

## Enhancing support for International Students to engage in Work Based and Placement Learning (WBPL)



Dr Gitit Kadar-Satat, [Gitit.kadar-satat@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Gitit.kadar-satat@warwick.ac.uk) Assistant Professor and Placements Officer, and Diya Mehta, Student Employability Champion, Department of Psychology, University of Warwick

### Policy background

The UK Higher Education system is the second most popular study destination for international students worldwide. [In 21/22](#), approximately 1 in 4 students in the UK came from overseas or the European Union. At the [University of Warwick](#), non-EU/UK-domiciled students make up 31% of the total student population.

The Government's International Education Strategy recognises the crucial financial, social and cultural value this student population brings to the [sector](#). The strategy emphasises the importance of supporting international students' employability and transition into the labour market. This is considered integral to enhancing the international student experience and essential for maintaining the sector's global competitiveness. However, the employability needs of international students have been largely overlooked by [HE providers](#) who maintain a 'UK-centric' focus. In the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick, we address this by developing and implementing inclusive employability practices targeting diverse groups including international students.

### Challenges for international student engagement with WBPL

There is little UK-based research on international students' perceptions and experience of WBPL, although [some evidence](#) suggests that completing work placements is beneficial. Drawing on [Goodwin and Mbah \(2019\)](#) we identified several key challenges related to international students' engagement with WBPL.

These include:

- Lack of information (e.g. how to identify WBPL and career enhancement opportunities, understanding specific requirements or processes);
- Lack of confidence (e.g. English language written and verbal communication skills);
- Cultural differences (e.g. familiarity with organisational values and workplace attitudes);
- Prior academic preparation and work experience (e.g. lack of prior professional experience in the UK).

### Addressing these challenges

We developed and implemented the following practices:

- **International students and alumni as role models**

We invite current international placement students and former international students to present at our annual Psychology careers conference to capture and disseminate their wealth of information and experience. Through presentations, Q&A sessions and networking, these speakers offer both practical tips and serve as role models for current international students. Speakers share their experiences of researching, preparing for, transitioning into their placements and careers and discuss their career progression. This allows international students to connect with individuals who have overcome various employability challenges.





- **Creating Internal Roles and WBPL Opportunities**

WBPL opportunities within academic departments and central services can provide an initial step into the UK employment environment, so we have expanded and diversified internal WBPL offerings to include Student Ambassadors, Media and Comms Officers, and Student Employability Champions, an internal research skills development scheme, and a credit-bearing placement module. These internal work opportunities allow our international students to gain insights into workplace culture and learn how to de-code organisational norms in a supportive 'student-centred' environment. Engaging with such WBPL opportunities can boost students' confidence before pursuing external options.

- **Communicating expectations and requirements**

Uncertainty regarding expectations and requirements can impede participation in WBPL. To enhance clarity and transparency, we offer tailored information to international students and signpost them to relevant resources early and frequently. For example, when promoting the placements offered as part of a final year academic module, we detail international students' eligibility and any related processes the student will need to complete, such as applying for a DBS check. In some instances, we signpost students to country-specific information and professional services for further guidance. Providing this information allows international students to make informed choices and be better prepared for the WBPL opportunity.

### **Final Takeaways**

- HE providers should consider international students' needs when creating, promoting and assessing WBPL opportunities. Co-creation with international students can ensure that this group's ideas and needs are integrated into the WBPL.
- It is important to leverage international students' expertise and diverse perspectives by actively involving them in career events.
- The information provided to international students about WBPL opportunities should clearly and explicitly address issues such as eligibility criteria and employment processes. This information allows international students to make informed choices and be better prepared for the WBPL opportunity.

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