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Final Report

What determines student success and failure when searching and applying for placements?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The aim of the investigation presented in this report was to examine students' personal motivation, careers aspirations, and experiences when seeking and applying for work placements. Opportunities to gain work-related experience during a degree are known to improve the academic performance and job prospects of graduates. Despite this, some higher education providers have been relatively slow to develop placement options within their degree programmes. With an increasingly saturated and competitive graduate jobs market and the inclusion of employability-related graduate outcomes in the recently announced Teaching Excellence Framework, it has now become a priority within higher education to offer more structured approaches to developing the employment potential of students beyond traditional subject knowledge.

- A common observation where optional placements are integrated into degree courses, is that not all students who initially express an interest in taking placements go on to secure work, and it is often assumed that only more capable or financially well-supported students succeed in finding placements. It follows that more needs to be done to better understand students' experiences and support needs when seeking placements in order to determine why some succeed and others fail to find suitable positions, to help ensure that equal course opportunities are afforded to all students.

- In the present investigation, a cohort of 185 second year psychology undergraduates were surveyed prior to reaching the placement stage of their course. Before searching for placements, students gave ratings of their certainty about their preferred employment area, certainty that they wanted to take a placement, confidence they would be able to secure a placement and their perceived support needs. A psychological measure of achievement motivation was also administered. The survey responses and second year academic performance of students who went on to successfully secure placements were then compared with those students who were unsuccessful or uninterested in finding placements. Findings presented in the report show students who secured placements exhibited a greater psychological need for achievement, were more certain about their decision to pursue a placement, were more confident that they would be able to find a placement, and also performed better academically than students who were unable to secure placements.

- Contrary to expectations, students who failed to secure placements did not show less certainty about their preferred employment area, did not differ in the type of work sought, and did not see themselves as needing greater support when beginning their placement search. This may suggest differences in personal attributes such as how students approach, and persist with, the task of searching for placements rather than different (or unrealistic) expectations about the type of work available may be more crucial to successful placement seeking outcomes.

- Focus groups discussions about students' search experiences were also conducted with a selection of placement seekers, who had either been successful or unsuccessful in securing a placement. Data from these focus groups showed broad agreement between participants that placements were a beneficial aid to future job applications, as well as providing important learning opportunities. The discussion also highlighted that in order to maximise the number of students taking placements, consideration should be given to the *optimum means of communicating placement information* to students, in addition to working with students during the search process to help develop their strategy *as their search progresses*. Students also reported feeling frustrated by a perceived *lack of communication* from potential placement providers and pressured by the *need to balance* placement searching with ongoing academic work. Thought should be given to how universities can work better with placement providers to ensure diversity in opportunities and improve communication during the application process, to ensure the needs of both students and employers are met.

- Further recommendations for higher education institutions, students and potential placement providers are made within the report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

Graduates entering the jobs market today face ever greater competition to secure employment on both a national and international stage. The number of students accepted onto places within UK universities has increased by over 35% during the last ten years, with now more than half a million students studying towards a first degree (UCAS, 2016). Data also suggest that, six months after graduating around 6% of graduates are unemployed with only 75% being in full-time employment. Of those entering work, typically around a quarter are based in low-skilled or non-professional jobs (HESA, 2015).

Such broad level data also belies the large differences that exist between different degree subject areas. Whereas graduates in subject areas such as veterinary science, medicine and dentistry benefit from an employment rate of over 90%, in other subject areas such as the social sciences, where a less direct vocational pathway exists for graduates, employment rates between 60-70% may be found.

For example, in the psychology subject area, 64% of graduates entered employment whereas 16% went on to further study which can be attributed to the need for psychology graduates to undertake further training for many professional psychological career paths (HECSU, 2015). However, around 80% of psychology graduates are thought not to progress to become professional psychologists (Trapp et al, 2011). Many psychology graduates may not therefore, directly use their subject knowledge in the work place (Lantz 2011). Despite this, Psychology remains one of the most popular degree choices within the UK, with over 100,000 applications made annually to study the subject at university (UCAS, 2015). It is therefore crucial for psychology courses to ensure their students are prepared for the demands of a diverse range of modern workplaces and successfully develop the broad professional skills that employers want.

Opportunities to gain work-related experience during a degree are known to improve the academic performance and job prospects of graduates with placement opportunities now forming an integral part of many undergraduate degrees (Moores & Reddy, 2012). Despite this, opportunities to undertake work placements on many undergraduate courses are optional, with students mostly being required to independently locate and secure their own placements.

In this project, we will explore students' motivations, actions and support needs when seeking placements in order to better understand why some students succeed and others fail to find suitable placement positions.

1.1   What are the issues facing students when entering today's job market?

Employability can be regarded as *"a range of subject-specific and transferable employability-related skills (graduate attributes), and professionalism/work-readiness at an acceptable competence"* (Fahnert, 2015, p.2). However, evaluation of undergraduate attitudes towards employability typically shows little alignment between the views of students and the views of other stakeholders such as the Government, employers, and higher education institutions in terms of what makes an individual employable (Tymon, 2013). A perceived 'skills gap' exists between the academic and working environment, with employers often reporting examples of where graduates are not well

enough prepared when they leave University (Moore & Morton, 2015). Poor motivation, lack of commercial awareness and lower than expected professional standards of conduct have also all been cited as difficulties faced by graduate employees when entering work (UKCES, 2014; Flynn, 2013; Wild & Wood, 2013). Whilst employers report that they have often felt ignored by Higher Education Institutions, with not enough being done to improve graduates' work-readiness (Lowden et al, 2011).

With respect to psychology students, surveys of employers have identified the most desirable qualities for graduates to possess include listening skills, willingness to learn, ability to learn, getting along with others and the ability to work as part of a team (Landrum & Harrold, 2003). However, it has been reported that psychology graduates may often not possess these basic skills and that employers may fail to recognise the distinction in the skills base of psychology students compared to other degree subjects (Trapp et al, 2011; Hugh-Jones, 2008). This could be due to a lack of effective self-marketing or failure to provide evidence of achievement (Hugh-Jones, 2008).

1.2   What are the potential benefits of taking a placement?

To help address the issue of graduate workplace readiness, Higher Education Institutions have responded by increasing their emphasis on employability in the curriculum (Harvey, 2005; O'Leary, 2016). This has been further cemented by the inclusion of student outcomes and learning gain in the recently announced Teaching Excellence Framework (BIS, 2016). With an increasingly saturated graduate jobs market, the establishment of employability as a priority within higher education provides a strong justification for higher education providers to provide more structured means of supporting and developing the employment potential of their students beyond traditional subject knowledge. Strategies for improving the employability of students have traditionally focussed on signposting to relevant services and opportunities, the use of Personal Development Planning (PDP) or teaching of practical skills to students that can be developed in an academic environment (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Increasingly though, some universities and degree subject areas are turning to work placements and internships as means of developing the professional skills of their students.

Placements are widely believed to be a way of allowing students to improve their profile as a potential employee by gaining tangible workplace experience, to improve their personal contacts within the world of work and to develop professional skills that are valued by employers (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Placements can include both work-based learning opportunities typically taken alongside regular academic studies or sandwich-year placements where students work full time for an external organisation, normally between their second and third academic year.

Research has examined the benefits of both placement types from both student and employer perspectives. This has produced mixed evidence regarding their effects, which in some cases can be attributed to how the benefits of placements are measured: Some evidence suggests undergraduates returning from work-based learning activities report feeling greater preparedness for the workplace and are better able to articulate the skills developed compared to pre-placement students (e.g. Ingram & Mulholland, 2012). Academic performance following a placement is often used as a way of measuring the success of placements and their efficacy for the students who took them. For example, a study of 6,000 students from one UK University across a variety of different

degree programmes showed a consistent benefit to students' final degree classifications regardless of demographic factors such as race, gender and class (Reddy & Moores, 2012).

Whilst improved academic performance can be seen as a direct benefit of taking placements, graduate employers look beyond good qualifications in the students they employ. Other authors have therefore focussed on how placements affect student transition into the workplace and the numbers of students progressing into paid work following graduation. For example, Bowes and Harvey (2000) examined graduate employment statistics from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey finding that placement students were more likely (70%) than other full-time students (55.3%) to have secured full time paid employment six months after graduating. Students taking sandwich degrees are not only more likely to be working but also more likely to be in higher paid jobs six months post-graduation, if graduating with good degree classifications, than students who did not elect to take placements. However, this advantage did not exist for students who received a lower second-class degree (Moores & Reddy, 2012).

The impact of placements has also been found to vary depending on a student's country of origin. Mandilaras (2004) found that UK students had improved chances of obtaining upper second or first class degrees after undertaking an industrial placement compared to International students. Similarly, Crawford and Wang (2006) showed that whilst accounting and finance students who took a sandwich placement benefitted from improved academic achievement once they returned from placement, this was more pronounced in UK students, who did significantly better than International students. However, the reverse effect was found when the performance of full-time (non-placement) UK and International students was considered.

Improvements in overall academic performance resulting from placements also vary in effect size across different degree subject area. Accounting and finance, bioscience, engineering and psychology students taking placements have been reported to perform significantly better academically than full-time (non-placement) students (e.g. Gomez, Lush & Clements, 2004; Mendez & Rona, 2010; Reddy & Moores, 2006; Surridge, 2009). Improvements are also found where placement grades do not contribute directly towards overall degree classifications, and may be sufficient to raise students' classification from a lower to upper second class degree (Green, 2011). However some authors have suggested that the benefits of placements on academic performance may also vary depending on how learning whilst on placement is managed (e.g. Duignan, 2002; 2002).

The nature of students' placement experiences also has an important bearing on placement outcomes. For example, an evaluation of three cohorts of graduates who undertook an optional placement unit alongside their normal academic studies during their final year, showed that students who completed placements relevant to their desired career were better able to see the association between their degree and the skills required in the workplace, than did non-placement students; and were more satisfied than non-placement students with their career progression up to 3 years following graduation. However those undertaking placements did not necessarily find the transition into work easier (Tricker, Turner & Udell, 2016).

1.3 How do students perceive placements and their potential benefits?

Whilst there is a general awareness amongst students regarding the value of their degree, recent research has also highlighted a growing awareness that this alone may not be sufficient to gain employment in today's competitive job market, and that students are sensitive to the need to 'add value' to their degree (Morrison, 2014; Tomlinson, 2008). A survey by the Confederation of British Industry and Universities UK (CBI & UUK, 2009) reported that 78% of students felt that they know what employers were looking for, whilst just over a third of students would have liked to have taken a placement, internship or other work experience opportunity during their degree programme to enhance their prospects of securing employment after graduation, but were not offered the choice. Moreover a high proportion of students felt that whilst skills development had been specifically addressed by their course, more could be done (42%), or that skills development was not specifically offered on their course (28%). Evidence from other studies examining students' perceptions of the importance of different employability skills also suggest that whilst these tend to be rated highly by all students (e.g. Jackson, 2013), the extent to which students feel they have developed these skills during their studies is rated only moderately (e.g. Morris, Cranney, Jeong & Mellish, 2013). Students perceptions of the importance of different graduate employability skills has also been found to vary depending on students' existing level of work experience, with the importance of developing initiative and enterprise being rated as significantly more important by students who are already engaged in employment, compared to non-working students who rated this attribute as being least important (e.g. Jackson, 2013).

An analysis by Hugh-Jones (2008) based on interviews with employers identified a number of difficulties faced by employers when evaluating graduate applications including the need for students to be able to support the skills they claim to possess in their application and at interview with tangible evidence. Together, these findings may suggest not only a mismatch between students perception of the skills developed from their course and those anticipated by others (e.g. Tymon, 2013), but also an inability of students to be able to substantiate their skills by drawing upon their experiences. It follows that undertaking placement and other work experience opportunities during their degree will not only add to the range of concrete examples or 'soft credentials' (Tomlinson, 2008) students can use to convey their potential calibre as an employee, but that the process of engaging in work-based learning may also help change students' perspectives of the value of different work place skills.

Research has consistently shown that students understand the benefits derived from placements. For example, Mahmood, Slabu, Randsley de Moura and Hopthrow (2014) found that the ability of students to articulate the learning gain from their sandwich year placement improved from pre- to post-placement with the use of more concrete concepts and terms, but also noted some personal and social disadvantages associated with re-inetgration into university life. Tricker et al (2016) examined placement experiences in three cohorts of psychology graduates, finding that the vast majority (93%) agreed that taking a placement had helped them learn things that their degree could not teach them, and that their placement experience helped them when applying for work or further study after graduating (87%). Similarly, MacDermott and Campbell (2016) report that over 75% of social work students reported that taking voluntary placements had helped them develop work place skills although some students believed that unpaid placements would have less influence on their future employment credentials, whilst others felt unprepared for placement learning and felt they required considerable support and guidance.

One of the many barriers to taking an unpaid placement is the financial cost, and in subject areas where placements are optional it is likely that only more financially able or well supported students will be amongst those who are more likely to elect to take sandwich placements. Smith, Smith and Caddell (2015) compared the perceptions of students who undertook paid placements as well as unpaid placements finding that both groups expressed similar primary motivations for wishing to take a placement including a desire to enhance their job prospects post-university and help with eventual career choices. However, whilst most students valued the experience more than the potential income gained, 36% of paid students reported that they would not be able to take a placement without pay. Employers also were found to hold paid placement students to different standards as unpaid placement students.

1.4   Individual differences in students' motivations for pursuing placements.

A common observation within universities where non-compulsory placements are integrated into courses, is that not all students who initially express an interest in taking placements will secure work, and it is often *assumed that only the more capable students succeed in finding a position*. Understanding what type of student is more likely to be attracted to placement opportunities despite the associated social and financial considerations, what potential external factors may be sufficient to cause students to opt out of pursing placements, and why some students are able to maintain their motivation and resilience to eventually secure a placement in the face of rejections has become a fundamental issue for universities seeking to develop work experience opportunities within their courses. Despite this, little research has examined differences in the personal attributes of students who do and do not secure placements. Reddy and Moores (2012) found partial evidence to suggest high achieving students are more likely to choose to go on placement, based on second year grades achieved prior to starting placements, although no analysis of individual motivations for choosing placements or evaluation of the reasons for not securing placements was considered in their study.

One aspect of aspect of students' personality that has been linked to pursing career enhancing opportunities is that of *self-efficacy*, or a belief in one's ability to succeed. Gbadamosi, Evans, Richardson and Ridolfo (2015) examined the relationship between career aspirations, the perception of part-time employment whilst studying as being beneficial and self-efficacy beliefs in 357 UK university students, approximately half of who had part-time jobs whilst studying and half did not. Their analysis suggested that students with greater self-efficacy were more likely to report greater clarity in their career aspirations, however self-efficacy was *not* related to the perception that part-time work roles were beneficial. The concept of *malleability*, or a belief in the idea that people can change their attributes that is consistent with Dweck's (1999) conceptualisation of *growth mindset*, was also weakly but significantly correlated with greater belief in the benefit of part-time work to students and the greater clarity in career aspirations. The findings of Gbadamosi et al (2015) can be explained in the context of the model proposed by Turner (2014) that self-belief is a key aspect of employability development, whereby in order to develop professional skills a student must first believe that (i) ability can be improved, (ii) that they personally possess the ability to achieve their goal of improving, and (iii) that their environment will allow their goal to be attained.

One factor that is thought to be an important antecedent of self-efficacy beliefs is that of a proactive personality type: *"Proactive personalities identify opportunities and act on them, they*

show initiative, take action and persevere until they bring about meaningful change" (Crant, 1995, p.532). Lin, Lu, Chen and Chen (2014) have demonstrated that ratings on an assessment of proactive personality were able to predict changes in academic self-efficacy when measured up to three months later. Proactive personality attributes are also believed to be an important part of the modern work place where the ability to act in a diverse and rapidly changing environment is crucial to success. Proactive personality tests have been shown to predict objective measures of job performance in real estate agents (Crant, 1995). Proactive personality has also been linked to successful job search outcomes such as number of jobs offered, number of second interview invitations and overall job search effort in university students, 2-3 months post-graduation (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy & Shalhoop, 2006). Proactive personality has also been related to measures of job progression and career satisfaction in over 2000 business and engineering students when assessed two years following graduation (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001).

Whilst evidence therefore, exists to link individuals with proactive personalities to more effective career development strategies and progress post-degree, little is known about the importance of proactive personality as a factor in the development of undergraduate students. Crant (1996) has demonstrated that the proactive personality characteristics of a mixed sample of undergraduate and MBA students were strongly related to their entrepreneurial intentions, such as the desire to starting new businesses after graduating. Tymon and Bastistic (2016) have also hypothesized that proactivity is an important employability attribute which can be associated with improved academic performance. However, their evaluation of academic achievement in 166 business students, suggested this to only be the case when the moderating effect of increased personal initiative was also considered. The authors speculate that high trait proactivity *per se* may not be a universally positive, but that the attribute may have limited value unless it is targeted effectively towards specific behaviours, which may be set by situational judgements arising from our personal initiative.

An alternative perspective is that trait proactivity provides a basis to more complex motivational processes (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010) underlying student achievement. For example, Major, Turner and Fletcher (2006) demonstrated that trait proactivity was positively related to the motivation to learn, which subsequently was related to the successful acquisition of new skills and knowledge. In their study, 183 employees of a financial services firm were measured on two occasions. Firstly, self-reports of proactivity personality and learning motivation were recorded. These were then compared to objective measures of development activity (e.g. the number and amount of time spent on training courses) over a 6-month period. Proactive personality was the strongest predictor of motivation to learn of those tested, but was only indirectly linked to the development activity. This may suggest that *individual differences in academic motivation* rather than proactivity may provide a more suitable framework for understanding the reasons underlying students' placement seeking behaviour and the acquisition employability skills.

A study by Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempechat & Seltzer (2010) examined the impact of a work-based learning programme and its relationship to academic motivation. Within this programme, a group of 201 children were placed in work sites for one day each week across the four years of high school. Results suggested that students' sense of work hope, career planning, and autonomy were strongly associated with achievement-focussed beliefs, with a more positive, planned and hopeful view towards one's vocational future developed through the work experience adding value to the students' current educational motivation and feelings of competence. The

authors argue that work-based learning may be an effective means of fostering achievement motivation among adolescents.

In the present study, we will explore the relationship between achievement motivation and students' placement seeking behaviour. Achievement motivation is a well-established psychological construct that alongside intellectual ability can be viewed as an important factor in both career and academic success (e.g. McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Franz, 1992; Singh, 2011). According to the Expectancy Value Theory of Achievement Motivation (e.g. McClelland, 1985), the effort people expend in trying to achieve a task will be dependent on the degree to which they motivated by and believe success can be achieved on the task, and the incentive value associated with completing the task. It follows from this, that students who place greater value on gaining work experience and are more confident that they will be able to successful secure work will be amongst those who are more motivated to seek and persist until securing placement opportunities.

When considered as an individual difference variable, achievement motivation can be thought of as an individual disposition or determination to work towards accomplishing challenging personal or professional targets. Whilst trait measures of achievement motivation have been developed, it appears that the concept has never been specifically explored in the context of placement seeking behaviour. It follows that more needs to be done to better understand students' motivations, actions and support needs when seeking placements in order to determine why some succeed and others fail to find suitable positions, and to help ensure that equal opportunities are afforded to all students.

The current research therefore, aims to identify what personal attributes may influence a student's decision to pursue a placement, and to explore, as has been assumed by previous authors, whether placements improve student's employability or whether more academically-able students with a greater motivation to improve their employability are more likely to seek and be more successful in securing placements.

1.5   Objectives

This research project will:

i. Examine students' personal motivations and experiences when seeking and applying for placements.
ii. Compare the psychological characteristics of students who successfully secure placements with those who are unsuccessful or uninterested in finding placements.
iii. Evaluate the impact of academic performance and careers engagement of placement and non-placement students during the placement application process.

2.   METHOD

2.1   PLACEMENT CONTEXT

Psychology undergraduates within our institution are able to complete two different types of work placement in professional areas related to psychology: (i) a non-campus based sandwich year placement taken between the second and final year of their degree, lasting for a minimum of 30 weeks and (ii) a day placement unit taken alongside other regular lecture-based units during their final year. Day placements typically last for the full academic year and yield 150-175 hours external work experience. Both sandwich year and day placements are an optional component of our undergraduate psychology programmes, with currently around 30% of each cohort progressing to take a placement. Both types of placement are introduced to students through briefing sessions held during the second year (FHEQ Level 5) of the degree programme, with students being required to secure placements by a set deadline in the summer of that academic year.

2.2   STUDY A: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

2.2.1 The Study Sample
The student sample in this research comprised a cohort of 185 Level 5 psychology students (72% female; 28% male) surveyed prior to reaching the placement stage of their course. Within this year group, 94.1% were aged 21 or under with the remaining 5.9% being mature students (average age, 19.9 years; range, 19-38 years).

In March 2016, all students were invited to attend a formal course event at which a questionnaire was administered concerning their intentions regarding taking a placement during the next academic year. Of these students, 60 wished to take either a sandwich year or final year placement; 89 were not interested in taking a placement, and 33 did not attend the questionnaire session.

By August 2016, of the 60 students who had initially wanted to take a placement, 33 students had successfully secured placements, whilst 27 students had not been successful in their applications or had decided not to continue looking for a placement prior to the university's placement confirmation deadline. This process yielded three groups for the purposes of comparison: (i) students who were successful in securing a placement; (ii) students who did not secure a placement; (iii) students who were not interested in taking a placement.

2.2.2 Attitudes to Placement Seeking Questionnaire
The questionnaire designed by the research team specifically for the purposes of this study assessed attitudes towards placement searching and self-perceived ability to secure a position, prior to placement searching. Four different aspects of placement searching were evaluated:

- How certain are you that you would like to take a placement?
- How confident do you feel about being able to find a placement?
- How sure are you about the employment area in which you would like to do your placement?
- How much support do you feel you need from the university to help find a placement?

Responses to each question were made using an 11-point semantic-differential scale (0-10, where higher scores indicated greater confidence, certainty or support needs).

In addition, participants were asked to respond to four open questions regarding placements:

- What problems had they experienced when looking for placements (if any)?
- What type of support did they feel they needed to find a placement?
- In which specific types of employment were they seeking placements?
- (and for students not seeking a placement) What was their main reason for not being interested in taking a placement?

Responses to these open survey questions were content analysed and categorised to identify the most common response themes given by students to each question.

2.2.3 Achievement Motivation

As part of the survey, students also completed a psychometric assessment of Achievement Motivation. A 9-item, abbreviated version of the *Prestatie Motivatie Test (PMT)*, an achievement motivation scale developed by Hermans (1970) was used which assesses several different aspects of the construct including level of aspiration, desire for upward mobility, persistence, task tension and achievement-related work behaviours.

For each PMT item, 5 different response options are offered to a question prompt. For example:

> *If I have not done a task well and failed to attain my goal …*
> *(5) I continue to do my best to reach my goal;*
> *(4) I try one more time to reach my goal;*
> *(3) I find it difficult to not lose heart,*
> *(2) I'm inclined to give up;*
> *(1) I usually give up.*

Each question was scored from 1 to 5 with response options consistent with a greater need for achievement being given higher scores. Responses to all nine questions were then added together to produce a total score (ranging from 9 to 45), whereby higher scores indicated greater psychological achievement motivation in the respondent.

2.2.4 Academic Performance

Two measures of students' academic performance were evaluated. Firstly, the average percentage mark obtained for all Level 5 modules was calculated for each student (including any assessments completed during the summer resit period).

Secondly, each student's overall percentage mark for one Level 5 module, *Employability Skills for Psychologists* was examined. This module was selected since it focuses specifically on recruitment and selection processes, provides opportunities for experiential learning, and supports students to acquire key career management skills designed to assist them in implementing career decisions. Marks achieved in the module were therefore felt to be particularly relevant to the core skills required to successfully secure a placement.

2.2.5 Procedure

The study was conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society code of conduct for research involving human participants and was subject to ethical review by the University of Portsmouth, Department of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. The placement questionnaire was administered at a recorded attendance session during the spring term, at which other course questionnaires were also completed. Respondents were instructed that the purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge the likely demand for placement positions in their year group with the aim of better understanding the support needs of students, as well as exploring the reasons why some students may not wish to undertake placements. As part of the questionnaire, students were also encouraged to indicate whether they would like to be contacted by someone from the department for help regarding placement searching. Students were allowed as much time as they required to fill in the questionnaire, with typical completion times being 5-10 minutes. A full version of the survey questionnaire used can be found in Appendix 8.1.

Students' placement positions were required to be confirmed in writing with employers by August 2016 in order to be considered as having successfully secured a placement for the next academic year. All questionnaire data were input into IBM SPSS Statistics [Version 22] and compiled with the Level 5 academic records, such that the self-ratings of attitudes towards placement search could be evaluated against successful placement seeking outcomes and the academic performance of each student. Five students who had already been successful in securing a placement prior to completing the attitude questionnaire were not included in subsequent analyses regarding confidence securing placements.

2.3   STUDY B: FOCUS GROUPS ON PLACEMENT SEARCH

2.3.1 Focus Group Participants

During August 2016, all 60 students who had initially expressed an interest in taking a placement, regardless of whether they had been successful or unsuccessful in securing a placement, were contacted and invited to take part in a focus group regarding their placement search experience.

This group were firstly sent an email from the Department of Psychology informing them about the study and explaining that they would later be contacted by telephone and asked if they would like to participate. Participation in the focus group study was entirely voluntary. Students could decline to participate when telephoned or could opt out of being contacted by telephone by responding to the original email message, without prejudice.

Focus group discussions were held over one day at the beginning of September 2016. Of those students who were willing to take part in the discussion and able to attend on the day, seven were selected to participate in one of two focus groups.

The first focus group comprised four students (four females, aged 19-36) all of whom had been successful in securing a placement. The second focus group comprised three students (two females and one male, aged 19-21) two of whom had been unsuccessful in securing placements and one who had been successful in securing a placement. In lieu of their time and travel costs for attending the focus group, all participants received a fee of £50 for their participation.

2.3.2 Focus Group Schedule and Procedure

Transcripts from each focus group were considered in the same analysis to explore common themes in students' responses as well as highlighting any differences in the reported experiences of students who had or had not successfully secured a placement.

Both focus groups were held in a quiet observation suite within the Department of Psychology. The observation suite was equipped with comfortable seating and refreshments were made available to participants to provide a relaxed environment to those attending. On arrival, participants were firstly briefed on safety arrangements whilst attending the event, and were then verbally reminded about the purposes of the study and ethical considerations regarding its conduct. Participants were specifically instructed that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were free to their express opinions which would be treated confidentially by the focus group facilitator. They were also reminded that their responses would be heard by the other participants present and that by taking part they agreed to respect the privacy of their fellow participants and would not to repeat what was said during the session to others. Participants then signed an informed consent form before the audio recorder was switched on.

The focus group was facilitated by a 21-year old female member of the research team who was not an academic lecturer nor involved with the organisation or support of placement opportunities within the department. This was felt important to limit potential bias in the opinions expressed by the students that may be caused by academic staff being present.

The facilitator posed questions for open discussion within the groups, encouraged the development of discussion issues through use of neutral prompts, and determined when it was necessary to move discussion on, such that the a consistent schedule of questions were considered by both groups.

A semi-structured discussion schedule was designed which covered a range of themes including what had motivated the students to take a placement, what techniques they had used when searching for placements, what were the biggest challenges they had faced during their search (and how they had overcome these) and what lessons they felt they had learned from the placement seeking experience. The nature of the questions addressed to each focus group was adjusted slightly depending on the presence or absence of unsuccessful placement seekers in the group. A copy of the full focus group discussion schedule is provided in Appendix 8.2.

The two discussion sessions lasted for 43 and 34 minutes, respectively. Once each session had ended, participants were reassured regarding the confidentiality of the responses they had provided and the audio recorder was switched off. Participants were then given debriefing information to take away with them about the study which included further sources of support about placements and the contact details of the research team in case of further questions.

Both focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, with overlaps and pauses noted, line numbers added, and any personal identifying details removed.

3.   RESULTS: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

3.1   What employment areas did students wish to pursue?

To help identify any patterns amongst successful and non-successful placement seekers, students were asked what employment area they currently wanted to pursue (Table 1). Successful placement seekers were most likely to list professional psychology roles such as clinical psychologist or educational psychologist as their employment area of choice whereas unsuccessful placement seekers were split between professional psychology and private sector work such as marketing or HR.

Table 1. The Employment Areas of Choice of Placement Seeking Students.

Area	Unsuccessful Placement Seekers	Successful Placement Seekers	Total
Public Sector	7	11	18
Research	1	0	1
Professional Psychology	8	12	20
Private Sector	8	3	11
Other	1	4	5
No response	2	3	5
Total	27	33	60

3.2   Was decision certainty related to placement success?

Students were asked to rate using a 10-point scale, how certain they were about their decision that they would like to take, or not take a placement, where higher scores indicated greater decision certainty. This was used to explore whether students who were more certain about wanting to take a placement would be more successful or not (Figure 1).
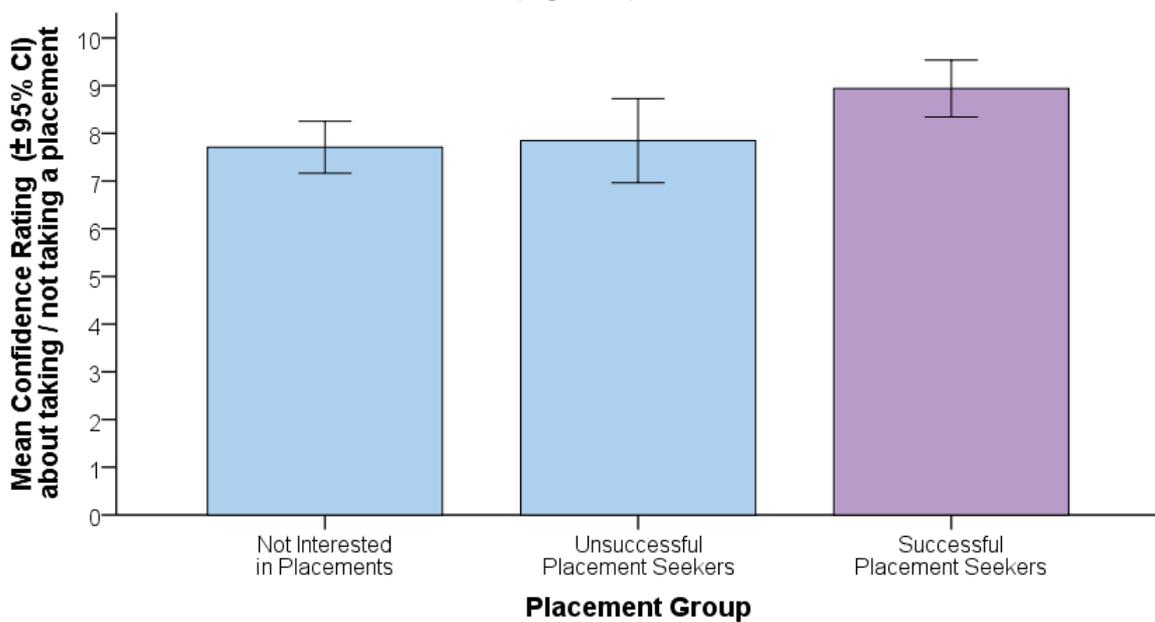

Table 2. Differences in Decision Certainty between students seeking, securing and uninterested in placements.

A one-way independent group ANOVA was used to test for differences in certainty ratings given by students who had secured placements compared to students who had not secured a placement or were not interested. Certainty ratings differed significantly between the groups ($F_{(2, 155)}$=4.45, p=.013). Students who had successfully secured a placement were compared to those who were either unsuccessful in finding a placement, or uninterested in placements using planned orthogonal comparisons. This analysis revealed that students who had secured placements by the start of the academic year (M=8.94, 95% CI [8.35, 9.53]) were significantly more certain about their decision, than students who did not secure a placement (M=7.43, 95% CI [6.87, 8.00]) or who were not interested in taking a placement (M=7.89, 95% CI [7.06, 8.73]); t(155 df)= 3.33, p=.001).

These findings suggest students who were more certain about wanting to find a placement are more likely to go on to secure a placement than students who are not as certain.

3.3   Was Achievement Motivation related to placement seeking behaviour?

A one-way independent group ANOVA was used to examine differences in students' overall level of achievement motivation between students who had secured placements, had not secured a placement or were not interested in taking a placement. This analysis revealed no overall statistically significant difference between the three groups $F_{(2, 155)}$=2.51, p=.08, n.s.). However, when those who had successfully secured a placement were statistically compared to the remaining two groups using planned orthogonal contrast comparisons, successful placement seekers were found to have significantly higher achievement motivation (M=36.64, 95% CI [35.03, 38.23]) than the unsuccessful (M=35.17, 95% CI [33.23, 35.72] or uninterested [M=34.85, 95% CI [33.92, 35.78] placement groups (t(47.47 df)= 2.26, p=.026).

This may suggest that greater levels of achievement motivation are required to both attract students to the idea of taking placements and maintain a level of persistence to enable them to secure a placement (Figure 2).
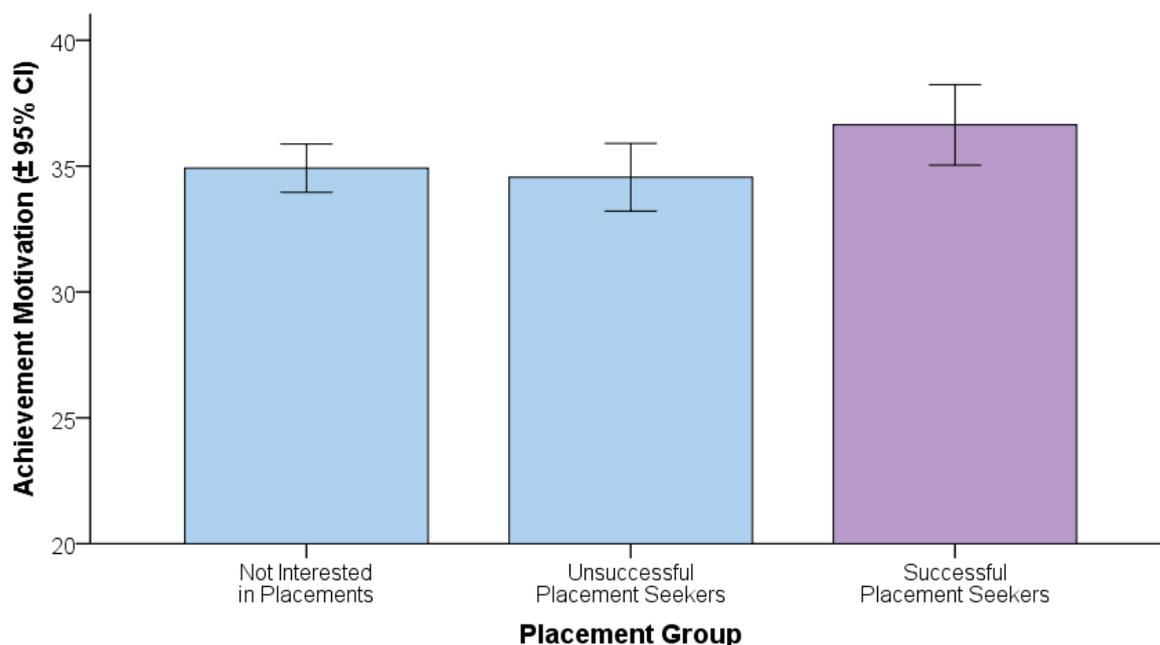

Figure 2. Differences in achievement motivation between students seeking, securing and uninterested in placements.

3.4   Attitude differences between successful and unsuccessful placement seekers

For the student groups who had expressed an interest in looking for a placement, 10-point rating scales were used to determine (i) how confident the student felt about being able to find a placement, (ii) how sure they were about the type of job or employment area they wanted there placement to be in and (iii) how much support they felt they needed from the University to help them find a placement. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare these ratings between students who went on to secure a placement and students who did not secure a placement (Figure 3). A significant difference in initial search confidence was found between successful placement seekers (M= 6.67, SD= 2.25) and students who did not secure a placement (M= 4.67 SD= 2.39) suggesting students who were more confident that they would be able to secure a placement were more likely to succeed (t(55)= 3.26, p=.002).

However, no significant difference was found between students who went on to secure a placement and students who did not secure a placement with respect to their level of certainty about the employment area in which they wished to work (t(55)=0.34, p=.73 n.s.) or with respect to the level of support they felt they needed in order to secure a placement (t(55)=0.69, p=.49 n.s.).
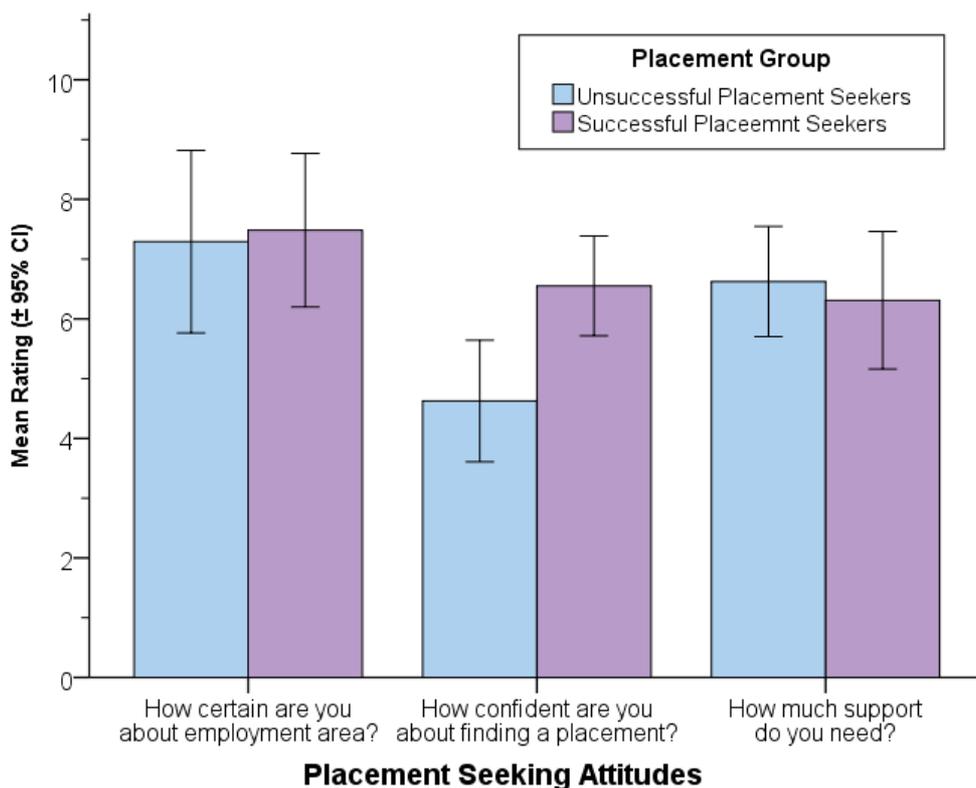

Figure 3. Differences in Confidence, Sureness about Employment Area and Support needed between students seeking, securing and uninterested in placements.

3.5　Relationships between Achievement Motivation and Placement Seeking Attitudes in Successful and Non-successful placement seekers.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the degree of association between achievement motivation and the main placement attitude ratings gathered in the study. These were examined separately for students who were successful in securing a placement (Table 2) and students who were not successful in securing a placement (Table 3).

For students who were successful in securing a placement, a significant positive correlation, with a large effect size (r(n=33)=.51, p=.004) was found between certainty about the type of employment area in which students wished to work and their confidence in being able to find a placement. A similar significant correlation, with a medium effect size was observed between these two variables in students who were unsuccessful in securing a placement (r(n=27)=.46, p=.015), suggesting that students who are more certain about the type of work they wish to do will be more confident in their ability to secure a placement, regardless of placement seeking outcomes.

Table 2. Pearson Correlations (r) between Achievement Motivation and Placement Attitudes measures in Successful Placement Seekers (n=33)

Measure	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Achievement Motivation Total	-	-.01	-.11	.22	-.01
(2) Certainty about wanting to do a placement	-	-	.40*	.18	-.27
(3) Confidence in finding a placement	-	-	-	.51*	-.22
(4) Certainty about employment area	-	-	-	-	-.18
(5) Level of support needed	-	-	-	-	-

* p<.05; ** p<.01 (2-tailed)

Table 3. Pearson Correlations (r) between Achievement Motivation and Placement Attitudes measures in Unsuccessful Placement Seekers (n=27)

Measure	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Achievement Motivation Total	-	-.17	-.12	.09	-.08
(2) Certainty about wanting to do a placement	-	-	.23	.19	.12
(3) Confidence in finding a placement	-	-	-	.46*	-.18
(4) Certainty about employment area	-	-	-	-	-.01
(5) Level of support needed	-	-	-	-	-

* p<.05 (2-tailed)

For students who went on to successfully secure a placement, increased levels of certainty about wanting to take a placement were also positively associated with greater levels of confidence that they would be able to secure a placement (r(n=30)= .40, p=.029). However, this relationship was not replicated in students who did not go on to successfully secure a placement (r(n=27)= .23, p= .25 n.s.). Taken together, these results may suggest that the link between confidence in one's ability to secure a placement and high certainty about wishing to take a placement are an important explanatory factor in successful placement seeking outcomes.

Interestingly, no significant relationships were found between achievement motivation and any of the placement attitude ratings examined in successful or unsuccessful placement seekers. This suggests that generally being motivated to accomplish tasks is not directly linked to subjective feelings of confidence or certainty about placements, or opinions on the support requirements students need.

3.6   Academic Performance in Placement and Non-placement Seeking Students

To examine the impact of academic ability on placement seeking behaviour, two indicators of student academic performance were considered (i) Students average unit mark (on a scale of 0-100%) for the six academic units they were taking in their current year of study (Level 5), (ii) and students performance (from 0 to 100%) in an individual Level 5 unit dealing specifically with careers and employability issues (*Employability Skills for Psychologists*).

Differences in academic performance were examined between successful and unsuccessful placement seekers and compared to the control group of students who were not interested in taking placements, and a further group of students who did not attend the session when the placement questionnaires were administered, using independent groups ANOVA (Figure 4).
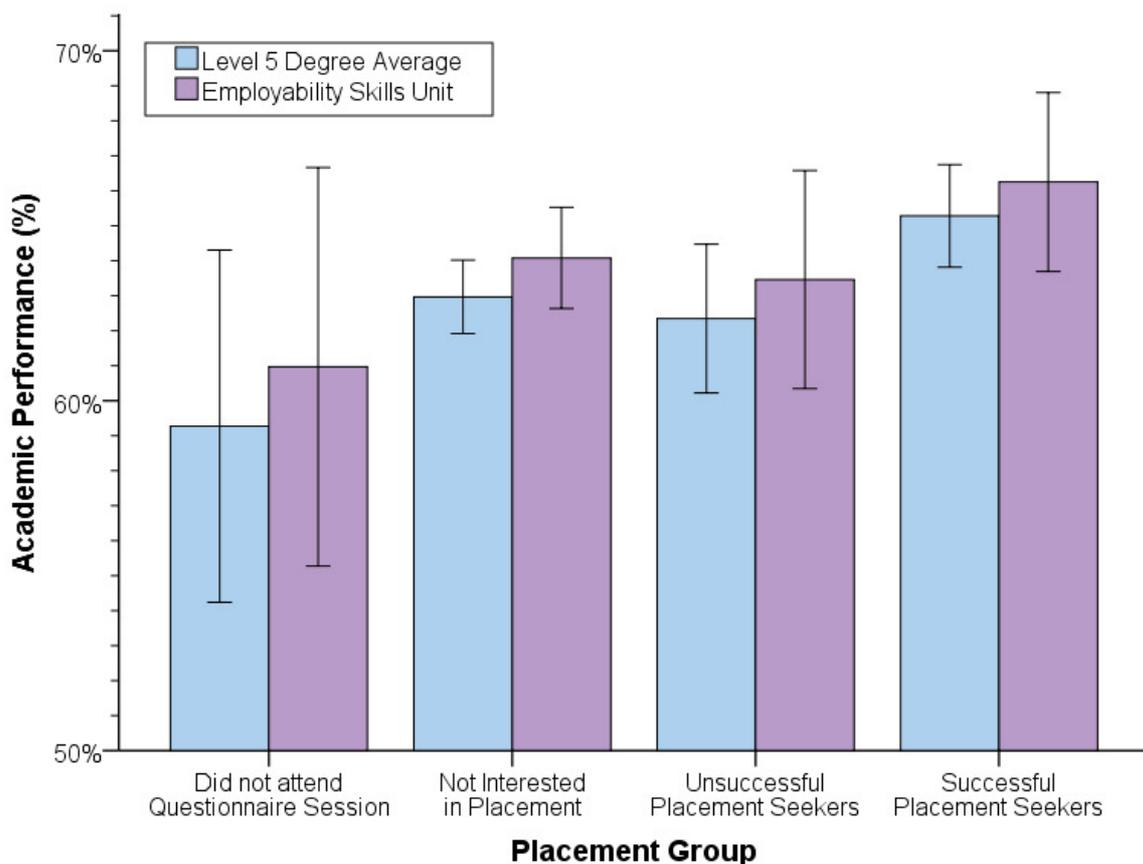

Figure 4. Differences in Academic Performance between students seeking, securing and uninterested in placements.

A significant difference was found in the overall level of academic performance at Level 5 between the four different student groups (F(3, 178)=2.81, p=.04), with students who successfully secured placements have a higher average year mark (M=64.61%) than students who were either unsuccessful in securing a placement (M=62.35%) or who were not interested in taking a placement (M=62.81%). Students who did not attend the placement questionnaire session were found to have the lowest overall year average (M=59.27%). Analysis using polynominal contrast comparisons suggested the decrease in average marks across the four student groups to be a significant linear trend (F(1, 178) = 6.87, p=.01).

With respect to Level 5 Employability Skills unit marks, no overall significant difference was found in performance between the four groups (F(3, 176)=1.77, p=.15 n.s.). However, when those who had successfully secured a placement were statistically compared to the remaining three student groups using a planned orthogonal contrast comparison, successful placement seekers were found to have significantly higher employability skills unit marks (M=66.25%, 95% CI [63.69, 68.81]) than the unsuccessful (M=63.46%, 95% CI [60.36, 66.58] or uninterested [M=64.08%, 95% CI [62.63, 65.52] placement groups, or those not attending the questionnaire session [M=60.97% 95% CI [55.28, 66.66]; (t(71.53 df)= 2.06, p=.043).

Taken together, these data suggest that students who go on to successfully secure placements tend to do significantly better in other academic units prior to placement, and assessments relating specifically to the development of employment relevant skills and careers knowledge, including when compared to other students who were motivated to secure placements but were unsuccessful.

In addition to further examine differences in academic performance, the relationships between grades, achievement motivation and attitudinal ratings towards placement seeking were explored separately for successful and unsuccessful placement seekers using Pearson correlations (Table 4).

Table 4. Pearson Correlations (r) between Placement Seeking Attitudes and Academic Performance for students successful and unsuccessful at finding placements.

Measure	Unsuccessful Placement Seekers		Successful Placement Seekers	
	Level 5 Employability Skills Unit Mark (%)	Level 5 Year Average Mark (%)	Level 5 Employability Skills Unit Mark (%)	Level 5 Year Average Mark (%)
(1) Achievement Motivation Total	.48*	.42*	.24	.06
(2) Certainty about wanting to do a placement	.34	-.07	-.29	-.11
(3) Confidence in finding a placement	.27	-.06	-.01	-.07
(4) Certainty about employment area	.30	-.06	.07	-.05
(5) Level of support needed	.32	.16	.23	.15

 * p<.05 (2-tailed)

Overall no significant relationships were found between the measures of academic performance explored with the confidence, certainty or support needs of students in relation to placement seeking regardless of successful or unsuccessful placement outcomes. Achievement motivation was though significantly related to both academic performance measures, with a medium effect size, suggesting that those with higher achievement motivation tended to perform better in the Employability Skills unit (r(n=26)= .48, p=.015) and with respect to their average performance at Level 5 overall (r(n=26)= .42, p=.035). However, these relationship were only observed in those who were *unsuccessful* in securing placements and did not re-occur in the group of students who had secured placements.

These findings provide partial support for the idea that those with greater motivation to achieve tend to do better academically, but only where such students are not motivated to find, or unsuccessful at finding placements. For those who successfully secure placements, it could be argued that their motivation for achievement may be more directly manifested through the placement search process and less towards academic achievement, although this does not preclude other explanations of these data.

3.7 Student explanations for lack of interest in taking a placement

Students were also asked to describe in their own words why they were not interested in taking a placement. This was done to identify whether students who were uninterested in placements have different motivations or priorities to those who had considered taking a placement, and to help identify any recurrent issues within the placement search process (Table 5).

The vast majority of students gave wanting to avoid delaying the completion of their degree as the main reason for not taking a placement, with some students indicating that they would prefer to get experience after their degree. The second most common reasons given were that students were already undertaking some form of non-course related work experience (e.g. volunteering or a part-time job) or that a further external factor was preventing them (e.g. *"feel as though it would be too much pressure"; "… don't have the money to support myself"; "Already signed a contract for my house next year"*). Relatively few students gave reasons which might otherwise indicate a lack of engagement or awareness (e.g. *"I do not feel it would be beneficial to me"; "I don't need a placement for what I want to do (teacher)"*).

Table 5. Reasons given for not pursuing a placement.

Response Category	Number of comments
Wanted to finish their degree	35
Other external factors (e.g. time pressure)	18
Already had volunteer experience	19
Didn't want to do one	16
Couldn't find information	5
Total	93

3.8   Problems experienced when looking for placements.

To help identify issues that students experience when attempting finding and securing a placement, students were also asked to indicate any problems they had encountered during the process. These issues were summarised into five main categories (Table 6). The most commonly cited issue experienced was the perceived difficulty of finding relevant placements (e.g. *"Not many in the areas I am interested in - mainly clinical or educational placements available"*). Unsuccessful placement seekers were most likely to have issue relating to themselves as students or other logistical issues (e.g. "as I'm on the {single honours} psychology course, I feel I don't have the required knowledge or experience to gain a placement in the forensic field"; "difficulty in getting far in the assessments"; "Trying to juggle finding a placement with other academic commitments"; "Don't have a car"). In comparison, successful placement seekers were more likely to cite issues with the placement providers themselves (e.g. "waiting times to hear back").

Table 6. Most common issues cited whilst searching for a placement.

Response Category	Unsuccessful Placement Seekers	Successful Placement Seekers
Problems Finding Relevant Placements	8	8
Issues with Placement Providers	2	5
Logistical issues (e.g. travel, cost)	5	2
Student-focussed Issues	9	2
No Issues (stated explicitly)	1	2
Total	27	22

3.9   What support do students want to help find placements?

Students were also asked what help they needed during their placement search (Table 7). The most common support needs related to where to search for placements (e.g. *"Finding other places to find a placement more suitable to the area I want "; "just continue sending opportunities"*). Application related support related to the process of applying for placements (e.g. *"How to go about contacting employer"; "interview help").* Support from the University included the desire for more direct contact with university through tutorials or workshops (e.g. *"Face-to-face support if denied a placement to talk through what went wrong"; "Someone to discuss different options and talk through and possible placement examples"*). Whereas unsuccessful students were more varied in the type of support they felt they needed, including help on how to apply, successful placements students overwhelmingly indicated that more support was needed with searching for placements and seemed less reliant on other sources of support beyond identifying available opportunities.

Table 7. Most common support requested.

Response Category	Unsuccessful Placement Seekers	Successful Placement Seekers
Application related (e.g. CV, cover letter)	5	2
Searching related (e.g. where to look)	6	15
Support from the University (e.g. workshops)	6	0
None (stated explicitly)	3	0
Total	20	17

4.   RESULTS: FOCUS GROUPS

4.1   Data Validity & Reflexivity

To help strengthen the validity of the findings presented below, Yardley's (2008) framework for validity in qualitative analysis were applied to the conduct and analysis of our study (Table 8). The focus group facilitator is a white female in my early twenties with an academic background in psychology. She is a recent graduate of the degree programme on which the focus group participants are themselves currently enrolled and herself undertook a work placement a UK based relief charity as part of her degree. In considering the influence of her background on the process of interpreting the focus group data, the researcher submits:

> *"My placement involved supporting older and vulnerable people to remain independent in their own home and I continued this placement for several months after my official placement period was over. This positive experience may have impacted on how I viewed the process and benefits of placements and my interpretation of the students' own experiences of placements, as it allowed comparison with my own experience. In my view, this also allowed a deeper understanding of the students' perspectives".*

Table 8. Examples of the Application of Yardley's Principles of Validity (2008).

Principles	Examples
Sensitivity to Context	• Students were interviewed in a quiet, informal room without the presence of any University staff, to allow the group to speak openly without fear of judgement. • The group facilitator also made it clear to participants that they were not a member of University staff.
Commitment & Rigour	• A comprehensive process of data familiarisation was undertaken involving reading and re-reading transcripts, note-taking and systematically highlighting interesting features of the transcripts that allowed complete immersion in the data. • Use of a Thematic Analysis framework allowed a structured and rigorous analysis of the data.
Transparency & coherence	• Evidence in the form of quotations and excerpts from the data are used to support the development of themes; coding is used to gather all evidence in relation to each theme to achieve a comprehensive presentation of the views expressed. • Reflexivity is used by the coder to identify any personal experience or conflicts of interest that may have a bearing on the interpretation of data.
Impact & Importance	• The analysis is structured to provide a personal account of how students experience the process of searching for and securing work placements. • Themes and patterns of behaviour amongst are developed are the experiences and meanings identified in the student accounts. • Analysis is theoretically guided with the intention of supporting the identification of practical solutions to issues that students, higher education institutions and placement providers face when it comes to placements.

4.2   Thematic Analysis & Discussion

A thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts was conducted using the analytical approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This revealed five super-ordinate themes, relevant to the placement experiences of students, each containing two or three subthemes (Table 9). Each theme with indicative illustrations in the students' own voices are explored below.

The aim of the focus groups was to explore how students perceived placement searching as well as their motivations for taking a placement. The focus groups also touched on how the students felt the search process impacted upon their career goals and their perception of the world of work. A complete list of questions used during the focus groups can be found in Appendix 8.2. The resulting transcriptions were analysed and presented as follows.

Table 9. Super-ordinate and sub-themes identified in student accounts of their placement search experiences.

Super-Ordinate Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Expectation versus Reality	• *Pre-search expectations* • *Reality sets in* • *Searching Strategies*
2. Development is a Journey	• *Developing Personally* • *Motivation for development* • *Developing tools*
3. Bringing together Academia and Careers	• *Positive Harmony* • *Negative Discord* • *Proposing Solutions*
4. Coping with barriers	• *Barriers from others* • *Intrapersonal Barriers*
5. Experience is the currency of the realm	• *Employability experience* • *Experience wish-list*

4.2.1 Expectation versus Reality

One of the aims of the focus groups was to identify how students approached their search with the objective of identifying possible adjustments to current university support systems as well as identifying strategies that might best inform future students. Participants were encouraged to retrospectively compare their opinions before and after the process as well as to reflect on the overall experience. It became clear during this analysis, that students felt that their expectations of the search process and the eventual reality had been very different and in some cases, direct opposites.

Sub-theme: Pre-search expectations
Students overwhelmingly reported that they had been enthusiastic about securing a placement, expressing excitement and interest in the opportunities that a placement provided for them. They cited a variety of reasons for wanting to secure a placement from the practical experience that it would provide, to the opportunity of 'dipping their toes in the water'. A recurrent theme was

utilising the support provided by the University and getting experience before they finished their degrees as shown in the quote below:

> *I thought, I'm doing the sandwich year though because I thought that might be better for me. So I can get experience in the field I want to go into. So I thought it might be the best way whilst you're still at University, it's... you get the support from them as well (FG1, P1, L68-70)*

A few students however reported that they also felt pressure to take a placement from within the prevailing academic culture. It became clear through these testimonies that the university educational system has placed the idea into students' heads that without the experience that can be achieved via a placement, they would be seemingly less employable and struggle to find graduate positions. This is consistent with other studies (e.g. Bowes & Harvey, 1999; Tomlinson, 2008). However, the focus groups revealed that students had brought into the notion that a placement would act as a silver bullet for the student's career prospects:

> *In sixth form, I just remember teachers saying get a placement, get a placement, get a placement, employers love students with placements so I think they drummed that into us from like year twelve so I just thought okay when I get to Uni, when I get to second year, I'm gonna get ... I need a placement. Like I need a sandwich placement or everything else is gonna be so much harder. (FG2, P1, L69-72)*

Sub-theme: Reality sets in

Students expressed frustrations and stress during their search as well as a realisation that their task was more difficult than first anticipated. This seemed to be due to the misconception that placements would be easy to come by, providing a quick and easy means to improve their employability, but they were not prepared for the realities of searching for a placement:

> *"I really wanted the sandwich placement, I wanted to take the year out and I thought yeah, it will be good ... I can return after a year knowing everything I wanna do - but like that, that's not how it turned out ... I think that's [what] I half thought. Do it and it'll help you grow ... You can find it out if you do like doing something or if you don't like it. Then that's what you're definitely gonna go for but I feel like ... that's not ... that's not what's happened, because like you said, what I was looking for doesn't exist". (FG2, P1, L100-102)*

In this quote, the student is specifically referencing a type of placement that would appeal to two areas of career interest that she sought, but also to the idea of a placement that would fulfil the expectations that she had put on to the idea of undertaking a placement, including that it would help her form a perfect career path and provide her with what she needed to pursue that career.

Sub-theme: Searching Strategies

During the focus groups, students were asked to explain the strategies and techniques they had used to secure a placement. This allowed the researchers to explore any patterns in approach and

success outcomes that emerged. A number of students reported that they had begun their search by directly approaching potential placement providers but due to the issues that this brought up (see super-ordinate theme 4), they reverted to more well-known strategies such as using the University careers service or applying for placements that were advertised via the Departmental Academic Placement Coordinator:

> *So I direct approached a lot of places but that was fruitless. Um, if I had been seriously passionate about being a particular thing, I would have done more direct face-to-face approach but I wasn't … quite so set on what I wanted to do so that didn't seem like a useful utilisation of my time (FG2, P1, L160-162).*

4.2.2 Development is a Journey

A second major theme that emerged through analysis was that students viewed their personal and employability development as a continual and evolving process rather than a static objective. Students framed their experiences when seeking a placement as part of journey on their career paths, seeing higher education as part of their personal and professional development, beyond just satisfying the needs of potential employers, corroborating the views reported by Higgins (2012). However, a variety of distinct facets emerged within this process.

Sub-theme: Developing Personally
Students talked about their own personal development that emerged from placement seeking or that they hoped to achieve via placement searching. They identified the barriers that they faced which had helped them learn how to cope with rejection and adjust to the ongoing challenges ahead, even those that they had not anticipated.

> P2: *Especially the whole keep trying, I think…that's gotta last for your entire life, you've just gotta keep trying if you want something to happen something good to happen, now … later on, just keep going for what you want, like yes, there will be obstacles and we will get rejections, it's just kinda like we've got to…*
>
> P3: … t*ry not to be discouraged. (FG2, P2 and 3, L315-319)*

Sub-theme: Motivation for development
Students talked at length about the reasons why they wished to take a placement. This included the chance to take advantage of opportunities, gain insight and skills as well as making the most of their experience that would aid their personal development beyond enhancing their employability credentials. There was a general recognition that personal growth was important and that having the right temperament and personality was just as important as their work experience portfolio and academic achievement:

> *Yeah, I think it takes a lot of tenacity to actually secure a placement. So you know you've got to be able to […] get no response or get lots and lots of rejections and just see that as part of the process rather than expecting you apply for two things and one of them will come through. (FG1, P1, L183-185)*

Sub-theme: Developing tools

A discussion amongst the groups was also held regarding the practical development of the tools of job applications such as their CV, covering letter and email or written communication, skills identified by previous authors as often lacking in undergraduates (Moore & Morton, 2015). There was a sense that students were more aware of their progress when these tools were applied for real, from the beginning of their search to post placement:

> *I definitely learnt about the email thing […] 'cause like I compared my first email to my last. [laughs] It was like one sentence versus a couple paragraphs. […] 'Hey, gotta any placements?' doesn't really cut it, does it?*
> *(FG2, P3, L301-306)*

The importance attached to having these tools refined was clearly evident within the groups; students were aware of and had made use of the University's career services to improve. The process of searching for a placement had provided them with a testing ground to gain real world experience and feedback to reflect upon and revise how they presented themselves to potential employers, without the pressure of needing full-time permanent employment.

4.2.3 Bringing Together Academia and Careers

Participants also expressed the challenges they faced in attempting to balance their academic and careers-oriented selves, often conceptualising these as separate entities rather than one and the same. This may partially reflect the perceived disconnect reported by employers between higher education and the world of work (Lowden et al, 2011). Students talked about the balance between their academic and work life in a variety of ways, both positive and negative.

Sub-theme: Positive Harmony

Participants felt that taking a placement and the process of securing one would inform their academic studies in a rich and fulfilling way that could not be experienced without a placement. This included allowing them to experience and apply theoretical information from their studies to the real world, as well as adding to the value of any prior work experience they had already acquired. There was also an anticipation that the experience would also contribute to subsequent improvements in academic performance (e.g., Reddy & Moores, 2012):

> *I always think that this sort of will help, like it will kind of open your eyes. And you'll actually notice things that you study or you read up and because I've really noticed that before, like things actually start happening like oh wow um, oh I see it now kind of thing. It will help you with your writing and going to like different-like go deeper into things. (FG1, P3, L111-114).*

Sub-them: Negative Discord

Despite the expected benefits they believed a placement would bring to their studies, participants also felt there were elements of the academic environment that were not compatible with placement seeking. These included the difficulty of focussing on placement seeking due to the demands of their academic studies and pressures of approaching deadlines. The imposition of a placement confirmation deadline itself also represented a significant barrier which in some cases it

was felt may have acted as a deterrent to taking a placement. There was a feeling that students were always fighting to stay ahead of their work which left little time to search for placements effectively:

>P4:*I didn't realise that it was going to get hectic so quickly.*
>
>P2: *Yeah.*
>
>P4: *With like deadline and exams and everything is going to creep on you.*
>
>P1: *And all of the deadlines seem to fall so closely together.*
>
>   [noises of agreement]
>
>P4: *One after the other. (FG1, P1, P2 and P4, L209-214)*

When the subject of informing students about placements in an effective manner came up, students felt that the current system did not meet their needs. Students reported at times feeling overloaded with information, which led to pressure that could be most easily circumvented by not engaging with the idea of placements. The use of a lecture format to inform students about placements was highlighted as not providing sufficient opportunities to ask questions, particularly when other students present may not be interested in placement opportunities:

>*But I feel like if we were told about how quickly we'd have to find a placements … then I'd be more prepared. We kind of were, but it's very hard to hear all the messages that you're given … because you've given so much and because it's like a new experience. So you've got, what, six new handbooks? five new handbooks? you're coming to university ... living on your own, being away from home and you've got all of these freedom all of a sudden plus here, here's all your paperwork go away and read it and I don't know what the best way to transfer knowledge from people who know the process to people who are new ... but what I do know is giving it to people on a bit of paper is not a good way to transfer knowledge. And nor is standing in front of them saying 'you have to do this and you need to do this and you need to do this'. I don't have a solution [laughs] But those were challenges for me, too much information, too many important bits of paper to know which ones to prioritise. (FG1, P1, L267-272)*

Sub-theme: Proposing Solutions

As vocal as students were on the issue of balance between academic life and career development, several solutions were also proposed including placement fairs, one-to-one consultations with advisers and optional workshops that allowed information to be presented with less pressure on students. It was also felt that hearing information about the importance of placements from people in authority such as lecturers or placement officers, did not resonate with students as effectively as would hearing first-hand about the possibilities from other students. Where opportunities had already been integrated into placement talks to hear from students who had themselves undertaken placements, these were seen as highly beneficial:

>*I think also when we came back in second year and had the talks from the girls who'd been on placements I think that's a lot to see ... cause they all had completely different experiences so I think that kind of helped me in the sense of wow okay...she's done and gone something completely ... didn't*

like, she's gone and done something she really liked, I kinda felt like that's quite supportive. (FG2, P1, L269-272)

Peer-to-peer support in an informal setting repeatedly came up as an excellent solution for imparting information to support students particularly during their searches, since advice could also be provided on issues to do with the management of academic workload that they experienced, as well as advice on placements.

4.2.4 Coping with Barriers

Participants were aware of the changing labour market that graduates were entering after university with increased competition for jobs (e.g. HESA, 2015). This, in turn, placed additional pressure on students seeking placements. Participants were quick to identify the barriers that prevented not only effective searching but also threatened their personal development. These included both external and intrapersonal barriers.

Sub-theme: Barriers from Others

External barriers were a common theme when it came to the challenges of finding a placement. Students discussed communication barriers with potential placement providers, citing them as a key source of stress in the process. These difficulties took various forms including problems initiating contact, delayed notifications, and outright rejection. There was a partial sense incredulity amongst some participants that it was the potential placement providers who dictated the process rather than the students:

> *So this process for me was quite hard … Because there's so many places that I applied to that would just not let you know. And it's kind of like disheartening because you're not giving me a yes or no answer so are you going to give me a place? … I called them I emailed them and eventually I did find one. But it was also the deadline, which is like, that's coming up but I still haven't got a placement so it's very stressful. On top of everything. (FG1, P1, L122-129)*

Sub-theme: Intrapersonal Barriers

Another form of barrier identified within the focus groups were the personal barriers that were an inherent part of each student's own character. Students were candid about what traits they felt had aided or hindered their placement seeking success, which ranged from self-reported laziness, not knowing where to start, to a lack of confidence when approaching the placement providers:

> *I'm really not that organised, I kind of have a tendency to let deadlines creep up on me and run around like a headless chickens trying to get done at the last minutes but it was outside of my normal way of doing things to actually be looking so early for the placement. I think if I had fallen into my usual placement then I wouldn't have a placement. (FG1, P1, L190-193)*

There was also a perceived lack of diversity amongst some participants in available placements that were advertised by the University which confirmed an underlying dependence within the process on the university to source placements rather a reliance on the student's own initiative.

4.2.5 Experience is the currency of the realm

The most common reason given for seeking a placement was the experience and value this would provide to their future careers. Students seemed to understand that experience was an important 'currency' when it came to being able to provide tangible evidence of employability skills (Jackson, 2013) and securing employment post graduation. The benefits of this new currency were articulated in one of two ways - by expressing the attributes or status they would gain through the placement that was desirable, or by describing what they personally wanted from the experience.

Sub-theme: Employability Experience
When asked what they hoped to gain from their placement, students who adopted this stance would express the professional benefit of having a more robust CV that would impress potential employers. This was also often co-presented with expectation (Super-ordinate theme 1) that students felt pressured by universities to take placements since this would make them more valued in a competitive job market.

> *What I think was drummed into my head, you need experience to get*
> *somewhere … I was just told by a lot of people that's it's a lot harder to find*
> *a job if you haven't got any experience really. And they're more likely to take*
> *you on if you're coming on under a sandwich placement rather than just*
> *looking for some experience, or that's what I got from it. (FG2, P3, L82-87)*

From this perspective, the experience was seen as 'a box that each student was required to tick' as this was something that employers wanted. The experience itself was not conceptualised as valuable but was treated as a means to end - something that was necessary to enable students to later find a 'real' job.

Sub-theme: Experience Wish list
From this perspective, students articulated the benefit of placements as being something new that they wanted achieve in order to allow themselves to develop personally. Typically such participants would list specific experiences that they sought which would allow them to develop skills in certain areas. The placement was therefore conceived more as a learning experience in its own right which would allow them to test out their career aspirations.

> *I also thought … um, I can do it so I can find out what I like and don't like*
> *before I finish University. So like, second year we did this, I worked alongside*
> *a researcher and I was, like, I definitely don't want to do this. So then I'm*
> *experimenting with the different fields. (FG1, P3, L76-78)*

As well as describing the type of experience they want, students also described what they wanted to take away from the experience. Students felt that experience should allow them to reflect on and reveal something about themselves as well as benefit themselves personally rather than what was expected of them as future graduates. Such an outlook seems broadly consistent with the basic attributes of a proactive personality type which has been linked to more effective career development strategies and effect job search outcomes (Brown et al., 2006; Seibert et al, 2001).

When defining their experiences in this way, students spoke with hope about what they would gain, but also indicated that they were prepared if the experience turned out not to be what they desired - consistent with the idiom that whilst there was such thing as bad experience, there could be no such thing as worthless experience:

> *So I think like a big characteristic, you would need to do this is kind of being willing to try something new 'cos if you're not then … 'cos yeah anything could happen, you could love it, you could hate but you don't until you do it really. (FG2, P3, L177-179)*

5.   CONCLUSIONS

- The aim of this study was to examine students' personal motivations and experiences when seeking and applying for placements, and more specifically to compare the psychological characteristics of students who successfully secure placements with those who are unsuccessful or uninterested in finding placements.

- Some key differences were found in the personal characteristics of students who were successful in securing a placement, compared to students who were initially interested in taking a placement but did not secure a placement, or students who were not interested in taking a placement. Students who secured placements scored more highly on a psychology assessment of achievement motivation, were more certain about their decision to pursue a placement, were more confident that they would be able to find a placement. In addition, a strong positive correlation was found between students' certainty that they wished to study a placement and confidence that they would be able to successfully secure a placement.

- The construct of achievement motivation may therefore provide a promising conceptual framework or understanding student success and failure when applying for placements. With the context of expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation (e.g. McClelland, 1985; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), students who place greater value on gaining work experience and are more confident that they will be able to successfully secure work will be amongst those who are more motivated to seek and persist until securing placement opportunities As these achievement motivation scores and confidence ratings were taken before the students began their placements, it can be inferred that these traits were already present in the students at the time of searching for a placement. Therefore, they were not a consequence of the placement, providing compelling evidence for the hypothesis that more confident and motivated students are more likely to undertake a placement compared to their less confident and less motivated classmates.

- A further objective was to evaluate the impact of academic performance and careers engagement of placement and non-placement students during the placement application process. Our intention was not just to corroborate previous findings that higher achieving students are more likely to elect to undertake placements (e.g. Reddy & Moores, 2012) but also to examine whether students who successfully find and secure placements differ academically from other students who wish to undertake placements but are unable to secure a position.

- Students who successfully secured placements were found to have significantly higher course grades than all of other groups of students. Academically, the profile of students who were not interested in placements was undistinguishable from that of students who were interested but not able to secure a placement. It follows that rather than simply being a self-selection effect whereby more able students apply to study placements, academic differences may also contribute to success outcomes in the process of applying for placements. Student accounts of the challenges faced when applying for placements suggest a greater need for support may exist in less academically able students targeted specifically at application preparation and increased access to specialist staff for placement advice.

- Achievement motivation was not directly related to placement search attitudes, and was related to academic performance in the case of unsuccessful placement seekers only. Contrary to expectations, students not securing placements did <u>not</u> show less certainty about their preferred employment area, did <u>not</u> differ in the type of work sought, and did <u>not</u> see themselves as needing greater support to find placements at the beginning of their search. This may suggest personal attributes regarding how students approach, and persist with, the task of searching for placements rather than different (or unrealistic) expectations about the type of work available they pursue may be crucial to successful search outcomes.

- Taken together, these findings suggest that higher education providers may need to consider ways of developing support to improve the search confidence and tactics of placement seekers and consider ways to develop more 'careers-focussed' in addition to 'academic' achievement motives in their students, particularly in subject areas were prescribed vocational pathways for graduates are less apparent.

- Data from the focus groups showed broad agreement that placements were beneficial to the development of workplace skills in students to aid future job applications, broadening skills, and improving career certainty, as well helping students during the final year of their degree (e.g. by experiencing the application of subject practice in the real world). Discussion also highlighted that in order to maximise the number of students taking placements, consideration be given to the optimum means of framing and communicating placement information to students, in addition to working with students during the search process to help develop their career aspirations as their search progresses.

- Thought should also be given to how HEIs can work better with placement providers to ensure diversity in opportunities and improve communication during the application process, to ensure the needs of both students and employers are met.

- Emergent themes developed from students' own experiences identified how an initial idealised expectation of finding the perfect placement were surpassed with the reality of knowing where to search and how to identify suitable opportunities, as well as stress resulting from the demands of searching and threat of rejection. In most cases, students were able to frame the search process as a journey through which the challenges experienced formed a valuable part of their own self-development. The findings of this research will assist higher education providers in understanding how best to engage and support students with developing their employability skills through placements, in developing our understanding around which students are most likely to secure a placement.

6.   SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

For Higher Education Institutions

- Modify the delivery of placement information to maximise its utility to students. For example, consider staged rather than upfront delivery of placement details making use of alternative mediums, beyond lectures, handbooks and emails (e.g. social media, newsletters, and advice workshops with opportunities for one-to-one student guidance).
- Provide more course-based opportunities for students returning from placements to engage with pre-placement students to provide peer-to-peer support and role modelling either formally or informally (e.g. via careers fairs, invited talks on pre-placement units or as part of a structured or credit bearing peer mentoring schemes).
- Educate students regarding the psychological basis to placement search confidence (e.g. via feedback) and explore the use of trainability approaches to improving students' achievement motivation and self-efficacy to determine what methods would be most effective for enhancing student confidence in support future placement seeking behaviour.
- Help students identify areas for development through the use of personal development planning and the use of other media (e.g. https://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner) to support the establishment of concrete career goals using in order to maximise subsequent search confidence.

For Students

- Make use of course based and university wide peer networks (both campus based and online) for support and advice regarding placements, particularly students and graduates who have undertaken placements.
- Engage with course based opportunities to develop and reflect on employability skills, and build careers confidence and certainty through activities such volunteering and universities and societies, prior to placements.
- Utilise university based careers services and placement advisors to maximise effective placement applications.

For Potential Placement Providers

- Work closely with university's to ensure appropriate placement information and application processing timelines are known, and expectations regarding student standards of communication are set to ensure the needs of both students and employers are met.

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8.   APPENDICES

8.1   Placement Questionnaire

Psychology Placements Questionnaire

To help us provide better support for students thinking about taking placements (or who may not wish to take placements) we would be grateful if you could answer a few questions below.

Please enter your Student Number:

1. Are you thinking about taking a placement next year?

    Tick **any** which apply

    ☐ Yes, I want to take the sandwich year, and have already found my placement
    ☐ Yes, I want to take the sandwich year, but am still looking for a placement
    ☐ Yes, I have chosen the final year work placement option, and have already found my placement
    ☐ Yes, I have chosen the final year work placement option, but am still looking for a placement
    ☐ No, I am not interested in doing a placement of any kind next year

2. How *certain are you* that you would either like, or not like, to take a placement? (Please circle a number from 0 to 10).

Not at all certain	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Very Certain

3. If you are **NOT INTERESTED** in taking a placement, please tell us your main reason in the box below:

Now please go to **Question 5** on the next page >>

4. If you **ARE INTERESTED** in taking a placement next year, please answer the following questions:

4a). How *confident do you feel* about being able to find a placement? (Please circle a number from 0 to 10).

Not at all confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Very Confident

4b). How *sure are you about the* type of job or employment area in which you would like to do your placement?

Not Sure Yet	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	100% sure of the type of placement I want

4c). If you do have an idea about the **type of placement / work role** you would like, in what area is this?

Enter type of placement or employment area you want to work in:

4d). What (if any) **problems** are, or have you, experienced when looking for your placement?

4e). How much *support* do you feel you need from us to help find your placement?

None at all … I just need to get on with it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A lot of extra support … I'm finding it difficult.

4f). What *type of support* do you feel you would like?

Please tell us how you would like us to help you here:

Continued … PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 5 ON THE NEXT PAGE >>

Some information about you.

To help us provide better tailored support to all students, we need to know more about the characteristics of those who do or don't wish to undertake placements. To help us gain a better understanding, please tick **one** reply to each question below which best applies to you:

5. Working is something …

I would rather not do
I don't like doing very much
I would rather do now and then
I like doing
I like doing very much

6. At school, they thought I was …

Very diligent
Diligent
Not always so diligent
Rather easy-going
Very easy-going

7. To prepare yourself for a long time for an important task …

Really is senseless
Often is rather rash
Can often be useful
Testifies to a sense of reality
Is necessary to succeed

8. Other people think that I …

Work very hard
Work hard
Work pretty hard
Don't work very hard
Don't work hard

9. If I have not done a task well and failed to attain my goal …

I continue to do my best to reach my goal
I try one more time to reach my goal
I find it difficult to not lose heart
I'm inclined to give up
I usually give up

10. When I am working, the demands I make upon myself are …

Very high
Pretty high
Not so high
Low
Very low

11. Work that requires great responsibility …

I would like to do very much
I would only do if I was paid well
Would be a great deal of effort for me
I don't think I would be capable of doing
Is completely unattractive to me

12. When doing something difficult …

I often give up very quickly
I give up quickly
I give up rather quickly
I don't give up too soon
I usually see it through

13. In general I am …

Very strongly future-oriented
Strongly future-oriented
Sometimes future-oriented
Not strongly future-oriented
Not at all future-oriented

DON'T FORGET:

More information about placement options is available on Moodle (on the "Undergraduate Psychology Placements Information" site). The deadline for returning placement confirmation forms to Julie Udell is **Friday 27th May 2016.**

If you would like someone from the department to contact you before next academic year for help regarding placement searching, please enter **your email address** here:

8.2 Focus Group Schedules

8.2.1 *Topic Guide: Placement Students*

Project title: *What motivates university students to take a placement?*
Name of Moderator: Ellie Scott-Allen
Date: Friday 19th August
Attendees: Students who found a placement

Arrive and refreshments and complete forms   20 minutes

- *Informed consent and expense forms to be completed. Confidentiality to be emphasised.*
- ***Audio recorder ON***

Setting the Scene   10 minutes

- *Introductions of facilitator.*
- *Explain location of fire exit and toilets.*
- *Outline finishing time. Ask if people need to leave early and for those that do to leave quietly to try to minimise the disruption to the discussion.*

We are here today to talk about your experiences of trying to locate a placement for your sandwich or third year work placement. The aim is to identify the motivations of psychology graduates in relation to psychology placements.
I would like to say the following:

- We would like you to feel comfortable to say what you really think; it is fine to have different views, or to change your mind about something. Everyone is asked to show respect to one another.
- Please speak clearly and try not to speak at the same time as someone else.
- Only talk about personal experiences if comfortable to do so.
- Please do not talk after the session about the details of what was said by other people
- We will keep confidential what you say in the group, unless we learn that someone here today, or someone mentioned by you, is being harmed.
- If anyone is uncomfortable about anything being discussed, please raise this - at any time during or after the discussion.
- If anyone has a mobile phone, please make sure it's switched off.
- Does anyone have any questions?

We are interested in everyone's different experiences and views and it isn't my job to decide who's right and who's wrong. We would like to hear mainly from you as an individual. If you see me writing any notes, it's just to help me remember, not because there is anything wrong about what you are saying. As we speak, please feel free to respond to me or to others without waiting to be called on. My role is not to give my opinions but to learn about what you think is important. It would be good to hear from everybody, so we have as many different viewpoints as possible. We have a lot to cover, so at times I may need to move you on a bit.

The discussion is being recorded so as not to miss anything that is said – so we'll just check that what we've been saying so far has come out on the machine **– CHECK –** After today we will write down word for word what we hear, but remove names. We may quote sections of what was said – although others may guess who was speaking by the way things are put, no-one's name will be used.

Assurance of confidentiality to be re-iterated.
- Do you have any questions?

Placement Discussion
Our first discussion will be about your motivations for seeking a placement.

Ice breaker   5 minutes

So, let's start with finding out some more about you. Who would like to start?

Please tell us your name, whether your placement is a Sandwich year or 3rd year Psychology Work Placement and where your placement is.

Ok that is great, thank you. I now have some questions that I'd like to open up to everyone. My first question is:

1. What motivated you to take on a placement?
   - *Can you tell me more about that?*

2. What aspect of the placement excites you most?
   - *Why is that?*

3. Do you feel your placement will benefit your degree?
   - *If just say yes or no, ask why that is.*

4. How did you go about trying to find a placement?
   - *Where did you look? Who did you speak to? Did you: email organisations, see Purple Door, use the Jobs Board, etc; was there anything else?*

5. Do you think that your personal characteristics helped you in finding your placement?
   - *What characteristics do you think helped? Why do you think they helped?*

6. What were the biggest challenges you faced whilst seeking your placement?
   - *If they had challenges - How did you overcome these challenges?*

7. Did you learn any lessons from this?
   - *What did you learn? Do you think that will help you in the future?*

8. Has the process of searching for a placement had any impact on your choice of career area?
   - *How has it impacted?*

- If you had one piece of advice for other students considering a placement what would it be? Do you have any tips for students about the application process or placement seeking in general.

- If you could sum up your experience of seeking for a placement in one sentence, what would you say?

- We are moving towards the end, this is my last question. So thinking about everything we have talked about today, your experiences and your motivations. Do you think there is anything important that we should know about that we might have missed?

Closure

Thank you all very much, we've now come to the end of the session; We will transcribe the discussion and then write a summary of what was said, which we will send to everyone who has signed the relevant form but this might take few weeks. Again, I would like to stress that everything we said today is confidential. Thank you again for your time and sharing your experiences and insights; they are very valuable to our study. I am now going to switch off the recorder.

Audio recorder OFF
After the session:
Speak to each of the participants and thank them. Ask their feedback/future suggestions?
Record researchers' thoughts.
Remind them the thank you cheque will go directly to their bank.

8.2.2 Topic Guide: Placement Seekers

Project title: *What motivates university students to take a placement?*
Name of Moderator: Ellie Scott-Allen
Date: Friday 19th August
Attendees: Students who did not find a placement

Arrive and refreshments and complete forms   20 minutes

- *Informed consent and expense forms to be completed. Confidentiality to be emphasised.*

- ***Audio recorder ON***

Setting the Scene   **10 minutes**

- *Introductions of facilitator.*
- *Explain location of fire exit and toilets.*
- *Outline finishing time. Ask if people need to leave early and for those that do to leave quietly to try to minimise the disruption to the discussion.*
-

We are here today to talk about your experiences of trying to locate a placement for your sandwich or third year work placement. The aim is to identify the motivations of psychology graduates in relation to psychology placements.
I would like to say the following:

- We would like you to feel comfortable to say what you really think; it is fine to have different views, or to change your mind about something. Everyone is asked to show respect to one another.
- Please speak clearly and try not to speak at the same time as someone else.
- Only talk about personal experiences if comfortable to do so.
- Please do not talk after the session about the details of what was said by other people
- We will keep confidential what you say in the group, unless we learn that someone here today, or someone mentioned by you, is being harmed.
- If anyone is uncomfortable about anything being discussed, please raise this - at any time during or after the discussion.
- If anyone has a mobile phone, please make sure it's switched off.
- Does anyone have any questions?

We are interested in everyone's different experiences and views and it isn't my job to decide who's right and who's wrong. We would like to hear mainly from you as an individual. If you see me writing any notes, it's just to help me remember, not because there is anything wrong about what you are saying. As we speak, please feel free to respond to me or to others without waiting to be called on. My role is not to give my opinions but to learn about what you think is important. It would be good to hear from everybody, so we have as many different viewpoints as possible. We have a lot to cover, so at times I may need to move you on a bit.

The discussion is being recorded so as not to miss anything that is said – so we'll just check that what we've been saying so far has come out on the machine **– CHECK –** After today we will write down word for word what we hear, but remove names. We may quote sections of what was said – although others may guess who was speaking by the way things are put, no-one's name will be used.

Assurance of confidentiality to be re-iterated.

- Do you have any questions?

Placement Discussion
Our first discussion will be about your motivations for seeking a placement.
Ice breaker   **5 minutes**

So, let's start with finding out some more about you. Who would like to start?

Please tell us your name, whether you were searching for a sandwich year or 3rd year Psychology Work Placement and why you chose that type of placement.

Ok that is great, thank you. I now have some questions that I'd like to open up to everyone. My first question is:

1. What motivated you to seek out a placement?
   - *Can you tell me more about that?*

2. How did you go about trying to find a placement?
   - *Where did you look? Who did you speak to? Did you: email organisations, see Purple Door, use the Jobs Board, etc.; was there anything else?*

3. Do you think that your personal characteristics helped you when searching for a placement?
   - *What characteristics do you think helped? Why do you think they helped?*

4. What were the biggest challenges you faced whilst seeking your placement?
   - *Can you tell me more about that?*

5. What made you decide to stop looking for a placement?
   - *Why was that?*

6. What support do you think could have helped you to find a placement?
   - *How do you think that might have helped?*

7. Did you learn any lessons from this?
   - *What did you learn? Do you think that will help you in the future or not?*

8. Has the process of searching for a placement had any impact on your choice of career area?
   - *Why was that? How has it impacted?*

- If you had one piece of advice for other students considering a placement what would it be? Do you have any tips for students about the application process or placement seeking in general?

- If you could sum up your experience of seeking for a placement in one sentence, what would you say?

- We are moving towards the end, this is my last question. So thinking about everything we have talked about today, your experiences and your motivations. Do you think there is anything important that we should know about that we might have missed?

Closure

Thank you all very much, we've now come to the end of the session; We will transcribe the discussion and then write a summary of what was said, which we will send to everyone who has signed the relevant form but this might take few weeks. Again, I would like to stress that everything we said today is confidential. Thank you again for your time and sharing your experiences and insights; they are very valuable to our study. I am now going to switch off the recorder.

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