czech, Finland, Poland, Spain and the UK

Pragmatic approach

- Policy and practice influenced
- Broad theoretical framework
- Mixed-method
- Seeks to identify ‘what works’
- Looks to the future

Developing shared understanding

A working definition of WBL

‘WBL is a learning process which focuses university level thinking upon work (paid or unpaid) in order to facilitate the recognition, acquisition and application of individual and collective knowledge, skills and abilities to achieve specific accredited outcomes of significance to the learner, their employer and the university’

Source: adapted from Garnett, 2005

A working definition of Integrated Curriculum

- A document (or a collection of documents) and process providing the framework for developing and delivering learning experiences which matches learner and employer/labour market needs.’

Source: adapted from Cedefop 2010
The main differentiating factor associated with WBLIC is the extent to which employers influence the development and delivery of the curriculum.

**SUCCESS FACTORS**

- Use of a range of approaches to initiate, develop and maintain relationships with employers and intermediaries
- Build on the capital that exists with Alumni in influential positions
- The ability to respond in a positive and timely manner ('Customer service')
- The need to demonstrate benefits of university-employer working at an early stage and throughout the partnership

**Data collection**

- Case studies based on multiple interviews with programme leaders, academic planners, tutors, employers, students
- Digitally recorded and case study summary (3,000-5,000 words) provided in English
- Ethics: Informed consent

**Case Study Programmes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechatronics and management (Austria)</td>
<td>PG Dip/Masters in Modern-Railway Vehicles (Czech)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Work (Austria)</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering (Czech)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Work with Children, families (Finland)</td>
<td>Strategic Communication (UK)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production Technology and Organisation (Austria)</td>
<td>Innovation and Development Project (Spain)</td>
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<td>Business Leadership and Corporate Management (UK)</td>
<td>Business Economics (Finland)</td>
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<td>Production Technology and Organisation (Austria)</td>
<td>Applied Informatics (Finland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation Engineering in Processes and Products (Spain)</td>
<td>Organisation: IMH (Universidad del Pais Vasco) Programme: Industrial Engineering Start Date: 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Clinic (Finland)</td>
<td>Work Based Integrative Studies (UK)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**An example from Spain where WBL is emergent**

- **Market need**
  - Market need identified through student surveys and local employers to support innovation engineering within the programme

- **Development and Delivery**
  - Curriculum designed with key employers to ensure student understand the real-world application and relevance of the courses

- **Planning**
  - Demonstrate the alignment of the programme with national accreditation frameworks
  
**Data Collection/analysis framework**

- Data collection
  - Case studies based on multiple interviews with programme leaders, academic planners, tutors, employers, students
  - Digitally recorded and case study summary (3,000-5,000 words) provided in English
  - Ethics: Informed consent

- **Relationship capital**
  - Use of a range of approaches to initiate, develop and maintain relationships with employers and intermediaries
  - Build on the capital that exists with Alumni in influential positions
  - The ability to respond in a positive and timely manner ('Customer service')
  - The need to demonstrate benefits of university-employer working at an early stage and throughout the partnership

- **Evaluation**
  - Use of a range of approaches to initiate, develop and maintain relationships with employers and intermediaries
  - Digitally recorded and case study summary (3,000-5,000 words) provided in English
  - Ethics: Informed consent

- **An example from Austria where WBL is well established in some parts of the system**

- **Market need**
  - Assessment of labour market needs in accordance with national frameworks
  - WBLIC informed by concepts/ideas from intellectual capital (Stewart, 1997)

- **Planning**
  - Regular review and development of the curriculum in accordance with national frameworks
  - Use of a range of approaches to initiate, develop and maintain relationships with employers and intermediaries
  - Digitally recorded and case study summary (3,000-5,000 words) provided in English
  - Ethics: Informed consent

- **Development and Delivery**
  - Demonstrates a 3-month classroom/3-month workplace 'modern apprenticeship'
European policy context is favourably disposed towards WBL

A strategic approach to WBL (at national or institutional level)

Develop a strategic approach to development and implementation at the Institutional level

The results identify some key features associated with the successful development of WBL-related programmes but they are not exhaustive

CDC provided a framework to surface some of the challenges both within and between stages of curriculum development – highlighting the role that employers play at various stages

The analysis highlights the key role that the relationship and structural capital of universities and employers plays alongside the development of the human capital of academic staff and individual learners

A strategic approach to WBL (at national or institutional level) which provides a vision and a supportive infrastructure is a key enabling factor that is often absent

Conclusions

European policy context is favourably disposed towards WBL but both demand from employers and supply from universities is yet to be mobilised on a substantial scale

The main responsibility for curriculum reform rests with member states and national regulatory frameworks have an important role to play inhibiting or enabling it

WBL would appear to be a relatively expensive form of HE and careful consideration of the costs and benefits and scalability is needed

WBL challenges the traditional role of universities as disseminators of knowledge and there is strong resistance to it in many universities in Europe – this inhibits its contribution to the policy agenda and threatens sustainability

References


THANK YOU
RP9

Exploration of the key factors to enable Negotiated Work Based Learning to be accepted within HE - a case based approach

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Keywords
negotiated work based learning; change agents, university champions; organisation

Abstract
Using a case based approach, this paper will examine some key factors that appear necessary if negotiated forms of work based learning (NWBL) have any chance of being accepted into the HE provision. The case study examined here is part of a wider doctoral study examining what factors impact on how different universities perceive and locate work based learning (WBL) and particularly NWBL into their HE provision.

The case study is based on the University of Chester (Chester) which is generally recognised within the wider academic community in WBL as having created one of the most flexible academic frameworks to support different forms of WBL and NWBL. The study focuses on the experiences, memories and reflections of three key individuals who were involved in the early stages of developing the Work Based and Integrative Studies (WBIS) framework at Chester which is now used extensively to support all forms of WBL both internally within the university and also in the wider external community (Major, Meakin, & Perrin, 2011). The flexibility and sustainability of Chester’s WBIS framework is evidenced by its ability to facilitate an increasing variety of WBL projects from the more traditional HE WBL offerings such as placements, corporate programmes and contract partnerships to projects that are more challenging for HE such as co-delivery arrangements and formal partnerships (Talbot, Perrin, & Meakin, 2014).

Drawing on the work of Major, Perrin, Talbot, Wall and Meakin who are all practitioners and researchers of NWBL and WBL at Chester, together with prominent researchers within the wider field of NWBL such as Portwood, Costley and Gibbs, the paper identifies some key factors, such as the need for a champion, the influence of the university’s culture, the relevance of the word ‘integrative’ and the importance of timing. In addition it will highlight that for such initiatives to be
effective and sustainable, WBL and in particular NWBL must be underpinned through strong organisational and governance capabilities to ensure the resultant programmes meet the criteria from a quality assurance perspective. The paper concludes by drawing together and evaluating whether the factors which appear key in enabling the WBIS framework at Chester could be embraced by other Universities in their pursuit of WBL initiatives (Talbot et al., 2014).

Introduction

This paper is based on research which has been undertaken as part of a doctoral study examining the impact of various factors on how negotiated forms of work based learning (NWBL) have been able to develop within Higher Education (HE). The field research was undertaken at the University of Chester (Chester), a post ‘92 ‘new’ university, and took the form of in-depth qualitative interviews with three key individuals involved in the development of what Chester believes is one of the of the most flexible, and arguably most successful, frameworks for supporting NWBL.

Firstly, within the context of this paper, it is important to understand what is meant by NWBL and how it differs from other forms of experiential learning, including placements that are commonly perceived as being a form of work based learning (WBL). The importance of emphasising this distinction is illustrated when considering one of the earliest accepted definitions from Boud, Solomon, & Symes who state WBL is ‘a class of programmes that bring together universities and work organizations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces’ (Boud, Solomon, & Symes, 2001, p. 4). Such a definition encompasses all forms of WBL from conventional programmes adapted via negotiation with employers through to the creation of innovative programmes which place the learner and their workplace at the centre (Talbot et al., 2014). However, the latter forms of WBL are a step change away from the traditional academic learning frameworks that are regulated by the protocols associated with their respective academic disciplines (Major, 2002a). As a result, the term work based learning describes a variety of practices which can differ markedly in terms of their context and purpose (Boud et al., 2001; Jonathan Garnett, 2007; Nikolou-Walker & Garnett, 2004; Nixon, Smith, Stafford, & Camm, 2006; Nottingham, 2012; Weston, 2013).

Whilst recognising that WBL comes in many forms, Garnett and Workman argue that it is important to make a clear distinction regarding NWBL. They argue that in order for WBL to be classified as ‘negotiated’ it must be “grounded in the context, nature and imperatives of work” (Jonathan Garnett & Workman, 2009, p. 3) so placing the workplace, rather than a specific academic discipline, as the focus of the learning experience. The importance of this distinction is reiterated by Lester & Costley (2010) who emphasise the point that NWBL is situated within the workplace, or resulting from workplace concerns, therefore is highly contextualised. As such, the academic discipline(s) which
are drawn upon to support the subsequent learning being undertaken must be identified and applied in relation to the context of the workplace and identification of the learner’s needs and motivations for learning. As such NWBL is transdisciplinary in nature (Costley & Armsby, 2007).

**Background**

The concept of the workplace to site and contextualise learning is not new, with examples of practitioner learning embedded in several professional fields including Engineering, Health and Education (Costley, 2007). However, Major (2005) and Boud and Solomon (2001) assert that within HE, the concept of ‘negotiated’ forms of learning is relatively new.

Many universities have developed an interest in WBL in response to government pressure for them to become more accessible to business by offering programmes that are relevant and applicable to the requirements of the workplace (Bolden, Connor, Duquemin, Hirsh, & Petrov, 2009; Leitch, 2005; Talbot, 2013b; Wedgwood, 2008; Wilson, 2012). As a result, there is now a general acceptance that WBL holds an important position within HE (Brodie & Irving, 2007), with reflective and experiential learning increasingly being utilised to inform HE practices across many academic disciplines (Costley & Dikerdem, 2012).

However, despite the growth of WBL initiatives over the last twenty years (Brodie & Irving, 2007), true examples of NWBL remain rare (Major et al., 2011) and typically remain on the periphery of universities’ activities (Lester & Costley, 2010). This may be partly due to the fact that inherent cultures of many universities appear closed to the concept that learning at an HE level can occur outside the confines of clearly defined academic disciplines (Major, 2002a; Portwood, 2001). In addition, many universities’ processes and procedures are designed to support the management, delivery and assessment of standardised, discipline led programmes that are typically aimed at full time UG students. (Lester & Costley, 2010). Finally, McNay (2006) argues that rather than facilitating WBL, government pressure on universities to monitor and audit their activities has actually forced much of HE to move towards more bureaucratic and managerially focused structures with rigid quality and assessment processes that struggle to support anything other than a model of mass provision. McNay (2006) argues the rigidity in many universities’ systems and procedures means that it is far more difficult for them to support more innovative and creative programmes.

Others echo McNay’s views. Whilst it is generally accepted within HE that the workplace provides a valuable opportunity for learning (Travers, 2012a), Nottingham (2012) claims most universities are nervous about incorporating NWBL into their core provision due to concerns regarding quality assurance and how this can be accommodated and audited within their standardised systems and procedures. Even where NWBL is well established, as in the case of Middlesex University which has
one of the largest and most successful centres for NWBL in the UK, Garnett (2007) claims it does not sit comfortably within the university’s structures and procedures which have remained doggedly focused on full-time UG programmes. Garnett (2007) goes on to state that he believes the issues experienced at Middlesex are common across the sector, based on anecdotal evidence from other practitioners and researchers within the field of WBL. As well as quality assurance issues, there also remains a general undercurrent of resistance to NWBL within much of mainstream HE (Major, 2002a; Nottingham, 2012) due to misconceptions around what it involves and how it is facilitated (Lester & Costley, 2010; Wedgwood, 2008). Costley & Dikerdem (2012) refer to an institutional resistance towards research based within the field of WBL citing arguments that it is just ‘an easy way to enter higher education’, and is little more than an exploration of the development and training of practical competences. Therefore, despite McNay’s (2005) claims that the concept of the ‘research-led’ university is actually quite a modern concept and has actually distorted the purpose of a university, misunderstandings and misgivings around NWBL have resulted in claims that it is instrumentalist and economic in nature and that the teaching and learning involved in NWBL undermines the philosophies and values of mainstream HE (Wedgwood, 2008).

All of the above emphasises that if universities wish to be involved in NWBL they need to create suitable frameworks that incorporate rigorous assessment procedures which ensure the teaching and learning undertaken is accepted as being at an HE level. Up to now, there has been no nationally agreed framework for WBL (Chisholm, Harris, Northwood, & Johrendt, 2009), therefore most examples of NWBL have been developed and managed at a local level. As such, Workman (2010) emphasises the importance of having a high level champion who is able and willing to argue the case for NWBL at an institutional level. She claims success of any initiative is highly dependent upon individuals who are passionate and who are able to recognise and work within the culture of their institution in order to promote NWBL. In addition, she highlights the importance of such individuals not only being able to attract interest both internally and externally but also, perhaps more critically, funding as this can often help to sway those in a senior position to look on NWBL in a more favourable light.

Research Approach

This qualitative study is phenomenological in nature (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2006), as its purpose is to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations surrounding why the WBIS framework which is used to support NWBL was developed at Chester. In line with other qualitative studies, it is small scale and focuses on in depth, detailed enquiry (Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2006).
Qualitative Interviewing

The interview is well recognised and highly regarded as a fact finding technique. It has been used to support research for over a century which has resulted in a wide variety of interview techniques across a vast range of disciplines including business and education (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). As an interview technique, qualitative interviews provide a unique opportunity for the interviewer to develop a mutual understanding and empathy with their interviewee (Fontana, 2002) and therefore, unlike more rigid interview techniques, can provide a means of helping to unlock rich and contextual information about interviewee’s reflections of their experiences and motivations in particular situations (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Warren, 2002).

Case Study

This paper is based on a field study undertaken at Chester which is generally regarded as offering one of the most flexible forms of NWBL (Major et al., 2011) via its ‘Work Based and Integrative Studies’ (aka WBIS) framework. The WBIS framework is essentially a ‘shell’ framework that contains empty module slots that can be populated with modules from across the university. In addition, the WBIS framework now incorporates what it refers to as ‘negotiated experiential learning modules’ or NELMs where the content, learning outcomes and assessment are negotiated directly with learners and their employers. As such, the framework is the vehicle which enables the WBL team to facilitate all forms of learning including NWBL across a huge variety of disciplines and vocations (Talbot et al., 2014).

Whilst critics of case based research claim it is weak because it lacks rigour and its findings cannot be easily generalised (Cohen et al., 2006), case studies have been used extensively within all areas of social sciences including business research, and are considered particularly relevant when undertaking research that focuses on real-life contexts (Yin, 2003).

As the purpose of the case study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions and expectations of the key people involved, this qualitative study is phenomenological in nature (Cohen et al., 2006). Qualitative studies are naturally small-scale focusing on in depth, detailed enquiry (Patton, 1990). Phenomenological research provides a means of gaining a rich awareness of how people construct and interpret the world around them and the way this impacts on their relationships with others (Silverman, 2005).

Research Process

Through the use of qualitative interviews, this research examines the memories and motivations of three individuals who played key roles in how the WBIS framework was created and developed. The
three people were approached to take part in this study, not only because of their knowledge of the WBIS framework and their involvement in its development but also because of their different roles within the university which has influenced their perspectives of WBL and the WBIS framework. The interviews were spread over a period of approximately six months between November 2013 and July 2014.

The first person (A) to be interviewed was one of the first people to be employed after the WBIS framework was created, and now manages the Centre of Work Related Studies (CWRS) which is responsible for the WBIS framework and NWBL. The second person (B) is generally regarded within Chester as being the founder of the WBIS framework, and who is recognised as its most respected champion. The final person (C) is a senior manager within the Quality Assurance department at Chester. (C) was approached to take part in this study after the interviewer identified from (B) that he had been involved in validating the WBIS framework in 1998.

Each interview was approximately one hour in length, and was recorded after obtaining a verbal consent from each of the interviewees. Interviews were then transcribed and e-mailed to interviewees for comments and amendments, after which they were subjected to a basic thematic analysis to draw out common themes based on the literature and the interviews (Boyatzis, 2006). As a result, the researcher identified the following themes: **Historical Context, the Importance of ‘integrative’ in WBIS title**, and **Quality Systems and Procedures**.

**Findings**

**Historical Context:**

The creation of the WBIS framework occurred over a period of time through discussions between key individuals not only internally at Chester, but also between Chester and the leading HEI in WBL, Middlesex University. The discussions between (B) and Middlesex influenced how WBIS was finally structured.

‘I began to look then at the potential for ... offering ... people in full time employment the opportunity to gain a university qualification through work based learning effectively, ... establishing what eventually became the Work Based and Integrative Studies framework. The WBIS programme and framework as validated in 1997-98 ... was really our main ... development by way of work based learning beyond that provision ... for full time undergraduates. And we developed it at all levels ... through negotiated work based learning, and it’s this ability which has proved to be our crowning glory’. (B)

‘.. so you could say it was market pressure in a way. But also I became aware that the model of work based learning ... in Chester ... was narrower in outlook ... than ... Middlesex. And I struck up a relationship ... with Professor [names individual] who is the driving force for work based learning at Middlesex ... and ... I got very interested ... and decided that we could put together a team at Chester and do the same but clearly make it fit our specific needs and
requirements, and our culture and everything else. So [colleague 1] joined me, [colleague 2] joined me and [C] joined me, um, and I think it was the four of us really that worked on this.’ (B)

In addition, at the time when WBIS was going through its validation, Chester was an HE College whose awards were accredited through the University of Liverpool (Liverpool). As such the relationship between Chester and Liverpool was critical to the creation of the WBIS framework.

‘And I well remember the work based and integrative studies going to the University of Liverpool Senate and … the Vice Principal … telling me that most of the academics at the Senate just put their head in their hands and said:

‘look we don’t understand this, we don’t understand it, but we trust you [Chester] if you say this is what you want; there is a market for this, then you know, you have our blessing, as it were’,

which I thought was rather nice really! And I think that was because the University had always gone the extra mile … you dot all the I’s and cross all the T’s and provide the relevant paperwork and so on. We were always aware that we had to do a little bit more than perhaps even the people at Liverpool did to demonstrate our proficiency.’ (B)

‘They [Liverpool] trusted us, and this was something innovative that they didn’t have. But because the validation discussions were conducted according to due procedure and seemed to convince particularly the externals that were present at the time um, they trusted us that we knew what we were doing with this.’ (C)

Finally, the relationship between (B) and the senior managers and particularly the Principal and Vice Principal of Chester at that time, together with his decision to involve (C) to resolve any quality issues appears to have been a key factor.

‘Hmm, that was a deliberate move to get him [C] involved because we knew that unless we could meet all of the quality requirements of the University … we wouldn’t get very far at all! (B)

‘I don’t mean this to sound arrogant in any way but I think because … I’d earned the respect of my colleagues as an academic … [the then] Dean of Arts and Humanities … was not at all sympathetic to work based learning … but he respected me.’ (B)

‘he [Principal of Chester College] was very, very supportive and I think without that leadership and support from the top it might not have happened.’ (B)

It would have been just at the transfer between [the last Principal] and [the VC]. There was a little bit of an interregnum when [the deputy principal] … who was acting as the Principal at that time was in favour of this. She definitely would have taken an interest in this because that was her nature … she was interested in all new programmes … She … chaired a number of validations.’ (C)

Importance of ‘Integrative’ in the WBIS title

The importance of the inclusion ‘integrative’ within the framework title was stressed by all three interviewees. When asked to clarify what they meant by ‘integrative’ and why it is so important, they all stated that WBIS framework requires the integration of taught modules from the traditional
academic curricula to be applied to and underpin any experiential learning that takes place within the workplace. Without this, they all argued that the resultant learning would not have the necessary academic rigour to be classified as HE level, and that it was this characteristic which differentiated the Chester WBIS framework from WBL offered elsewhere.

‘So we called it (stresses) work based and integrative studies because we wanted people to have the opportunity not only to learn through work but also to take modules from the University’s suite of modules that were relevant to what they wanted to learn.’ (B)

‘... the clue is in the word 'integrative' in the WBIS name, and people often say 'what the hell does that mean?', because Work Based Learning is fairly obvious and intuitive. ‘Integrative’ refers to the fact that students can integrate into their chosen pathway of study relevant taught modules. ... Most universities with work based learning frameworks, if you look at what they've got, they do APL and they do work based projects obviously, and credit transfer. But what they don't tend to do is the taught stuff. So in other words, the taught work related modules we've got which are subject specific they don't tend to have. So that is something else we have that they don’t have.’ (A)’

So (slight sigh) there was a lot of debate over the title (slight pause) um, and eventually a decision was reached that it should say on the tin what it was meant to do: it was meant to be work based and it was meant to cover integrative studies; studies that were integrated. And I remember the debate being very careful not to use the word ‘integrated’ but ‘integrative’ studies. And the idea was that you could free up the modular framework within the university and put together specific programmes based on modules that were already there and form your own programme which would be approved on an individual basis. ... where we didn’t have um, modules that were pre-existing in the modular framework; that’s where the taught work based learning modules came in. (C)

‘originally it was designed firstly for individuals, and the integrative studies part was much more prominent; this was the way it was sold at Validation; that it would make use of all the modules in the university by putting them together in for an individual pathway for an individual route through for individual students.’ (C)

Quality Systems and Procedures

The flexibility of the WBIS framework also seems to be at odds with Chester’s processes and procedures which are often characterised as managerial and bureaucratic. As such, it was important to understand how (B) and his team were able to argue for its existence, and also to explore its relationship with Chester’s quality assurance systems.

‘firstly by the parts of the university that looked after standards and quality procedures burying their heads in the sand and not paying close attention as to what was going on in the WBIS area. And secondly, ... allowing the WBIS area to set up almost a parallel registry.’ (C). The institution as a whole is very supportive of WBIS because it’s a key USP ... However, layers below ... systems which are very often ‘one size fits all’ have tended to be applied right across the board. Then you get a situation whereby somebody ... says 'hold on a sec, this doesn't fit; this doesn't work for us' because we're completely different ... and WBIS doesn't quite fit.’ (A)
We’ve had the impression that because the practitioners in WBIS can give such a good account of themselves and the programme, that people who are very unfamiliar with it don’t know how to counter any propositions put forward; they don’t know how to engage in that sort of discussion. And therefore have not come to any conclusions of unsound practice, if there is any. Um, basically it is too complicated, it’s too novel; it’s outside auditors’ typical experience so they’ve let it go. There’s a feeling we’ve got through a couple of audits on that basis. (C)

‘My view is, as far as I’ve been aware, nothing’s ever really gone wrong with it. But (emphasis), um until very recently it’s been completely unmonitored (slight pause) through formal mechanisms; through mechanisms that explicitly and clearly report back through normal university monitoring systems.’ (C)

‘I think this is why we’ve experienced so many, um yes, difficulties in convincing people how things should work. You know I’m thinking of the broader university and central services … They always had the view that a student came here for three years on a full-time basis and they were comfortable with that. And all these systems which we have in place are built around that idea of what the university is about. (B)

The issue of autonomy also seems to be important for frameworks such as WBIS to develop and grow. As such where it is situated was raised as a key concern.

‘if you look at the history of Work Based Learning in the UK that these things grow and flourish when there is a degree of independence and when the trans-disciplinarity of the thing is allowed to flourish; when they are put into a silo that is when the cap is put on growth, and it’s too much of a coincidence. (A)

The ability for WBIS to grow at the outset also appears to be closely linked to (B)’s ability to attract funding.

‘So there was a lot of money around and the Government of the day was using to incentivise our education. Now our vice chancellors, with the best will in the world, I’m sure don’t just support initiatives for their … benefit … there has to be money involved (emphasis) in other words, and there was money involved, and reasonable sums of money! … so the VC was pleased for people to have ideas and offer to submit bids … and bring in money. So we brought in a fair bit of money, in various ways, and brought in student numbers which enabled me to increase staffing and get the whole thing on a departmental/centre type footing. Eventually, for a short while we were a faculty (small laugh).’ (B)

Discussion
When examining the findings, it becomes apparent that the opportunity to create the WBIS framework and its development has been largely down to timing, context and the people involved. The WBIS framework was created in 1998 when there was significant interest by the then government to create links between employers and universities. This resulted in an era where grants and funding were readily available to universities who wished to explore various forms of WBL including NWBL. Through various bids by [B] in particular, Chester was able to take advantage
of this and gained approximately £75,000 over a four year period to develop its WBL offering, validate WBIS and create the Centre of Work Related Studies (CWRS). What is also evident is that when CWRS and WBIS appear to have grown appears to coincide with when they have had a degree of autonomy within the University structure and hierarchy.

What is also clear is that the WBIS framework has never sat that easily within Chester’s systems and structures and that for it to function, it has effectively created its own set of procedures for auditing processes which [C] referred to as a parallel registry, likening WBIS to a small university within a larger university. For Chester to accept such a radical concept was only possible because [B] was so highly respected and he was able to gain both interest and support from those at the highest level within Chester. This commitment to the project is clearly evidenced by the fact that at the time of the validation the Acting Principal of Chester argued its case at its inaugural validation meeting.

Another factor which appears to be important is the timing of the validation. In 1998 Chester did not have its own awarding powers, but validated its programmes and modules through the University of Liverpool. Chester was a small, systems oriented HE college feeding into a part of a university which operated on a more collegiate basis where power was devolved down to faculty level. As such it is likely that much of Liverpool, including its senior management team, were not even aware of WBIS. In addition, whilst it is clear that Liverpool did not understand WBIS or WBL, they appear to have had few reservations regarding validating the framework because of their confidence in Chester’s quality assurance procedures, despite recognising that this was a departure from the more traditional HE mode of teaching, learning and assessment.

**Conclusions**

Whilst it should be recognised that this is a very small scale study which has only sought the views and impressions of three individuals of a project which took place over fifteen years ago, there are some important conclusions to be drawn. The first is the importance of having a champion who is respected by their peers, those at the most senior level and also within the wider HE community. Otherwise it is unlikely that NWBL will gain the necessary ‘buy-in’ from the senior management team. In addition, it is essential that those promoting NWBL show evidence that the quality systems and procedures being implemented have the necessary rigour to ensure the learning taking place is at an HE level. As part of this it is essential that NWBL can show evidence that the learning and assessment meets the QAA requirements for study at HE level. At Chester this is defined by the word ‘integrative’ in the WBIS title which emphasises that the WBIS framework melds academic and work based learning together so that each support and build upon one other.
It is also clear that frameworks, such as WBIS, sit uncomfortably with most universities' systems and procedures as the latter are typically highly standardised and are geared towards full-time undergraduate provision. As such, it is essential that those at the most senior level allow departments (such as the Centre of Work Related Studies (CWRS) some degree of autonomy over managing their programmes, otherwise NWBL is unlikely to grow and develop. However, in turn those involved in NWBL must provide evidence that the systems and procedures monitoring NWBL are formalised and audited and they need to be visible to those responsible for quality assurance. In addition, for NWBL to be allowed this degree of autonomy it must be able to show not only that it is financially viable but that it can generate enough income to warrant it having the dispensation to work outside normal university systems. Whilst the political climate around 2000 resulted in a lot of publicly funded grants which enabled universities and colleges such as Chester to explore NWBL, the current economic and political environment means this funding is no longer so freely available. As such, it is questionable whether anything like WBIS could be created today.

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Student International Experience & Perceived Employability Gains

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Higher Education, Global Graduate, International experience, Employability

Abstract
In recent years there has been discourse both within UK graduate recruitment and within Higher Education about the value of international student experience, student mobility, and the concept of the global graduate. Literature suggests that graduates across the globe tend to have similar expectations and demands placed on them (Harvey & Bowers-Brown, 2004; Andrews & Higson, 2008), and Diamond, Walkley & Scott-Davies in their report: ‘Global Graduates into Global Leaders’ (2011) identified the need for the addition of the graduate perspective to the debate. In response to this and other linked professional questions, the UK Universitas 21 (a global network of research-intensive universities) employability group commissioned a qualitative research project to explore the effect of international experience on student self-perception of their employability.

75 students with three different types of international work or study experience and none, from four UK HE institutions (Birmingham University, Edinburgh University, Glasgow University & Nottingham University) took part in semi structured telephone interviews. Questions were designed to explore the impact of international experience on participants’ perception of their ability to flourish in a global work environment. Interviews were transcribed and analysed.

Gains from international experience were perceived to be a mixture of personal qualities or resources and specific employment related factors, which were consistent with those reported by Crossman & Clarke (2011) in their qualitative study in Australia of stakeholder perceptions of international experience and employability.
The qualities and skills reported to be enhanced by international experience mapped well on to the top ten Priority Global Competencies reported in the Global Graduates into Global Leaders report (2011) and students who had undertaken some form of international experience tended to rate themselves higher on these competencies than those who had no direct international work or study experience, with some differences being identified between those who undertook international work experience rather than international study.

Generally barriers to international experience tended to be social, cultural and financial, but interestingly a number of institutional factors were also identified. Conversely the university environment itself was identified as providing an international perspective through the diversity of the population and through elements of the course of study being followed. Analysis of the data is ongoing.

It was also noted that those who did engage in international experience tended to be a small minority of any university population and consideration was given to the need for institutions and careers and employability services in particular to position and configure their activities to respond to student perceptions, the institutional offer and the demand for Global Graduates.

**Introduction**

For many years the value of international experience for young adults has been taken for granted. For any young man of wealth and position in the 17th and 18th century international travel was almost mandatory in the form of the Grand Tour. It has been described as shaping the creative and intellectual sensibilities of some of the eighteenth century’s greatest artists, writers and thinkers (Adam Matthew Digital). It is therefore unsurprising to find discourse in the Higher Education literature over the last three decades about the value of international experience for students. Wilson (1993) in her article about the importance of a global perspective for teachers, described the gains from international work experience in terms of a global perspective (which encompasses substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding) and developing the self and relationships (encompassing personal growth and interpersonal relationships), which are not dissimilar to the priority global competencies identified by Diamond et al (2011) nearly twenty years later.

In more recent years the employability agenda has been incorporated into the discussion, and concerns have been expressed about the ability of graduates to meet the needs of employers in an increasingly mobile and globalised work environment (Yunus & Li, 2005). Diamond et al (2011) note
that the UK is only ranked 34th worldwide for external student mobility where the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) nations have developed their external mobility by a factor of ten over the last 30 years. Literature suggests that graduates across the globe tend to have similar expectations and demands placed on them (Harvey & Bowers-Brown, 2004; Andrews & Higson, 2008), and Diamond et al (2011) identified the need for the addition of the graduate perspective to the debate.

International literature dealing with the employability of graduates is often discipline specific. For example, Andrews & Higson (2008) in their European study found that business graduates were expected to be ‘employment-ready’ (p.409) and on employment should possess all the required competencies and resources to work with minimum supervision; and Wros & Archer (2010) list benefits for nurses of international experience including knowledge and skill acquisition as well as personal development and maturation.

There is also a strong voice in the literature on the utility of work experience for enhancing employability, including employers opinions (Kagaari, 2007; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005), policy recommendations (CBI, 2007) and empirical research (Cranmer, 2006; Wilton, 2008), although, as noted above, the reporting of international work experience is often discipline specific in the literature or encompassed within a larger study e.g. Crossman & Clarke (2010).

There seems to be a consensus in the literature and in the policies of the UK government about the value of international experience for students, and the importance of a global mindset (Dept of Business, Innovation & Skills, 2009). However, as Tymon (2013) points out, the literature about graduate employability from the point of multiple stakeholders is rich and varied, but the views and perceptions of undergraduates themselves tend to be less well known. Crossman & Clarke (2010) also note the need for research to explore whether the gains from international experience represent enhancements to the skills and abilities which tend to be developed by all graduates, or whether they a part of a unique set of attributes gained through concentrated engagement with another culture and society. These questions are particularly relevant to Higher Education Institution (HEI) Careers and Employability Services, and in an effort to explore the undergraduate perspective, the UK U21 (Universitas 21*) Employability Group has commissioned a joint research project to explore the impact of a variety of types of international experience, as well as no international experience, on student self-perception of their ability to flourish in a global work/life environment.

* The U21 global network consists of 27 research intensive universities around the world and the UK partners are the universities of Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Nottingham.
Methodology

Design

A qualitative design was chosen, whereby participants took part in semi-structured telephone (or face-to-face in the case of one HEI) interviews, which were recorded and analysed. Thematic analysis was chosen as the method of analysis, as the project’s aims were to explore participants’ ideas and perceptions with the aim of identifying and reporting patterns within the interview data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

As far as possible a realist inductive approach was taken to data analysis, allowing the data to determine the themes, rather than any particular position.

Participants

Four categories of student were identified -

1. International students ‘studying abroad’ in a UK U21 Institution
2. UK students returned after a period at a U21 Institution
3. UK students who have had a period of overseas work experience or volunteering which is not part of their course of study
4. UK students who have had no International experience beyond studying at a U21 institution in the UK

Up to five students from each of the four UK U21 HEIs in each category were recruited via purposive sampling. A total of 75 participants in total took part in semi-structured telephone interviews.

Materials

A question schedule was agreed between the four employability services and the researcher, based on a combination of the literature and practitioner experience. Questions were amended slightly for category 4 students who had no international experience beyond studying at a U21 institution

Example questions

When you think about your future, and careers you might follow, how important do you feel it is to have an understanding of the world beyond the UK? (or your own country)...and why?

How do you feel the experience as a whole has affected your outlook or skills or approach to life in general?

How do you think your experience might help to prepare you for your future career?

Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim.
Ethics

Participants were given a verbal briefing which was recorded as part of the interview, and their explicit informed consent to participate and to be recorded was obtained and included as part of each recording. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and request that their data was destroyed.

Participants were also informed that recordings were anonymised for transcription, stored securely, and are destroyed at the completion of the project. The research utilised the ethical framework of the British Psychological Society (2006) throughout.

Results

Fig 1. Perceived gains from international experience overall

Note: Themes in red- emphasised by those who undertook voluntary work or placement overseas
Fig 2. A Comparison of Global Competencies

**Key Findings 2**

**Priority Global Competencies**
(Top 10 as reported in the AGR/CFE/CIHE report, 2011)

- An ability to work collaboratively with teams of people from a range of backgrounds & countries
- Excellent communication skills: speaking & listening
- A high degree of drive and resilience
- An ability to embrace multiple perspectives and challenge thinking
- A capacity to develop new skills and behaviours according to role requirements
- A high degree of self awareness
- An ability to form professional global networks
- An openness to and respect of a range of perspectives from around the world
- Multi-cultural learning ability

**Qualities & Skills reported enhanced by International Experience**

- Team working & learning how to work with different people
- Confidence and communication
- Resilience
- Leadership
- Creativity/Imagination
- Awareness/appreciation of different ways of thinking & doing
- Problem Solving
- Adaptability
- Ability to use both narrow & wide perspectives (of work)
- Using & making networks & contacts
- Broaden Opportunities
- Demonstrable ability to cope internationally

*Note: Skills in red- emphasised by those who undertook voluntary work or placement overseas*

**Table 1 Average self ratings on Priority Global Competencies** (Global Graduates into Global Leaders, AGR/CFE/CIHE report 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>UK students with no International experience</th>
<th>UK students who undertook work overseas</th>
<th>UK students who studied overseas</th>
<th>Overseas students studying at a UK university</th>
<th>UoB students who undertook structured international internships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work collaboratively in diverse teams</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to appreciate the point of view of others from a different background</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Figures give the mean rating where students were asked to rate themselves on a score of 1 - 5, where 1 is not strong and 5 is very strong, for each competency.

Barriers to international experience

These were often practical such as finance or accommodation.

“I wouldn’t have been able to get my job back when I returned” - Glasgow

“I’d lose the place in a flat with my girlfriend” - Edinburgh

Language was also a factor,

“I’d probably be afraid of the language barrier” – Birmingham

There were course related concerns about time away affecting grades adversely as well as structural problems

“I would have liked to but ... joint honours course I would have had to drop one or the other and I didn’t want to”- Nottingham

Those who did not undertake international experience were not unaware of its importance, however:

“...banking is really global and we need to be aware of everything that’s going on around the world” Birmingham

and were able to identify ways in which they had gained international experience on campus:

“probably one of the first settings where I was exposed in a more professional, more working sense to people that gave me some sort of global and international context and experience” Glasgow

Findings particular to those who undertook international work experience as opposed to overseas study

Those who undertook work overseas were often the least confident initially, perhaps due to feeling unprepared,
“being over there in another country not knowing anyone else... kind of getting into that kind of experience of having to go out there and open yourself up to different people and different challenges” – Glasgow

but they also tended to return with the most increases in confidence and the highest perceived increases in both life skills and employability (see table 1).

“I think it’s, well it’s definitely helped my skills. I hadn’t worked in...a sort of large company before and there are definitely skills that you need to develop in terms of...things like the way that you communicate working in teams, working in teams that were scattered across the country sometimes, sort of co-ordinate and things like that.” – Nottingham

“I got to do more there than I would have been able to in this country. It gave me more confidence” – Birmingham

In addition to the 4 general categories of students already discussed, the study included a very small sample of students who had undertaken one of the structured international internship programmes at the University of Birmingham.

This group had competed for funding for their international internships and viewed their internships more as a challenge and an opportunity. They had been prepared for their experience by undertaking a number of pre-travel briefings and they also engaged in structured learning and reflection activities on their return.

It appears that this preparation may have increased these participants’ confidence pre-departure and left them feeling less unprepared than those from the other cohorts.

“The most useful part was probably having to be there by myself and not actually knowing anyone, it helped me be more engaging with the other people there and helped me be really independent.” – Birmingham

“.think it helped me sort of be more confident and stuff when I communicate things and when I’m working with people who I’ve never met before. Yes, just things that people require for workers to have... from my internship” - Birmingham
Discussion

It is important to note that this is an ongoing project and this paper is reporting on work in progress. Nevertheless, overall these findings are consistent with those reported by Crossman & Clarke (2010) in their qualitative study in Australia looking at stakeholder perceptions of international experience, showing clear connections between employability and international experience.

In contrast to studies discussing Asian students, Brooks, Waters & Pimlott-Wilson (2012) did not find the strategic pursuit of labour market advantage to be an important motivating force in their study of UK students who pursue a full course of study outside the UK. This seemed also to be the case for UK participants who studied abroad in this study, whereas those who came to the UK to study from other countries tended to be more career oriented than their UK counterparts. Brooks et al (ibid) suggest that this may be partially explained by a perception that employers value overseas institutions less than those from the UK, and that the reputation of the university may be a factor rather than its location. However as study abroad in this context tended to be for one year only and the degree awarded by the UK institution, this is unlikely to be an important factor for participants.

The findings suggest that those who undertake international work experience return with the most increases in confidence and the highest perceived increases in both life skills and employability, compared to those who study internationally. In line with the findings of Rothwell & Charleston (2013) individuals tended to “want to make a difference” in the lives of others or to gain new experiences rather than to improve their CVs or increase their chances of finding employment, when choosing to undertake international work experience. Having said this, participants were not unaware of these advantages. It is particularly interesting that those students who had undertaken structured internships with the associated preparatory and reflective learning elements reported higher levels of perceived competency; possibly not that surprising but an important confirmation of the value of thorough pre-departure, on-programme and post-return support for those undertaking international work experience. Interestingly, Rothwell & Charleston(ibid) found that the undertaking of international volunteer work for disingenuous reasons is more likely to fail for the individual and that altruistic motivation is more likely to result in enhanced emotional development & leadership skills, which does provide some quantitative support for the findings here.

Tymon (2013) suggests that communication skills and self-confidence may be developed as part of the process of undertaking a degree, and table 1 above does seem to indicate that differences between the self-perception of priority global competencies for participants with different types of
experience and none may be in terms of enhancement of abilities, rather than developing new and unique attributes.

The inclusion in this research of students who had not undertaken any form of prior international study or work experience has provided possibly the most intriguing outcomes. Their relatively high level of perceived competency is somewhat surprising but again this confirms a growing body of thought that recognises that global citizenship is something that can be developed via on-campus activity and there is a need to create more cohesive methods to acknowledge/accredit this activity e.g. Crowther (2000), Jon (2013)

Taking this approach is critical given the barriers identified here to gaining international experience i.e. funding, confidence, course programme etc. If developing a global mindset is indeed a key element of enhanced employability then universities must develop approaches that support the vast majority of students who cannot undertake international experience for very good reasons.

References

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Work Placements and Work Experience in History and the Humanities

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Key words
History, Humanities, Creativity, Enterprise, Co-Production, Students as Researchers/Producers

Abstract:

This is a new project and very much work in progress. I am interested in three main areas of work placement and work experience: 1 is the documentation and recording of how work placements and work experience has developed over the last twenty five years; 2. Is the development and integration of work experience and public engagement into the curriculum; 3 is the extent to which creativity and enterprising characteristics can be developed and encouraged in students through work placements and particularly projects which involve co-production between staff, students and external parties.

My research focuses on the provision of work placements and work experience in History departments in HE but I want to put that into the wider context of the Humanities. There has been a great deal of work done on work placements and work experience in Business-related degrees, and to some extent in other vocational and professional programmes but there has been relatively little work done on provision in the Humanities, and indeed until the last decade there has been relatively little activity which has actually been badged as work placement or work experience (although that may be different to the actual extent of activity). There have been a number of reasons for the expansion of this activity, including the increase of fees and the greater concentration on the ‘value’ and outcomes of degree programmes, government attempts to manage ‘quality’ through the collation of and publicity given to KIS data, pedagogical interests in enabling students through ‘students as producers’ and ‘students as researchers’ which has come to influence university teaching and learning strategies, and the pressure of the recent and next REF on university researchers to be more outwardly facing and demonstrate ‘impact’.
I am taking my own dept’s experience as a case study. History at Huddersfield has one of, if not the, oldest, Work Placement programme of any university History dept, dating back to c.1990. Over the last decade or so we have also developed a heritage focus to the programme which has become increasingly involved in working with external partners. The paper will explore changes to the provision and its rationale, especially the development of work with external partners and public and community engagement projects. In January 2014 I and colleagues founded a Special Interest Group in Creativity, Enterprise and Co-Production, which is designed to develop work in this field, improve curriculum and explore interactions between these factors. In order to develop my work I am interested in talking to colleagues in other institutions and Humanities disciplines to explore what they are doing/have been doing, for comparative purposes.

Presentation

**Work Placements and Work Experience in History and the Humanities**

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**Development and recording of WP/WBL**

- History of WP in History at Huddersfield
- WP elsewhere in the discipline
- WP in other Humanities subjects

**WP/WBL in the Humanities curriculum**

- WP/WBL and government
- WP/WBL and the institution
- WP/WBL and the Benchmark statement

**Introduction**

- Development and recording of WP/WBL
- WP/WBL in the Humanities curriculum
- Creativity and Enterprise
Distinctive issues for the Humanities curriculum

- Nature of the discipline
- Nature of Destinations for Humanities graduates
- Nature of the student body

Curriculum approaches

- The Silo
- The Outsource
- The Import
- The Sandwich
- The Pervasive

Research, The REF and Public Engagement

- Student involvement in staff public engagement activities
- Benefits
- Risks

Creativity and Enterprise

- Imagination and assessment
- Partnerships across disciplines
- Collabhub and working outside the curriculum
RP12

Linking your day job to research: A review of trends in research methods in cooperative and work-integrated education

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Abstract

This paper investigates trends over the past 15 years in methodologies and approaches in research into cooperative and work-integrated education (CWIE). CWIE, an expression first used by Coll and Zegwaard (2011), is intended to be an umbrella term capturing a variety of similar practices that use different names such as sandwich courses, work-integrated learning (WIL), practicum, vocational education, industry based learning, cooperative education etc. The term has been taken up by the World Association of Cooperative Education and is defined as ‘embracing all forms of experiential learning utilised by industry and educational institutions to prepare the next generation of global professionals’. In practice this presents mostly as relevant workplace-based learning.

Over a decade ago, Coll and Chapman (2000) commented that quantitative methodology predominated in research in this field and they encouraged the use of a wider range of approaches. The aim of our research is a) to review research practice globally to identify whether this call has been answered; b) to identify trends in research to plan future studies in CWIE effectively.

This review studies research published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education. The projects have been analysed to identify methodology and research approach; data collection method; method of analysis; and the outcomes and impact of the research. Over 100 projects conducted globally are analysed. This study is related to recent literature about methodology.

The findings demonstrate progress in broadening the range of methods. It is no longer sufficient to consider only whether to use qualitative or quantitative research because within those two approaches a range of methods is used, including combinations of both qualitative and quantitative. Specific and clearly identifiable outcomes are evident from the majority of projects. Some aspects of the student journey towards employability have received more attention than others.
The paper makes suggestions that can assist with the future planning of research projects in cooperative and work-integrated education and vocational education, in particular research that can be undertaken as part of the CWIE practitioner work role.

Background
Over the past 15 years significant gains have been made in research in cooperative and work-integrated education (CWIE). CWIE, an expression first used by Coll and Zegwaard (2011), is intended to be an umbrella term capturing a variety of similar practices that use different names such as sandwich courses, work-integrated learning (WIL), practicum, vocational education, industry based learning, cooperative education etc. The term has been taken up by the World Association of Cooperative Education and is defined as ‘embracing all forms of experiential learning utilised by industry and educational institutions to prepare the next generation of global professionals’. In practice this presents mostly as relevant workplace-based learning. Bartkus and Stull (1997) analysed the co-op/WIL literature in 1997, describing it as sketchy, limited, and uncertain, with a predominant focus on best practice, essentially echoing views held by Wilson (1988) 10 years earlier. The same authors assessed the research scene for two editions of the International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-integrated Education. Comparatively they described the literature in 2011 as stronger than the landscape described in the first edition seven years earlier (Bartkus & Higgs, 2011; Bartkus & Stull, 2004). Of significance is the growth reflected in the increasing output of the Asia Pacific Journal Cooperative Education as an indication of the maturation of co-op/WIL over the last 15 years (Zegwaard, 2012).

The nature of the research was initially slow to change. Coll and Chapman (2000) commented that quantitative methodology predominated in this field and encouraged the use of a wider range of approaches. Five years later Eames and Cates (2005) made a similar comment. Coll and Chapman outlined the merits of both quantitative and qualitative research and emphasised the importance of choosing an appropriate design for a specific research question. With only 5% of reported CWIE research in the 1990s using qualitative approaches, the depth of enquiry afforded by qualitative methodology was missing. This led Coll and Chapman to call for a greater use of qualitative methods.

The absence of a holistic approach to co-op research concerned Grainger (2001) and led her to suggest a greater use of qualitative or interpretative research. Grainger commented that the complexity of the teaching environment requires a more holistic view that can be better achieved through qualitative or interpretative research.
The relationship between the qualitative methodology and interpretative philosophy is well documented. Qualitative research draws heavily on interpretation – interpretation by the participants, by the researchers and then by the readers of the reported research (Stake, 2010). Interpretative research is concerned with an understanding of subjective meaning (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

By 2009 there was sufficient interpretative research to for a critical analysis of interpretative studies (Coll & Kalnins, 2009). The analysis identified 141 articles from four journals. A systematic analysis of these articles was undertaken. Coll and Kalnins concluded that “interpretive research is a significant part of the co-op research landscape, with numerous such studies published in the literature.” They comment about the diversity of interpretative studies in nature and scope, the variety of research methods and the range of co-op programs studied. They make particular note of “the complexity of the learning contexts or situations (i.e., the dual context, meaning that both workplace and on-campus learning occurs), and type of issues investigated (e.g., leadership, equity and migrants’ integration into the workforce (p.3)” . In spite of this diversity most studies employed interviews as the main data collection method, which Coll and Kalnins maintained was appropriate for the complex topics studied.

One specific form of research noted by Coll and Chapman (2000) is action research which they felt fitted the “highly pragmatic outcomes” of CWIE and meant that “practitioners are well positioned to conduct action research” (p.1). Grainger and Taylor (2004) were also advocates for this form of research in the first edition of the International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-integrated Education (2004). This methodology focuses strongly on reflection of one’s own action; a cyclical approach between reflection, action to improve a situation and then further reflection. It is well suited to collaborative research in a specific situation. Along with case study research and ethnography, action research is often listed as an effective method in education research (Arthur, Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012; Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). The importance of these methods is that they can be used for research undertaken within the context of the everyday work role of a CWIE practitioner.

The aim of this paper is a) to review research practice globally to identify whether Coll and Chapman’s call for more qualitative research has been answered; b) to identify trends in research to plan future studies in CWIE effectively. In particular this paper seeks to identify research that can easily be undertaken within the context of the work undertaken by CWIE practitioners and in doing so link research to their ‘day job’.
Methods
This paper studies research published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, an international journal which covers global research with a focus on the southern hemisphere. The projects have been analysed to identify methodology and research approach; data collection method; method of analysis; and the outcomes and impact of the research. The review was undertaken using document analysis. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents. It can encompass a huge range of documents, however in this case it is one form of documents, research studies in journals and conference proceedings. Document analysis is sometimes described as a qualitative research method in that text is examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding or develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The systematic procedure involves finding, selecting, appraising and synthesizing data. If qualitative data has been obtained, content analysis can be used to obtain results.

Document analysis is often used in conjunction with other methods as a form of triangulation, however can also be the sole source of data in a stand-alone study, as in this paper. The value of such analysis is that it can provide good quality data quickly and cost-effectively and it enables cross-cultural and longitudinal analysis (Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). That has certainly been the case by using APJCE as the journal. Research studies for the past 14 years are available from several countries, although predominantly the southern hemisphere.

Very few of the potential weaknesses of document analysis adversely affect this study. Bowen describes limitations of document analysis as insufficient detail, low retrievability, biased selectivity (Bowen, 2009). For this study the presence or absence of information about research methodology and methods is part of the findings. All papers in the selected journals and proceedings were selected and could be retrieved.

The importance of robust data collection means that the documentation of procedure must be provided in the reporting of the research (Bowen, 2009). For this paper, a spreadsheet was set up with headings for methodology and research approach; data collection method; method of analysis; and the outcomes of the research. The journal articles were reviewed by one of the authors of this paper who is described as the data collector. Initially a trial review of papers in three issues of APJCE were analysed. First the abstract was read to obtain as much of the data as possible, then the early sections of the paper and the method section were also read. The findings section was scanned to ensure that it matched the description of data analysis and/or to obtain any further information.
about data analysis. Data was recorded in the spreadsheet using the terminology of the paper author as much as possible.

After documenting results for three issues, three additional headings were added to the spreadsheet and all issues of APJCE were analysed. In several papers the methodology was not named. As this is critical to the objectives of this paper, an assessment was made by the data collector as to whether the paper used quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. A multi-stage approach was evident in many papers and so an assessment of the number of stages in each paper was made. Table 1 gives a description of all of the data collected.

If the paper was not deemed to be a research paper, this was noted and so no further data about that paper was recorded. For articles described as case studies, these were only recorded if they used the expression in the research sense. If they merely described a program or gave ideas about how CWIE could be delivered they were regarded as a showcase example and excluded from analysis. In total 118 research papers were recorded.

Table 1. Data collected about each journal article identified as a research paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collected</th>
<th>Description of data collected</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic or area of research</td>
<td>A few words taken from the heading to indicate the general area of research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated methodology or research approach</td>
<td>The methodology or approach as described by the authors of the journal articles, if given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology as identified by data collector *</td>
<td>Three broad groups were used. Where possible the stated methodology was categorised into one of three broad groupings: Qualitative; quantitative or mixed methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of stages of data collection</td>
<td>This data was assessed by the author of this paper using the following guidelines: in a longitudinal study, the number of times data was collected from participants; in a multi-method study the number of groups from which data was collected and/or the number of data collection methods used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection methods</td>
<td>The name of each type of data collection method/s used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of analysis</td>
<td>If an analysis method was described by the authors, this was recorded, using the terminology used by the author/s of the journal article. For statistical analysis, the type of statistics used in the findings was noted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample size **
The number of participants from whom data was collected, along with response rate or number in population.

Sampling method **
As described by the author/s of the journal articles.

Part of a larger study or linked to other papers
Whether the study was part of a larger project or linked to other papers.

Outcomes *
As determined by the author of this paper. Coded as evaluation & recommendation; effect of WIL; confirmation of benefits or practice.

* indicates that an assessment was required by the data collector. For all other variables the terminology of the paper author was recorded.

** Data relating to sample size and sampling method have not been analysed in this paper.

Results
The results show an increase in the number of research papers published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education; an increase in the use of qualitative approaches; a prevalence of multi-stage projects; considerable use of interviews, self-completion questionnaires and secondary data readily available to CWIE practitioners; a varied approach to describing qualitative analysis and a range of outcomes from the studies. Each of these findings is now explained.

Increase in research papers in the Asia-Pacific Journal
The number of papers published in the journal is increasing at a considerable rate. This is most easily demonstrated by comparing papers published in 2013 with those published in three years of 2000 – 2002. In 2013, the last complete year of analysis, there were four issues with 23 papers in total. In the early days, it took three years (2000 – 2002) to achieve 21 papers, with two issues a year each with a small number of papers. The percentage of papers that contained research in those early years was 43% (nine papers), whereas now research papers are the norm (17 papers or 74% in 2013). In the early years showcase or conceptual papers were more common.

Increasing use of qualitative approaches
With the increase in research papers overall, there has been an increase in the number of papers for all methods. The following analysis is based on a comparison of the same years 2013 compared with 2000-2002. The number of qualitative papers has increased dramatically from two out of nine in 2000 – 2002 to seven out of 17 in 2013. There has also been a development in the use of mixed methods, although the expression is not often used by the authors of papers. Mixed methods first became evident in the Asia-Pacific Journal in 2005 and been increasingly used since then.
Table 2. Comparison of research papers in 2013 compared with 2000-2002.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000-2002</th>
<th>2013</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of papers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of research papers</td>
<td>9 (43%)</td>
<td>17 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of qualitative</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of qualitative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mixed methods</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis solely</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Looking at the full range of papers in all years, for 30% of papers the approach or methodology was not described. This mainly occurred in the early years for quantitative papers. In more recent years it is less common in even quantitative studies for the research approach not to be identified. Over time the description of methods have become more specific. Descriptions of qualitative approaches are usually described with multiple terms such as interpretative qualitative; exploratory qualitative; mixed method qualitative; naturalistic enquiry; case study; collective case study; auto-ethnography; case study interpretivist-constructivist. Reports of quantitative studies sometimes describe whether the research is a longitudinal study or a cross-sectional analysis. Other expressions such as objective/structured examination can also be found or a more precise description such as evaluation of learning tool. As is common in many research spheres the terms methodology and method are used differently and/or interchangeably by different authors.

None of the approaches mentioned in the literature review as being commonly reported in general education research have been found to any great extent in this review. Only one case of action research and one auto-ethnography have been reported in the journal in the thirteen years of its history. Nine percent of the papers describe their approach as case study research, although many more papers could do so. There are no cases of ethnography.

**Prevalence of multi-stage research**
The majority (63%) of papers used multiple stages of data collection: forty-one percent used two stages of data collection and 22% included three or more stages of data collection. Multi-stage research took the form of pre and post measure evaluating some form of change, for example change in student perception; longitudinal studies with measures taken over a period of time; data collected from different stakeholders (students, academia and/or workplaces); or data collected from different sources on the same topic such interviews, evaluations, academic statistics and/or
Methods used

The most common methods in both qualitative and quantitative research was some form of interview and the analysis of secondary data. Interviews could be either face to face (mostly qualitative) or self-completion (mostly, but not exclusively, quantitative) with methods described as: survey/questionnaire; self-completion questionnaire/online survey; structured interviews; semi-structured interviews; interviews. In the earlier years self-completion surveys were most commonly administered either by mail or in person to students whilst at the educational campus. Use of secondary data from students, and workplaces have been reported, usually in conjunction with some form of interview. The secondary analysis took the form of a review of reflective journals/student assessments; review of study guides; placement data; feedback forms/evaluations (from the course students or workplaces).

Two specific types of questions are note-worthy. The use of open-ended questions were prevalent in a quantitative questionnaire as well as the more qualitative approaches. Scales have been used in 40% of research papers with Likert scales being the most commonly named. In the majority of cases used the original concept of a Likert scale - a series of statements with an agree/disagree scale. However, as in now fairly commonplace, a few of the papers used the term to refer to some other form of numeric scale.

Other methods were either mentioned in a one or two studies. These were either very precise methods some of which required some expertise in that method, or general methods rarely used in CWIE research. Examples of two very precise techniques are unstructured in-depth phenomenological interviews (Groenwald, 2003) and the use of learning curve grid (Fleming & Eames, 2005). The learning curve grid was a self-assessment by students of the amount of learning to the time course of the experience. General methods common in other research but rare in CWIE included focus groups, telephone interviews, participant observation and action research.

Analysis techniques of numeric data predominantly focus on frequency counts or percentages and descriptive statistics, usually the mean. The quantitative and statistical studies requiring more sophisticated techniques used factor analysis, correlation, ranking, ANOVA or MANOVA. Cronbach Alpha was used when testing the validity of scales.
Descriptions of qualitative analysis are more varied, although many of them are essentially describing some form of content analysis. There were numerous ways in which content analysis was described: content analysis; thematic analytical approach; thematic analysis; theme identification; coding, assembling and triangulating; themes identified; tabulation of results. The importance of context was specifically mentioned in studies (contextual analysis). The use of Leximancer resulted in concept mapping as well as content analysis. Other studies named an analysis approach of a specific author such as Braun and Clarke (cited in Sturre et al, 2012) and Maykurt & Morehouse (cited in Clarke & Llewellyn, 2012).

The outcomes of the papers were generally evaluation of a program or paper or tool used in CWIE; development of a tool or some aspect of a paper; development of an instrument for later research or for evaluation or the application of research tool in other setting.

**Discussion and conclusions**

The strengthening of the literature reflects greater researcher activity over the past 20 years, and reflected in the growth experienced by APJCE. Considering both the increase in qualitative papers and mixed method approaches, the call by Coll and Chapman has been answered with qualitative research now more prevalent than in 2000, both in terms of number of research studies and as a percentage of CWIE research. This has been achieved whilst maintaining a balance of research methods, with qualitative and quantitative both used to obtain a more holistic picture described by Grainger.

Data collection during the document analysis for this paper in itself demonstrates the difficulty of labeling research as either qualitative or quantitative. Initially a spreadsheet was set up to record facts about the research undertaken, for each research article or paper. Many studies use a predominantly quantitative method with open-ended questions or a qualitative method backed up by other forms of data. However the expression mixed- or multi-methods is rarely used. In spite of the multiple data collection points and the range of methods used within one study, very few authors described their research as multi-method.

The range and combinations found in multi-stage projects was impressive and demonstrated a desire to consider multiple perspectives on CWIE issues. Given the range of stakeholders involved, this is not surprising. Practitioners do seem to be taking advantage of the full range of resources available to them. The combinations of methods show considerable initiative and planning.
Some principles noted by Coll and Chapman (2000) are still evident. Interviews remain the main form of data collection. It is hardly surprising that telephone interviews and focus groups, so prevalent elsewhere, are not common in CWIE research. The difficulty of gathering participants together make focus groups very difficult in this field. Telephone interviews are often advocated for hard-to-reach participants or to obtain a random sample (Bryman & Bell, 2011). They can be intrusive and would not be convenient for either the student or workplace population.

The range of methods demonstrates a number of options for research that could be undertaken as part of work in CWIE. These include the use of student or workplace evaluations, either stand-alone or in conjunction with other methods; document analysis of student reports and assessments, study guides either cross-sectional or longitudinal and the use of placement data. These techniques could be used on their own or as part of an action research or ethnographic project. It is interesting that neither of these techniques were used a great deal in the published research in spite of the suggestion by Coll and Chapman (2000). Action research follows the natural process of development and evaluation in education of assessing a situation, planning an improvement and then evaluating and completing the cycle again. This cycle of action and research naturally occurs in education. Formalising it into a research project would not be requiring much more time to undertaken research. It does however require planning and forethought.

For any of these techniques to be used they do require the usual research process of planning, implementing, and evaluating. Ethics approval may be required in order to use many of the day-to-day documents for research, in particular student evaluations so that they can opt out of the research process if they wish.

The key to successful use of any method is to ensure that methodology and method are appropriate to the research questions and that the protocols for good research in that method are followed. Past editions of the Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education give good examples of projects following these principles.
References


