In-house, University-based work experience versus off-campus, work-experience

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

1 **Abstract**

3 **Purpose:** To investigate students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and
4 disadvantages of ~~internal (~~in-house~~,)~~University-based work experience versus ~~external~~ off-
5 campus, work~~work placements~~ experience.

6 **Design/methodology/approach:** Three focus groups, one consisting of students who had
7 undertaken ~~an external work placement~~work experience off-campus at an employers'
8 workplace (n=6), one consisting of students who had undertaken ~~an~~ work experience
9 ~~internal placement~~in-house with a University-based employer (n=6), and a third mixed
10 ~~placement~~ group (n=6~~,)~~consisting of students who had undertaken both types), were
11 formed. Focus group data were supplemented by interviews (n=3). Data were transcribed
12 and analysed thematically.

13 **Findings:** Based on student perceptions, both types of work experience ~~placement~~ were
14 thought to: enhance future employment; provide career insight; enable skill/experience
15 acquisition and application; and be useful for building relationships. ~~Internal placements~~Work
16 experience that occurred in-house was ~~were~~, in addition, perceived to: be cost effective;
17 enable students to be more closely supervised and supported; be good for relationship
18 building between and within students/staff; be beneficial for increasing student attainment;
19 and enable students to see the link between theory and practice more clearly. ~~Internal~~
20 ~~placement~~In-house work experience was ~~were~~, however, deemed to be restricted in terms of
21 variety, and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders.

22 **Research limitations:** The study is limited in that it is based on the perceptions of students
23 undertaking unique ~~placements~~ types of integrated work experience within one faculty at one
24 university.

25 **Practical implications:** When deciding on whether ~~internal~~ in-house or ~~external~~ off-campus
26 work experiences ~~placements~~ are offered, consideration should be given to level of support,
27 supervision, observation, and travel and time costs.

Originality/value: Original views of students regarding ~~internal placements~~in-house work experience have been gathered, which can be used to inform ~~placement~~ ~~choice~~ in-course workplace practices.

Key words: work-based learning; placements; internships; employability; workplace experience

1 **Introduction**

2 Students who undertake relevant work experience, such as a work placement or internship,

3 are not only more likely to receive a good degree (upper second or first class award),

4 compared to those who do not (Brooks and Youngson, 2016; Jones *et al.,* 2015; Mansfield,

5 2011; Patel *et al.,* 2012), but are also more likely to gain competitive advantage in the job

6 market (Harvey *et al.,* 1998; Helyer *et al.,* 2014; Langworthy and Turner, 2003; Tomlinson,

7 2008). Placements Work experience have has been found to improve student progression

8 and retention rates (Langworthy and Turner, 2003), and to motivate the student for further

9 learning (Moore & and Workman, 2011). Placements Work experience also improves

10 students' perception of their academic experience (Kettis *et al.,* 2013), which could impact

11 on overall student satisfaction scores.

12

13 Reasons for why students undertake a placementwork experience, and the perceptions of

14 their placement experience have been explored through qualitative research. One perceived

15 benefit of placements a work experience is that they it provides insight into a particular

16 industry or type of employment (Little and Harvey, 2006), to the extent that students are

17 more able to identify with their intended profession (Kettis *et al.,* 2013). Placements Work

18 experience isare also thought to supplement learning (Little and Harvey, 2006), enable the

19 student to see how theory is applied in practice (Bullock, Gould, Hejmadi and Lock, *et al.,*

20 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006), and improve personal and transferable skills, such as

21 communication, confidence, perseverance and empowerment (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Helyer *et*

22 *al.,* 2014).

23

24 Despite these reported advantages, there are several limitations concerning work

25 experience placements. Inappropriate placements work places or not being able to place

26 students with an appropriate employer are common challenges (Nduna, 2012). Students

27 may be obliged to find placement work themselves, which presents problems such as

28 students having to cold-call employers, and then having to face rejection (Aggett and Busby,

Formatted: Font: Italic

1 2011). Bullock *et al.* (2009) found that some students were not organised or confident

2 enough to arrange their own work placement experience. There are also cost implications for

3 the University (Nduna, 2012), as well as cost implications for the student, since time spent in

4 work-placement experience, which ~~are~~ is generally unpaid, means that time in paid

5 employment has to be reduced (Bullock *et al.,* 2009). There is also considerable diversity of

6 ~~placement~~ work experience. Students are, for instance, not always visited in the workplace

7 by their University supervisor due to time and travel constraints of staff (Nduna, 2012).

8 Barriers for employers to providing ~~placement~~ relevant work opportunities also exist, such as

9 the costs and time associated with supervision and managing projects (Wilson, 2012). For

10 these reasons, there has been a decline in the number of students who undertake ~~external~~

11 work experience at an employer's workplace ~~placements~~ (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Nduna,

12 2012). Universities have, therefore, been considering alternatives to the traditional ~~work~~

13 ~~placement~~work experiences that occur offsite at the employers' worksite, such as

14 experiential learning, project-based learning (Nduna, 2012), extracurricular activities (Wilson,

15 2012), virtual placements (Cornelius *et al.,* 2008), and community-based learning projects or

16 'science shops' (Gamble and Bates, 2011).

17

18 ~~Internal (i~~n-house work ~~) placements may~~experience may be one way of providing all the

19 benefits of ~~the~~ a traditional ~~placement~~ off-campus work experience but without the resource

20 implication, and the difficulties of trying to secure suitable ~~placement~~ workplace

21 opportunities. ~~Internal~~ In-house ~~placements~~ work experience may also be suitable for

22 students who are not confident enough to work externally. ~~Internal~~ In-house work ~~placement~~

23 opportunities are common in a number of settings, including medical, law, and sport~~, where~~.

24 In such situations, often a subsidised, commercial clinic or service is available on campus~~,~~

25 ~~often subsidised~~, which provides an opportunity for students to gain unpaid work ~~placement~~

26 experience.

27

4

1   There are certain disadvantages with ~~internal an~~ in-house work experiences~~placements~~.

2   They decrease external employer engagement, reduce opportunities for knowledge transfer,

3   and decrease other benefits associated with employer engagement and links with external

4   stakeholders (Mansfield, 2011; Tallantyre, 2010). Nduna (2012), however, suggests that

5   there was little or no proof of enhanced collaboration with industry as a result of ~~external~~

6   work experiences that occur at the employers' workplace~~placements~~. ~~A further disadvantage~~

7   ~~of internal in-house placements work experience is that students might not be able to~~

8   ~~develop their identity by observing a 'real' community of practice (Wenger, 1998).~~ The

9   advantages and disadvantages of work experience that occur ~~internal~~ in-house, on campus

10 versus ~~external work~~ that which occurs at an employer's workplace ~~placement~~ warrants

11 further investigation. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate students'

12 perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house, University-based

13 work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based experience ~~external versus internal~~

14 ~~work placements~~.

15

16

17

Methods

Undergraduate students within one faculty of~~from one~~ a university in the United Kingdom were informed about the study through advertisement (email, virtual learning environment, and verbal announcement in lectures). Students who expressed an interest were contacted to ensure they met the inclusion criterion (undertaken a relevant ~~placement~~work experience), and were invited to participate. All participants gave their written and informed consent having been fully ~~informed~~ briefed ~~of~~ on the study procedures. The study was approved by the University's research ethics committee.

Students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house, University-based work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based work experience ~~external versus internal work placements~~ were explored through focus groups and interviews. All of the students who volunteered were studying for an undergraduate degree within sport and exercise, and were enrolled on a module, in which they were obliged to complete between 75 and 150 hours of unpaid work ~~placement~~ experience. The work experience was integrated within the module, and the module took place in the third year of the students' study. There were approximately 100 students who met the inclusion criteria at the time of data collection, from which volunteers were obtained.

Three focus groups were formed: one group consisted of students who had undertaken ~~an external work~~their work ~~placement~~ experience at a school or within a local council setting (n=6) that was external to the University; another group consisted of students who had undertaken ~~an internal placement~~ in-house work experience, which was within a commercial sports science support service (n=6); and a third, mixed ~~placement~~ group, consisted of students who had undertaken ~~both external~~their work experience both with an employer external to the University (in a sports therapy or physiotherapy clinic or with a sports club) and ~~internal~~ with ~~placements as part of~~ a commercial sports therapy service that was an in-house, University-based setting (n=6). For the purposes of this paper, the three groups are

6

referred to as: 'in-house', 'off-campus', and 'mixed'. The term 'work experience' is used in this context to represent the learning from and application of knowledge and skills to a relevant working environment. The work experience was integrated into the learning of a module. Students used the term 'placement' since this is how the work experience was described in their module. Students referred also to 'internal placements', which were the in-house work experiences, and 'external placements' that were the off-campus work experiences. All participants were nearing the end or had recently finished their work experience. Focus group data were supplemented by interviews with two students who had undertaken the ~~internal~~ in-house only ~~placements~~ work experience and one student who had undertaken ~~the external~~ off-campus only ~~placement~~work experience, giving a total of 21 participants. Interviews were felt to be necessary following focus group data collection as an attempt to achieve data saturation. The number of participants in each focus group followed recommendations of Carlson and Glenton (2011). Interviews and focus groups lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and took place at a time and location convenient to the participants. The duration of the focus groups/interviews was such that they continued until the researcher felt that data saturation point had been reached. ~~All participants were nearing the end or had recently finished their placement.~~ Focus groups were chosen as the predominant method of data collection due to their ability to provide an understanding and deeper exploration of the views and ideas of the specific groups of participants under investigation (Wilkinson, 1998).

A topic guide was used to explore perceptions, which included the following: what students thought about their work experience ~~placements~~ generally (e.g., likes/dislikes and appropriateness); perceptions of the value and impact of the work experience ~~placement~~ on their learning ~~experience~~, degree classification, job prospects and professional identify; and whether or not the ~~placement~~ work experience had allowed them to develop links with industry. At the end of the focus group/interview, the topic guide was checked to ensure that all areas had been covered. The topic guide reflected the broad research question. The

focus groups and interviews were conducted by an independent researcher, who was recruited specifically because of her experience in focus group conduction and data analysis. The researcher did not know any of the students, was outside of their programme of study, and also had not been part of the study conception; these factors were put in place, in order to reduce bias in how the focus groups/interviews were conducted, and also how coding was carried out.

The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to facilitate analysis. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (following procedures from Braun and Clarke, 2006), allowing for exploration and interpretation of the relevant placement issues more widely (Marks and Yardley, 2004). This method involved two of the researchers reading transcripts independently and devising their own coding, key concepts and themes. Codes and themes were based on the broad research question, which was on the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of the in-house and off-campus work experiences. All data that met the broad research question were coded. Themes were constructed based on meaningful and coherent patterns in the data, relevant to the research question. The researchers then met to compare and contrast their findings, and to agree a set of themes and subthemes. In reporting of the findingsextracts, pseudonyms have been used to protect identity. Extracts were selected if they were thought to reflect the themes and subthemes particularly well.

A qualitative research design was used, since others had used such approaches to examine students' perceptions of work placements (e.g., Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock *et al.*, 2009;), and because we wished to explore and examine the degree of commonality and disparity of views, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences within and between the off-campus and in-house students.

1 **Findings and discussion**

2 Perceptions of ~~placements~~ work experience were diverse, ranging from those who reported

3 negative experiences *(I haven't learnt anything* [Trevor, ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~

4 ~~group~~]), to very positive experiences *(I _loved_ it. Absolutely, completely love it, wish I could go*

5 *back and do it all over again* [Bob, mixed ~~placement~~ group, talking about his ~~external~~ off-

6 ~~campus placement~~work experience]). These perceptions, however, did not depend on the

7 ~~placement type~~ location of the work experience (~~internal~~ in-house versus ~~external~~off-

8 campus), but were more to do with the particular individual's ~~placement~~ work experience.

9

10 Six main themes, which were common to both ~~placement~~ types of work experience,

11 emerged from the data: future employment; career insight; skills and experience; support;

12 time; and relationships.

13

14

15 *Future employment*

16 Regarding future employment, there were two subthemes: enhancing employer perceptions

17 and career links. All participants thought that their ~~placement~~ work experience would 'look

18 good' on their curriculum vitae, and would make them seem more employable (enhancing

19 employer perceptions).

20

21 *…when you leave Uni, there's a lot of talk about how a degree's not enough*

22 *anymore…I think that the more work experience you do, the more volunteer stuff you*

23 *do, then you're definitely going to help other people's views…when it comes to looking*

24 *for a job* [Jenson, ~~internal~~ in-house~~placement~~]

25

26 This perception was apparent even when the ~~placement~~ work experience was deemed

27 lacking in other areas:

28

…just having the experience…even though it might not be a positive experience, it's experience [Trevor, ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~]

In the mixed ~~placement~~ group, it was felt that the ~~external placement~~ work experience that took place at the employer's worksite would enhance employer perceptions more so than that undertaken ~~the internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~:

…I think overall external placement will probably make me look better when you go for a job after uni[versity]…than just the internal [Becca, mixed~~placement~~]

According to previous researchers (Harvey *et al.,* 1998; Langworthy and Turner, 2003), ~~placements~~ undertaking a work ~~experiences are~~ is more likely to lead to students gaining a competitive advantage when it comes to gaining employment. Based on the current data, the competitive advantage could be because ~~placements~~ the work experience enhance**s** the perceptions of employers, this point being supported by Eagle *et al.* (2008), who reported that ~~placements~~ work- experience placements were generally viewed as favourable by employees. In the current study, although students thought that their ~~placement~~work experience, irrespective of ~~placement type~~where it took place (~~internal~~ in-house versus ~~external~~off-campus) and suitability, enhanced employer perceptions, there was a tendency for ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placements~~work experience, when being compared to ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placements~~work experience, to be thought of as enhancing employer perceptions to a greater extent.

The mixed ~~placement~~ and ~~external~~ off-campus students valued the links to ~~the external~~ employers, who were external to the University (subtheme, career links):

…it's not what you know, it's who you know. [Bob, commenting on his ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~work experience].

If you go in with the right attitude and everything there is a chance that you can get employed at the end. [Jason, ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~]

For those students who were in the ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~ group, career links were still valued. This particular ~~placement~~ work experience involved external clients coming into the University to use the service; students felt that links with external clients in this way were valuable for their career. In the ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~ group, it was stated by one of the participants that the links were of no value, since this particular student was not intending to go back to ~~the~~ that particular ~~placement~~workplace, owing to a negative experience. It seems, therefore, that career links are important in a ~~a placement~~ work experience if they are perceived to be of value, but are not dependent on ~~placement locationtype~~where the work experience takes place, the latter finding contradicting observations by others (Mansfield, 2011; Tallantyre, 2010), who reported that ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placements~~ work experiences might decrease links with employers.

Career insight

Students in all three groups talked about career insight, within which emerged two subthemes: gaining real-world experience, and reinforcing and re-evaluating career aspirations. All students, regardless of whether they were doing ~~internal~~in-house, ~~external~~ off-campus or mixed ~~placements~~types of work experience, found that the ~~placements~~ work ~~were~~ was useful in gaining real-world experience (…*you can't really gain that through sitting in a classroom* [Dave ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~]).

By gaining this experience, students' career aspirations were either reinforced or re-evaluated. In other words, some students found that the ~~placement~~ work experience had made them realise that they did not want to continue with their previously intended

11

1 profession, whereas for others, the ~~placement~~ work experience had confirmed that their

2 career choice was the right one. Again, these observations were independent of placement

3 type:

4

5   *I think you've got to understand what exactly they do before you can kind of make a*

6   *decision on what it is that you're dead set on, 'cos once you commit to something you*

7   *commit to something.* [Jenson, ~~internal~~ in-house placement]

8

9   *It's making you see whether you want to get involved in it after. 'Cos if you don't*

10   *enjoy it after this, you won't enjoy it going into it, whereas if you still enjoy it after this,*

11   *you're probably gonna carry on.* [Dave, ~~external~~ off-campus placement]

12

13   *…it sort of confirms to you that it is what you wanna do…instead of realising sort of*

14   *afterwards, 'cos it's a big risk doing three years and then realising it's not what you*

15   *wanna do, but doing the placement helps confirm that.* [Paige, mixed ~~placement~~]

16

17 These opinions and perceptions regarding career insight reinforce those found by Little and

18 Harvey (2006), although in the current study, unlike that of Kettis *et al.* (2013), students did

19 not say that the ~~placement~~ work experience had helped them specifically to identify with their

20 intended profession~~, or developed their identity as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998)~~.

21 Gaining career insight and reinforcing and re-evaluating career aspirations were, however,

22 important aspects of all ~~placement types~~types of work experience, irrespective of location, in

23 the current study.

24

25

26 *Skills and experiences*

27 For all three groups, students identified a number of skills and experiences. Subthemes

28 were: job-specific skills, putting into practice, confidence, variety, and getting a better grade.

Apart from communication skills, which were identified by all students regardless of ~~placement~~ the location of their work experience~~type~~, the job-specific skills identified were unique to the particular employment type~~placement~~, such as teaching-related skills, and specific technical skills. All students identified these skills as being an advantage of ~~placements~~a work experience.

Confidence was highlighted as an important skill acquired, irrespective of ~~placement type~~the location of the work experience:

> *…one of the biggest barriers you have to overcome doing your placement is definitely confidence.* [Becca, mixed group, ~~placement~~ talking about ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~work experience)

> *…it makes you more confident….knowing that you can actually perform what you say, so your confidence helps you progress.* [Sophie, ~~internal~~ in-house~~placement~~]

Similar to the findings of others (Bullock *et al.*~~(~~, 2009; Helyer *et al.,* 2014), where students perceived ~~placements~~ work ~~based learning~~placement experiences and internships as improving their confidence, and their personal and transferable skills, students in the current study, regardless of ~~placement type~~work experience location, highlighted job-specific skills and confidence as being important skills acquired as a result of their ~~placement~~work experience.

The subtheme, putting into practice, was about how students were able to put their skills and experiences that they had learned in the classroom into practice 'in the field'. Such comments were particularly apparent among the ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~ group of students, possibly because the ~~internal~~ in-house work experience ~~placement~~ (which was a

sports science support service) had been specifically set up for this purpose. Students

remarked how they had learnt and understood more in-depth information by doing this

~~internal~~ in-house placement experience than they had in their normal, scheduled teaching

sessions (laboratories and lectures):

…I feel like I've learnt a lot more in the clinic than in the labs [Rob, ~~internal~~ in-house]

I think I've learnt more in them few hours than I did in those labs [Jackie, ~~internal~~ in-house]

Students, who ~~did~~ were in the ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placements only~~group, also commented

on how they were able to put their skills into practice:

…it's like behaviour management…you won't really understand in terms of someone telling you what to do, you can only learn that through it actually happening. [Dave, ~~external~~ off-campus placement]

These viewpoints support those of other researchers, regarding the value of ~~placements~~ work experiences in supplementing learning, and in enabling students to see how theory is

applied in practice (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006). Although it seemed that the

~~internal~~ in-house placement students could see the link between learning and practice more

clearly, all students valued this aspect of their ~~placement~~work experience, regardless of

~~placement type~~ where the work took place.

Regarding variety, there was a tendency for ~~internal placement~~ students who had done their

work experience in-house to say that the skills they acquired were not varied *(…we always*

come and do the same sort of testing [Bruce, ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~]; *…in clinic, you*

just do a load of massages and that's it. [Becca, mixed placement talking about ~~internal~~ in-

14

1　house work experience~~placement~~])*, owing perhaps to a lack of equipment (…within a*

2　*professional sport they obviously have the budget for bigger medical facilities.* [Bob, mixed

3　~~placement~~group]). A lack of variety, was also mentioned, however, by those who were doing

4　~~external~~ off-campus placements~~work experience~~, owing to the ~~placement~~ work experience

5　being restricted in some other way, such as it being on the same day each week, having to

6　work with the same group of children (for those on work experience ~~placements~~ in a school),

7　or not being allowed to do all aspects of the job *(…on external er I couldn't go pitch side 'cos*

8　*I didn't have a first aid qualification.* [Dan mixed ~~placement~~ group commenting on the

9　~~external~~ off-campus work experience~~placement~~]). The mixed ~~placement~~ group of students

10　appreciated the variety that both the ~~internal~~ in-house and ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placements~~

11　work experience gave them *(…you do need to experience both sides [clinic and sport]*

12　[Becca, mixed ~~placement~~]. Variety, whether positive or negative, could, therefore, be

13　dependent on ~~placement~~ work experience location~~type~~.

14

15　Most students felt that the ~~placement~~ work experience enabled them to get a better grade,

16　particularly highlighted by students in the ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~ group *(I've been*

17　*getting better marks and percentages on my assignments.* [Jenson]). The ~~placement~~ work

18　experience formed ~~was~~ part of the students' study, which contributed directly to their grade,

19　which students acknowledged. These findings ~~confirm~~ support observations made by other

20　researchers (Br~~r~~ooks and Youngson, 2016; Mansfield, 2011; Patel *et al.,* 2012), in that

21　students undertaking a work placement are more likely to obtain a good degree. There were,

22　however, also some reservations regarding enhancement of grades, since the ~~placement~~

23　work experience was felt to be, in some instances, so time consuming that it was actually

24　taking the students away from other aspects of their study. Further follow-up research on

25　whether the ~~internal~~ in-house and ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placements~~ work experiences do, in

26　fact, lead to a better degree classification could be undertaken.

27

28

1 *Support*

2 Subthemes identified under the theme of support included: finding ~~placements~~work

3 experience; level of supervision; and observation.

4

5 Finding ~~placements~~ work experience was unique to those who were doing ~~external~~ off-

6 campus ~~placements~~work. The mixed group specifically identified the struggles that they had

7 had in finding an appropriate ~~placement~~employer:

8

9   *…if you can't find a placement but you're looking every single day, you've then got*

10   *more pressure just to basically take a placement anywhere, although maybe you*

11   *don't wanna go there.* [Bob, mixed ~~placement~~ group talking about ~~external~~ off-

12   campus ~~placement~~work experience]

13

14 Some of the students, for whom ~~a~~off-campus ~~placement~~ work experience had been found,

15 said that they wished that they had been able to find their own ~~placement~~employer, since

16 they were not happy with the ~~placement one~~workplace ~~experience~~that they had been given.

17 Inappropriate ~~placements~~ work placements and internships or not being able to find a

18 suitable work placement~~s~~ have been identified in previous research as a limitation to

19 ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placements~~ experiences (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock *et al.,* 2009;

20 Nduna, 2012). Finding a ~~placement~~ work experience was not an issue for those who were

21 ~~only doing an~~working ~~internal~~ in-house~~placement~~.

22

23 Students in all groups talked about the level of supervision they received on their

24 ~~placement~~work experience. For ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~ students, the fact that tutors

25 were there to support them was viewed positively:

26

27   *First day of a job you're gonna be in the deep end either way aren't you, whereas this*

28   *is sort of middle ground still.* [Chuck, ~~internal~~ in-house~~placement~~]

16

…I think when you go in, you're a little bit nervous because…you're worried that you won't know how to perform a certain task but you've got the back up from whoever's in the lab helping you…so you progress at your own speed. [Sophie, ~~internal~~ in-house~~placement~~]

…if you haven't done something quite right on placement, you can do it again [Alice, mixed ~~placement~~ group talking about ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~work experience]

In the group of students who could compare their ~~internal~~ in-house and ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~ work experience, students seemed to appreciate the level of supervision of the ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~work experience, but also felt that the ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~ work experience put them under pressure, which was thought to be both a positive and a negative thing:

…you've got the real world professionals watching you do everything, so there's a bit more pressure to get it right the first time….rather than internal, there's always someone there to help you. [Dan, mixed~~placement~~]

…I think when you're working internally you can get a bit of a safety net where if you don't know anything, you can just pop up and ask the supervisor, but when you're in that [~~external~~off-campus] environment, if you don't know it, you have to go away and learn it….I feel an external placement is better because you don't have that safety net, there's a more pressurised environment. [Bob, mixed ~~placement~~]

In the ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~group, the level of supervision varied according to the particular ~~placement~~work experience, either being viewed as inappropriate to the extent that the ~~placement host~~employer did not know the student was coming ~~on placement~~to the

workplace, to those where organisation and level of supervision were thought to be good. The level of supervision, therefore, might be dependent on the student, and how much support they feel they need. Providing ~~internal placements~~ in-house work experience may help those students in the early part of their University life, or may help students who lack the confidence to be 'thrown into the deep end'.

Regarding the subtheme of observation, there were both benefits and barriers identified. Some students appeared to have benefitted from observing only (rather than doing):

> *Even though I've sat back and observed a lot, I have learnt stuff like…behaviour management.* [Trevor, ~~external~~ off-campus~~placement~~]

> *…I still learnt a lot just by shadowing.* [Paige, mixed ~~placement~~ group talking about her ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~work experience)

Other students wanted to have a more active role:

> ...it's kind of annoying...just sitting in the corner just watching, [Jess, ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placement~~]

These benefits and barriers seemed to be specific to the ~~placement~~work experience and student preferences, rather than whether or not the work took place in-house or off-campus ~~the~~ ~~its~~ placement ~~of the work experience~~ type.

Cost

For the theme of cost, subthemes identified were: time and travel. The ~~placement~~ work experience being viewed negatively, in terms of how it meant that their time was away from

18

studying, or was too time consuming in general, was identified by all students, regardless of placement type work experience location:

I could be doing my dissertation right now [Bruce, internal placement in-house]

...you have to be the one to decide, right, which day am I gonna lose to do my placement and then work basically everything around that. [Becca, mixed placement]

The internal placement in-house work experience, however, was viewed more positively, in that time was less of an issue, due to the placement work being more flexible (as the internal placement in-house work experience was specifically designed to accommodate students when they were free on their timetable).

Travelling to and from the placement work experience was specific to the external off-campus placement students only, and was viewed both positively and negatively:

…it takes an hour and a half to get to the training ground and two hours to get to the stadium but I do it with ease now because I love what I do. [Bob, mixed placement group talking about his external placement off-campus work experience]

…getting there has been a bit of a nightmare… [Trevor, external off-campus placement]

Travel time was understandably not an issue for those students undertaking internal in-house work experience placement.

These observations on time and travel identified in the current study support those of others, (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Nduna, 2012), although were not always viewed as negative, and were less of an issue for ~~internally~~ students undertaking in-house work experience~~placed students~~.

Relationships

A final theme that emerged from the data was about relationships, which included the subthemes of social side and tutor relationships. The ~~internal placement~~ students, who were undertaking in-house work experience, talked about the social side ~~of the placement experience~~, where they were able to chat with others in the course *(…I got to talk to a few people on my course that I wouldn't normally talk to.* [Jenson]). Students who had ~~done~~ undertaken ~~external~~ off-campus work experience ~~placements~~ also talked about the social side: *(…it's just like the team spirit and the team banter. I love it.* [Dan, mixed ~~placement~~ talking about external experience~~placement~~]).

Unique to ~~internal placements~~in-house work experience, was the subtheme of tutor relationships. Students commented on how they had been able to build good, positive relationships with their tutors with whom they worked *(…you get to see like a different side of them* [Rob, ~~internal placement~~in-house]), which transferred, it was highlighted, into the classroom.

Conclusions

~~Based on student perceptions, placements~~work, regardless of whether they were ~~internal~~ in-house or ~~external~~off-campus:

- ~~Enhanced future employment, because:~~

20

o   students felt that employers were more likely to view their placements work favourably, irrespective of the placement experience;

o   placements work provided career links with valued external employers/and individuals

- Gave students career insight, since:

o   real world experience was gained, and

o   the placement work provided students with an opportunity to reinforce or re-evaluate their career aspirations

- Allowed students to gain and put into practice a variety of skills and experiences (such as job-specific skills, confidence, communication skills, and gave them the skills needed to enhance their grades), and

- Allowed students to build relationships.

Work experience, regardless of whether in-house or off-campus, was perceived by the students who took part in this study to enhance future employment, not only because they felt that employers were more likely to view their work experience as favourable, but also because the work experience provided career links with valued, external employers and individuals. Students also felt that the work experience, regardless of its location, provided them with career insight via real-world experience, through which they were able to re-affirm or re-evaluate their career aspirations. Students thought that both in-house and off-campus work experience allowed them to gain and put into practice a variety of skills and experiences (such as job-specific skills, confidence, and communication skills), enhanced their university grades, and allowed them to build relationships.

Issues (viewed positively and negatively) that arose for both internally placedin-house and externally placedoff-campus students work experience included: the level of support in finding a placementwork; the level of supervision during the placementwork experience; the

21

1 amount of observation versus 'hands-on' experience involved in the ~~placement~~work

2 experience; and travel and time costs.

3

4 When comparing ~~internal~~ in-house and ~~external~~ off-campus ~~placements~~work experiences,

5 based on the data collected in the current study (which was limited to students undertaking a

6 ~~limited number of placements~~work-based learning experience that was integrated, short in

7 duration (75 to 150 hours) and specific to one faculty of one university), ~~internal~~ in-house

8 ~~placements~~ work experience ~~were~~ was deemed advantageous in that students did not have

9 to find their own ~~placement~~work, and was deemed cost effective in terms of travel and

10 ~~possibly, to some extent,~~ time. In addition, ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placements~~ work experience

11 allowed students to feel supported, and allowed them to develop relationships with their

12 tutors and other students. The ~~internally~~ in-house ~~placed~~ students specifically identified how

13 their ~~placement~~ work experience enabled them to see clearly the link between theory and

14 practice. ~~External~~ Off-campus work experiences ~~placements~~ were, however, deemed to

15 'look' better to the employer than were ~~internal~~ in-house

16 ~~experiencesplacements~~experiences, but if the ~~internal~~ in-house ~~placement~~ work experience

17 involved some kind of external clientele, then career links were believed sufficient. A lack of

18 variety seemed to occur with ~~internal placements~~in-house work experience, but also with

19 ~~external~~off-campus ~~placements~~experiences, which were restricted by, for instance, time.

20

21 The study is limited in terms of sample size and cohort. There was, however, an appropriate

22 size of participants in each focus group, and the focus group participants were segmented,

23 following recommendations regarding qualitative data collection (e.g., Carlson and Glenton,

24 2011). Sampling was from one cohort of students (those who were studying for an

25 undergraduate degree in sport and exercise), who met the inclusion criteria, which also

26 restricted, to some extent, the number of focus groups that were achievable, as well as the

27 generalizability of the findings. Although the study is limited in these aspects, based on the

28 findings of the students in the current study, further evaluation of in-house and off-campus

work experience is warranted, since perceptions of their relative value revealed some differences. That said, there may have been other reasons for the differences that were found between the in-house and off-campus work experiences. For instance, the in-house group was unique in that the student knew (or knew of) the employer, which may have influenced students' perceptions. In addition, all students volunteered for the study, which may have influenced findings, since students may have volunteered for their own motives, such as wishing to share their frustrations or conversely, to express their gratitude over their work placement experience. Undertaking a study on a larger and more diverse cohort of students, and attempting to control for potential confounding variables, is required.

Practical implications and recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, ~~recommendations are to offer~~ ~~placement~~ when offering work experience opportunities for ~~all~~ students, ~~but~~ consideration should be given to level of support, supervision, observation, and travel and time costs. ~~Internal i~~In-house ~~placements~~ work experiences ~~should be encouraged~~are recommended, since, in the current study, they ~~are~~ were perceived to be as beneficial as ~~external~~ off-campus work experiences~~placement~~, having the added advantages that they ~~are~~ were cost effective, allow~~ed~~ students to be more closely supervised and supported, ~~are~~ were good for relationship building between and within students/staff, and, if set up specifically to enable students to put theory into practice, ~~are~~ were beneficial for increasing student attainment. ~~However, if offering internal in house work~~placements, ~~t~~Tutors should be mindful, however, that variety, and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders may be compromised when offering in-house work experiences that are similar to those investigated in the current study. Further research on the value, impact, advantages and limitations of off-campus and in-house work experience could be undertaken, by not only investigating perceptions of a greater number and diversity of students, but also by gathering quantitative data regarding the value of such work experience for degree and employment success.

23

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
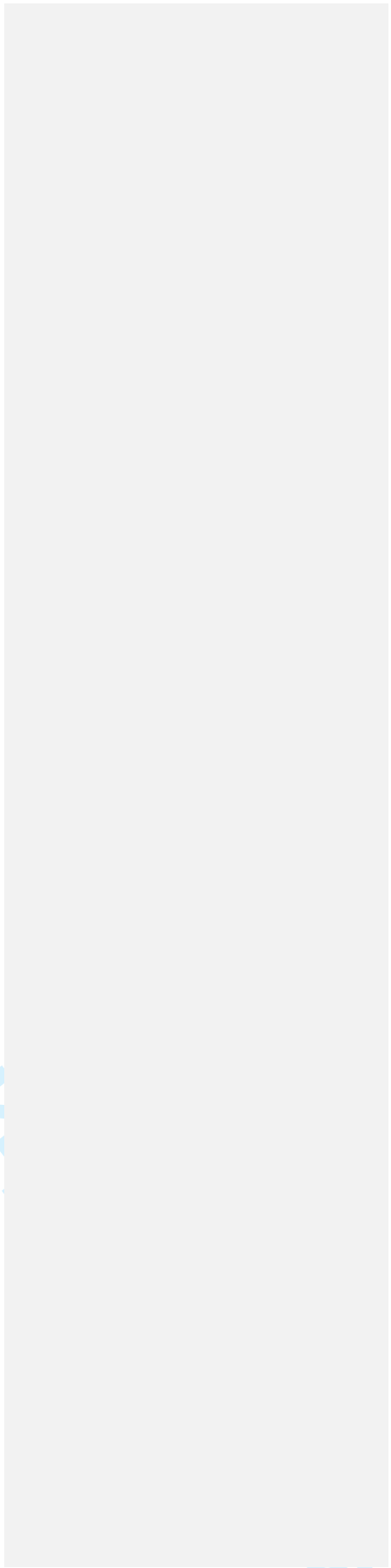
References

1. Aggett, M. and Busby, G. (2011), "Opting out of internship: Perceptions of hospitality, tourism and events management undergraduates at a British University". *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education,* Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 106-113.

2. Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology". *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77-101.

3. Brooks, R. and Youngson, P. (2016), "Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of the effects on career progression", *Studies in Higher Education,* Vol. 41 No. 9, pp. 1563-1578.

4. Bullock, K., Gould, V., Hejmadi, M. and Lock, G. (2009), "Work placement experience: should I stay or should I go?" *Higher Education Research and Development,* Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 481-494.

5. Carlsen, B. and Glenton, C. (2011), "What about N? A methodological study of sample-size reporting in focus group studies". *BMC Medical Research Methodology,* Vol. 11, p. 26.

6. Cornelius, S., Medyckyj-Scott, D., Forrest, D., Williams, A. and MacKaness, W. (2008), "The virtual placement: An alternative to the traditional work placement in the geographical sciences?" *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 287-302.

7. Eagle, L., Bennett, R., Ali-Choudhury, R. and Mousley, W. (2008), "Reassessing the value of work-experience placements in the context of widening participation in

higher education", *Journal of Vocational Education & Training,* Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 105-122.

8. Gamble, E. and Bates, C. (2011), "Alternatives to industrial work placement", *Higher Education Management and Policy,* Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 41-58.

9. Harvey, L., Geall, V. and Moon, S. (1998). *Work experience: Expanding opportunities for undergraduates.* Birmingham, England: Centre for Research into Quality (supported by DfEE and CIHE), University of Central England.

10. Helyer, R. and Lee, D. (2014), "The role of work experience in the future employability of higher education graduates". *Higher Education Quarterly,* Vol. 68 No. 3, pp. 348-372.

11. Jones, C.M., Green, J.P. and Higson, H.E. (2015), "Do work placements improve final year academic performance or do high-calibre students choose to do work placements?" *Studies in Higher Education,* Published online 09 Oct 2015, pp. 1-17. doi:10.1080/03075079.2015.1073249

12. Kettis, Å., Ring, L., Gustavsson, M. and Wallman, A. (2013), "Placements: an underused vehicle for quality enhancement in higher education?" *Quality in Higher Education,* Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 28-40.

13. Langworthy, A. and Turner, T. (2003), "Learning for the workplace and beyond: the challenge of university-community engagement". in *Learning for an Unknown Future, Proceedings of the 26th HERDSA Annual Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand,* 6-9 July 2003: pp 369.

1 11.14. Little, B. and Harvey, L. (2006), *Learning through work placements and beyond. A*
2 *report for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit and the Higher Education*
3 *Academy's Work Placements Organisation Forum*. England: Sheffield Hallam University:
4 Centre for Research and Evaluation.

5

6 12.15. Mansfield, R. (2011), "The effect of placement experience upon final-year results for
7 surveying degree programmes". *Studies in Higher Education,* Vol. 36 No. 8, pp. 939-952.

8

9 13.16. Marks, D.F., and Yardley, L. (2004), *Research methods for clinical and health*
10 *psychology*. SAGE publications, London.

11

12 14.17. Moore, T. and Workman, B. (2011), "Work based learning: Creative, imaginative and
13 flexible approaches". *The International Journal of Learning,* Vol. 17 No. 12, pp. 67-80.

14

15 15.18. Nduna, N.J. (2012), "The relevance of workplace learning in guiding student and
16 curriculum development". *South African Journal of Higher Education,* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp.
17 232-247.

18

19 16.19. Patel, N., Brinkman, W. and Coughlan, J. (2012), "Work placements and academic
20 achievement: undergraduate computing students". *Education and Training,* Vol. 54 No.
21 6, pp. 523-533.

22

23 17. Tallantyre, F. (Ed). (2010), "University management of work-based learning". Higher
24 Education Authority, available at:
25 http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/flexiblelearning/UniversityManagement.
26 pdf (accessed 26 January, 2014).

27
28 20.

Tomlinson, M. (2008), "The Degree is not Eenough: Students "Pperceptions of the Rrole of higher education credentials for Ggraduate Wwork and Eemployability". British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol. 29 (1No. 1);, pp. 49–61. doi: 10.1080/01425690701737457

18. Wenger, E. (1998), *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

19.21. Wilkinson, S. (1998), "Focus groups in health research: exploring the meanings of health and illness". *Journal of Health Psychology,* Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 329-348.

20.22. Wilson, T. (2012), "A review of business–university collaboration. The Wilson Review", available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32383/12-610-wilson-review-business-university-collaboration.pdf (accessed 26 January 2014).

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1   **Abstract**

2

3   **Purpose:** To investigate students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and

4   disadvantages of in-house, University-based work experience versus off-campus, work-

5   experience.

6   **Design/methodology/approach:** Three focus groups, one consisting of students who had

7   undertaken work experience off-campus at an employers' workplace (n=6), one consisting of

8   students who had undertaken work experience in-house with a University-based employer

9   (n=6), and a third mixed group (n=6, consisting of students who had undertaken both types),

10   were formed. Focus group data were supplemented by interviews (n=3). Data were

11   transcribed and analysed thematically.

12   **Findings:** Based on student perceptions, both types of work experience were thought to:

13   enhance future employment; provide career insight; enable skill/experience acquisition and

14   application; and be useful for building relationships. Work experience that occurred in-house

15   was, in addition, perceived to: be cost effective; enable students to be more closely

16   supervised and supported; be good for relationship building between and within

17   students/staff; be beneficial for increasing student attainment; and enable students to see

18   the link between theory and practice more clearly. In-house work experience was, however,

19   deemed to be restricted in terms of variety, and links with and perceptions of external

20   stakeholders.

21   **Research limitations:** The study is limited in that it is based on the perceptions of students

22   undertaking unique types of integrated work experience within one faculty at one university.

23   **Practical implications:** When deciding on whether in-house or off-campus work

24   experiences are offered, consideration should be given to level of support, supervision,

25   observation, and travel and time costs.

26   **Originality/value:** Original views of students regarding in-house work experience have been

27   gathered, which can be used to inform in-course workplace practices.

1 **Key words:** work-based learning; placements internships; employability; workplace

2 experience

1 **Introduction**

2 Students who undertake relevant work experience, such as a work placement or internship,

3 are not only more likely to receive a good degree (upper second or first class award),

4 compared to those who do not (Brooks and Youngson, 2016; Jones *et al.,* 2015; Mansfield,

5 2011; Patel *et al.,* 2012), but are also more likely to gain competitive advantage in the job

6 market (Harvey *et al.,* 1998; Helyer *et al.,* 2014; Langworthy and Turner, 2003; Tomlinson,

7 2008). Work experience has been found to improve student progression and retention rates

8 (Langworthy and Turner, 2003), and to motivate the student for further learning (Moore and

9 Workman, 2011). Work experience also improves students' perception of their academic

10 experience (Kettis *et al.,* 2013), which could impact on overall student satisfaction scores.

11

12 Reasons for why students undertake work experience, and the perceptions of their

13 experience have been explored through qualitative research. One perceived benefit of a

14 work experience is that it provides insight into a particular industry or type of employment

15 (Little and Harvey, 2006), to the extent that students are more able to identify with their

16 intended profession (Kettis *et al.,* 2013). Work experience is also thought to supplement

17 learning (Little and Harvey, 2006), enable the student to see how theory is applied in

18 practice (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006), and improve personal and

19 transferable skills, such as communication, confidence, perseverance and empowerment

20 (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Helyer *et al.,* 2014).

21

22 Despite these reported advantages, there are several limitations concerning work

23 experience. Inappropriate work places or not being able to place students with an

24 appropriate employer are common challenges (Nduna, 2012). Students may be obliged to

25 find work themselves, which presents problems such as students having to cold-call

26 employers, and then having to face rejection (Aggett and Busby, 2011). Bullock *et al.* (2009)

27 found that some students were not organised or confident enough to arrange their own work

28 placement experience. There are also cost implications for the University (Nduna, 2012), as

3

1 well as cost implications for the student, since time spent in work-placement experience,

2 which is generally unpaid, means that time in paid employment has to be reduced (Bullock *et*

3 *al.,* 2009). There is also considerable diversity of work experience. Students are, for

4 instance, not always visited in the workplace by their University supervisor due to time and

5 travel constraints of staff (Nduna, 2012). Barriers for employers to providing relevant work

6 opportunities also exist, such as the costs and time associated with supervision and

7 managing projects (Wilson, 2012). For these reasons, there has been a decline in the

8 number of students who undertake work experience at an employer's workplace (Aggett and

9 Busby, 2011; Nduna, 2012). Universities have, therefore, been considering alternatives to

10 the traditional work experiences that occur offsite at the employers' worksite, such as

11 experiential learning, project-based learning (Nduna, 2012), extracurricular activities (Wilson,

12 2012), virtual placements (Cornelius *et al.,* 2008), and community-based learning projects or

13 'science shops' (Gamble and Bates, 2011).

14

15 In-house work experience may be one way of providing all the benefits of a traditional off-

16 campus work experience but without the resource implication, and the difficulties of trying to

17 secure suitable workplace opportunities. In-house work experience may also be suitable for

18 students who are not confident enough to work externally. In-house work opportunities are

19 common in a number of settings, including medical, law, and sport. In such situations, often

20 a subsidised, commercial clinic or service is available on campus, which provides an

21 opportunity for students to gain unpaid work experience.

22

23 There are certain disadvantages with in-house work experiences. They decrease external

24 employer engagement, reduce opportunities for knowledge transfer, and decrease other

25 benefits associated with employer engagement and links with external stakeholders

26 (Mansfield, 2011; Tallantyre, 2010). Nduna (2012), however, suggests that there was little or

27 no proof of enhanced collaboration with industry as a result of work experiences that occur

28 at the employers' workplace. The advantages and disadvantages of work experience that

4

1 occur in-house, on campus versus that which occurs at an employer's workplace warrants

2 further investigation. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate students'

3 perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house, University-based

4 work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based experience .

5

1 **Methods**

2 Undergraduate students within one faculty of a university in the United Kingdom were

3 informed about the study through advertisement (email, virtual learning environment, and

4 verbal announcement in lectures). Students who expressed an interest were contacted to

5 ensure they met the inclusion criterion (undertaken a relevant work experience), and were

6 invited to participate. All participants gave their written and informed consent having been

7 fully briefed on the study procedures. The study was approved by the University's research

8 ethics committee.

9

10 Students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house,

11 University-based work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based work experience were

12 explored through focus groups and interviews. All of the students who volunteered were

13 studying for an undergraduate degree within sport and exercise, and were enrolled on a

14 module, in which they were obliged to complete between 75 and 150 hours of unpaid work

15 experience. The work experience was integrated within the module, and the module took

16 place in the third year of the students' study. There were approximately 100 students who

17 met the inclusion criteria at the time of data collection, from which volunteers were obtained.

18

19 Three focus groups were formed: one group consisted of students who had undertaken their

20 work experience at a school or within a local council setting (n=6) that was external to the

21 University; another group consisted of students who had undertaken in-house work

22 experience, which was within a commercial sports science support service (n=6); and a

23 third, mixed group, consisted of students who had undertaken their work experience both

24 with an employer external to the University (in a sports therapy or physiotherapy clinic or

25 with a sports club) and with a commercial sports therapy service that was an in-house,

26 University-based setting (n=6). For the purposes of this paper, the three groups are referred

27 to as: 'in-house', 'off-campus', and 'mixed'. The term 'work experience' is used in this context

28 to represent the learning from and application of knowledge and skills to a relevant working

1 environment. The work experience was integrated into the learning of a module. Students

2 used the term 'placement' since this is how the work experience was described in their

3 module. Students referred also to 'internal placements', which were the in-house work

4 experiences, and 'external placements' that were the off-campus work experiences. All

5 participants were nearing the end or had recently finished their work experience. Focus

6 group data were supplemented by interviews with two students who had undertaken the in-

7 house only work experience and one student who had undertaken off-campus only work

8 experience, giving a total of 21 participants. Interviews were felt to be necessary following

9 focus group data collection as an attempt to achieve data saturation. The number of

10 participants in each focus group followed recommendations of Carlson and Glenton (2011).

11 Interviews and focus groups lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and took place at a time

12 and location convenient to the participants. The duration of the focus groups/interviews was

13 such that they continued until the researcher felt that data saturation point had been

14 reached. Focus groups were chosen as the predominant method of data collection due to

15 their ability to provide an understanding and deeper exploration of the views and ideas of the

16 specific groups of participants under investigation (Wilkinson, 1998).

17

18 A topic guide was used to explore perceptions, which included the following: what students

19 thought about their work experience generally (e.g., likes/dislikes and appropriateness);

20 perceptions of the value and impact of the work experience on their learning, degree

21 classification, job prospects and professional identify; and whether or not the work

22 experience had allowed them to develop links with industry. At the end of the focus

23 group/interview, the topic guide was checked to ensure that all areas had been covered. The

24 topic guide reflected the broad research question. The focus groups and interviews were

25 conducted by an independent researcher, who was recruited specifically because of her

26 experience in focus group conduction and data analysis. The researcher did not know any of

27 the students, was outside of their programme of study, and also had not been part of the

7

1   study conception; these factors were put in place, in order to reduce bias in how the focus

2   groups/interviews were conducted, and also how coding was carried out.

3

4   The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to facilitate

5   analysis. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (following procedures from

6   Braun and Clarke, 2006), allowing for exploration and interpretation of the relevant

7   placement issues more widely (Marks and Yardley, 2004). This method involved two of the

8   researchers reading transcripts independently and devising their own coding, key concepts

9   and themes. Codes and themes were based on the broad research question, which was on

10   the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of the in-house and off-campus work

11   experiences. All data that met the broad research question were coded. Themes were

12   constructed based on meaningful and coherent patterns in the data, relevant to the research

13   question. The researchers met to compare and contrast their findings, and to agree a set of

14   themes and subthemes. In reporting of the extracts, pseudonyms have been used to protect

15   identity. Extracts were selected if they were thought to reflect the themes and subthemes

16   particularly well. A qualitative research design was used, since others had used such

17   approaches to examine students' perceptions of work placements (e.g., Aggett and Busby,

18   2011; Bullock *et al.,* 2009), and because we wished to explore and examine the degree of

19   commonality and disparity of views, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences within and between

20   the off-campus and in-house students.

21

1 **Findings and discussion**

2 Perceptions of work experience were diverse, ranging from those who reported negative

3 experiences *(I haven't learnt anything* [Trevor, off-campus]), to very positive experiences *(I*

4 *loved it. Absolutely, completely love it, wish I could go back and do it all over again* [Bob,

5 mixed group, talking about his off-campus work experience]). These perceptions, however,

6 did not depend on the location of the work experience (in-house versus off-campus), but

7 were more to do with the particular individual's experience.

8

9 Six main themes, which were common to both types of work experience, emerged from the

10 data: future employment; career insight; skills and experience; support; time; and

11 relationships.

12

13

14 *Future employment*

15 Regarding future employment, there were two subthemes: enhancing employer perceptions

16 and career links. All participants thought that their work experience would 'look good' on their

17 curriculum vitae, and would make them seem more employable (enhancing employer

18 perceptions).

19

20 *…when you leave Uni, there's a lot of talk about how a degree's not enough*

21 *anymore…I think that the more work experience you do, the more volunteer stuff you*

22 *do, then you're definitely going to help other people's views…when it comes to looking*

23 *for a job* [Jenson, in-house]

24

25 This perception was apparent even when the work experience was deemed lacking in other

26 areas:

27

9

1 *…just having the experience…even though it might not be a positive experience, it's*

2 *experience* [Trevor, off-campus]

3

4 In the mixed group, it was felt that the work experience that took place at the employer's

5 worksite would enhance employer perceptions more so than that undertaken in-house:

6

7 *…I think overall external placement will probably make me look better when you go for*

8 *a job after uni[versity]…than just the internal* [Becca, mixed]

9

10 According to previous researchers (Harvey *et al.,* 1998; Langworthy and Turner, 2003),

11 undertaking a work experience is more likely to lead to students gaining a competitive

12 advantage when it comes to gaining employment. Based on the current data, the competitive

13 advantage could be because the work experience enhances the perceptions of employers,

14 this point being supported by Eagle *et al.* (2008), who reported that work-experience

15 placements were generally viewed as favourable by employees. In the current study,

16 although students thought that their work experience, irrespective of where it took place (in-

17 house versus off-campus) and suitability, enhanced employer perceptions, there was a

18 tendency for off-campus work experience, when being compared to in-house work

19 experience, to be thought of as enhancing employer perceptions to a greater extent.

20

21 The mixed and off-campus students valued the links to employers, who were external to the

22 University (subtheme, career links):

23

24 *…it's not what you know, it's who you know.* [Bob, commenting on his off-campus

25 work experience].

26

27 *If you go in with the right attitude and everything there is a chance that you can get*

28 *employed at the end.* [Jason, off-campus]

1

2 For those students who were in the in-house group, career links were still valued. This

3 particular work experience involved external clients coming into the University to use the

4 service; students felt that links with external clients in this way were valuable for their career.

5 In the off-campus group, it was stated by one of the participants that the links were of no

6 value, since this particular student was not intending to go back to that particular workplace,

7 owing to a negative experience. It seems, therefore, that career links are important in a work

8 experience if they are perceived to be of value, but are not dependent on where the work

9 experience takes place, the latter finding contradicting observations by others (Mansfield,

10 2011; Tallantyre, 2010), who reported that in-house work experiences might decrease links

11 with employers.

12

13

14 *Career insight*

15 Students in all three groups talked about career insight, within which emerged two

16 subthemes: gaining real-world experience, and reinforcing and re-evaluating career

17 aspirations. All students, regardless of whether they were doing in-house, off-campus or

18 mixed types of work experience, found that the work was useful in gaining real-world

19 experience (…*you can't really gain that through sitting in a classroom* [Dave off-campus]).

20 By gaining this experience, students' career aspirations were either reinforced or re-

21 evaluated. In other words, some students found that the work experience had made them

22 realise that they did not want to continue with their previously intended profession, whereas

23 for others, the work experience had confirmed that their career choice was the right one.

24 Again, these observations were independent of placement type:

25

26   *I think you've got to understand what exactly they do before you can kind of make a*

27   *decision on what it is that you're dead set on, 'cos once you commit to something you*

28   *commit to something.* [Jenson, in-house]

11

1

2   *It's making you see whether you want to get involved in it after. 'Cos if you don't*

3   *enjoy it after this, you won't enjoy it going into it, whereas if you still enjoy it after this,*

4   *you're probably gonna carry on.* [Dave, off-campus]

5

6   *…it sort of confirms to you that it is what you wanna do…instead of realising sort of*

7   *afterwards, 'cos it's a big risk doing three years and then realising it's not what you*

8   *wanna do, but doing the placement helps confirm that.* [Paige, mixed]

9

10   These opinions and perceptions regarding career insight reinforce those found by Little and

11   Harvey (2006), although in the current study, unlike that of Kettis *et al.* (2013), students did

12   not say that the work experience had helped them specifically to identify with their intended

13   profession. Gaining career insight and reinforcing and re-evaluating career aspirations were,

14   however, important aspects of all types of work experience, irrespective of location, in the

15   current study.

16

17

18   *Skills and experiences*

19   For all three groups, students identified a number of skills and experiences. Subthemes

20   were: job-specific skills, putting into practice, confidence, variety, and getting a better grade.

21

22   Apart from communication skills, which were identified by all students regardless of the

23   location of their work experience, the job-specific skills identified were unique to the

24   particular employment type, such as teaching-related skills, and specific technical skills. All

25   students identified these skills as being an advantage of a work experience.

26

27   Confidence was highlighted as an important skill acquired, irrespective of the location of the

28   work experience:

1

2   *…one of the biggest barriers you have to overcome doing your placement is*

3   *definitely confidence.* [Becca, mixed group, talking about off-campus work

4   experience)

5

6   *…it makes you more confident….knowing that you can actually perform what you*

7   *say, so your confidence helps you progress.* [Sophie, in-house]

8

9   Similar to the findings of others (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Helyer *et al.,* 2014), where students

10   perceived work-placement experiences and internships as improving their confidence, and

11   their personal and transferable skills, students in the current study, regardless of work

12   experience location, highlighted job-specific skills and confidence as being important skills

13   acquired as a result of their work experience.

14

15   The subtheme, putting into practice, was about how students were able to put their skills and

16   experiences that they had learned in the classroom into practice 'in the field'. Such

17   comments were particularly apparent among the in-house group of students, possibly

18   because the in-house work experience (which was a sports science support service) had

19   been specifically set up for this purpose. Students remarked how they had learnt and

20   understood more in-depth information by doing this in-house experience than they had in

21   their normal, scheduled teaching sessions (laboratories and lectures):

22

23   *…I feel like I've learnt a lot more in the clinic than in the labs* [Rob, in-house]

24

25   *I think I've learnt more in them few hours than I did in those labs* [Jackie, in-house]

26

27   Students, who were in the off-campus group, also commented on how they were able to put

28   their skills into practice:

13

1

2   *…it's like behaviour management…you won't really understand in terms of someone*

3   *telling you what to do, you can only learn that through it actually happening.* [Dave,

4   off-campus]

5

6   These viewpoints support those of other researchers, regarding the value of work

7   experiences in supplementing learning, and in enabling students to see how theory is

8   applied in practice (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006). Although it seemed that the

9   in-house students could see the link between learning and practice more clearly, all students

10   valued this aspect of their work experience, regardless of where the work took place.

11

12   Regarding variety, there was a tendency for students who had done their work experience

13   in-house to say that the skills they acquired were not varied *(…we always come and do the*

14   *same sort of testing* [Bruce, in-house]; *…in clinic, you just do a load of massages and that's*

15   *it.* [Becca, mixed placement talking about in-house work experience])*,* owing perhaps to a

16   lack of equipment (*…within a professional sport they obviously have the budget for bigger*

17   *medical facilities.* [Bob, mixed group]). A lack of variety, was also mentioned, however, by

18   those who were doing off-campus work experience, owing to the work experience being

19   restricted in some other way, such as it being on the same day each week, having to work

20   with the same group of children (for those on work experience in a school), or not being

21   allowed to do all aspects of the job *(…on external er I couldn't go pitch side 'cos I didn't have*

22   *a first aid qualification.* [Dan mixed group commenting on the off-campus work experience]).

23   The mixed group of students appreciated the variety that both the in-house and off-campus

24   work experience gave them *(…you do need to experience both sides [clinic and sport]*

25   [Becca, mixed]. Variety, whether positive or negative, could, therefore, be dependent on

26   work experience location.

27

14

1   Most students felt that the work experience enabled them to get a better grade, particularly

2   highlighted by students in the in-house group *(I've been getting better marks and*

3   *percentages on my assignments.* [Jenson]). The work experience formed part of the

4   students' study, which contributed directly to their grade, which students acknowledged.

5   These findings support observations made by other researchers (Brooks and Youngson,

6   2016; Mansfield, 2011; Patel *et al.,* 2012), in that students undertaking a work placement are

7   more likely to obtain a good degree. There were, however, also some reservations regarding

8   enhancement of grades, since the work experience was felt to be, in some instances, so

9   time consuming that it was actually taking the students away from other aspects of their

10   study. Further follow-up research on whether the in-house and off-campus work experiences

11   do, in fact, lead to a better degree classification could be undertaken.

12

13

14   *Support*

15   Subthemes identified under the theme of support included: finding work experience; level of

16   supervision; and observation.

17

18   Finding work experience was unique to those who were doing off-campus work. The mixed

19   group specifically identified the struggles that they had had in finding an appropriate

20   employer:

21

22   *…if you can't find a placement but you're looking every single day, you've then got*

23   *more pressure just to basically take a placement anywhere, although maybe you*

24   *don't wanna go there.* [Bob, mixed group talking about off-campus work experience]

25

26   Some of the students, for whom off-campus work experience had been found, said that they

27   wished that they had been able to find their own employer, since they were not happy with

28   the workplace that they had been given. Inappropriate work placements and internships or

15

1　not being able to find a suitable work placement have been identified in previous research as

2　a limitation to off-campus experiences (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Nduna,

3　2012). Finding a work experience was not an issue for those who were working in-house.

4

5　Students in all groups talked about the level of supervision they received on their work

6　experience. For in-house students, the fact that tutors were there to support them was

7　viewed positively:

8

9　　*First day of a job you're gonna be in the deep end either way aren't you, whereas this*

10　　*is sort of middle ground still.* [Chuck, in-house]

11

12　　*…I think when you go in, you're a little bit nervous because…you're worried that you*

13　　*won't know how to perform a certain task but you've got the back up from whoever's*

14　　*in the lab helping you…so you progress at your own speed.* [Sophie, in-house]

15

16　　*…if you haven't done something quite right on placement, you can do it again* [Alice,

17　　mixed group talking about in-house work experience]

18

19　In the group of students who could compare their in-house and off-campus work experience,

20　students seemed to appreciate the level of supervision of the in-house work experience, but

21　also felt that the off-campus work experience put them under pressure, which was thought to

22　be both a positive and a negative thing:

23

24　　*…you've got the real world professionals watching you do everything, so there's a bit*

25　　*more pressure to get it right the first time….rather than internal, there's always*

26　　*someone there to help you.* [Dan, mixed]

27

1 *…I think when you're working internally you can get a bit of a safety net where if you*

2 *don't know anything, you can just pop up and ask the supervisor, but when you're in*

3 *that [off-campus] environment, if you don't know it, you have to go away and learn*

4 *it….I feel an external placement is better because you don't have that safety net,*

5 *there's a more pressurised environment.* [Bob, mixed]

6

7 In the off-campus group, the level of supervision varied according to the particular work

8 experience, either being viewed as inappropriate to the extent that the employer did not

9 know the student was coming to the workplace, to those where organisation and level of

10 supervision were thought to be good. The level of supervision, therefore, might be

11 dependent on the student, and how much support they feel they need. Providing in-house

12 work experience may help those students in the early part of their University life, or may help

13 students who lack the confidence to be 'thrown into the deep end'.

14

15 Regarding the subtheme of observation, there were both benefits and barriers identified.

16 Some students appeared to have benefitted from observing only (rather than doing):

17

18 *Even though I've sat back and observed a lot, I have learnt stuff like…behaviour*

19 *management.* [Trevor, off-campus]

20

21 *…I still learnt a lot just by shadowing.* [Paige, mixed group talking about her off-

22 campus work experience)

23

24 Other students wanted to have a more active role:

25

26 ...it's kind of annoying...just sitting in the corner just watching, [Jess, off-campus]

27

1   These benefits and barriers seemed to be specific to the work experience and student

2   preferences, rather than whether or not the work took place in-house or off-campus.

3

4

5   *Cost*

6   For the theme of cost, subthemes identified were: time and travel. The work experience

7   being viewed negatively, in terms of how it meant that their time was away from studying, or

8   was too time consuming in general, was identified by all students, regardless of work

9   experience location:

10

11   *I could be doing my dissertation right now* [Bruce, in-house]

12

13   *...you have to be the one to decide, right, which day am I gonna lose to do my*

14   *placement and then work basically everything around that.* [Becca, mixed]

15

16   The in-house work experience, however, was viewed more positively, in that time was less

17   of an issue, due to the work being more flexible (as the in-house work experience was

18   specifically designed to accommodate students when they were free on their timetable).

19

20   Travelling to and from the work experience was specific to the off-campus students only, and

21   was viewed both positively and negatively:

22

23   *…it takes an hour and a half to get to the training ground and two hours to get to the*

24   *stadium but I do it with ease now because I love what I do.* [Bob, mixed group talking

25   about his off-campus work experience]

26

27   *…getting there has been a bit of a nightmare…* [Trevor, off-campus]

28

1

2 Travel time was understandably not an issue for those students undertaking in-house work

3 experience.

4

5 These observations on time and travel identified in the current study support those of others,

6 (Bullock *et al.,* 2009; Nduna, 2012), although were not always viewed as negative, and were

7 less of an issue for students undertaking in-house work experience.

8

9

10 *Relationships*

11 A final theme that emerged from the data was about relationships, which included the

12 subthemes of social side and tutor relationships. The students, who were undertaking in-

13 house work experience, talked about the social side, where they were able to chat with

14 others in the course *(…I got to talk to a few people on my course that I wouldn't normally talk*

15 *to.* [Jenson]). Students who had undertaken off-campus work experience also talked about

16 the social side: *(…it's just like the team spirit and the team banter. I love it.* [Dan, mixed]).

17

18 Unique to in-house work experience, was the subtheme of tutor relationships. Students

19 commented on how they had been able to build good, positive relationships with their tutors

20 with whom they worked *(…you get to see like a different side of them* [Rob, in-house]), which

21 transferred, it was highlighted, into the classroom.

22

23

24 **Conclusions**

25 Work experience, regardless of whether in-house or off-campus, was perceived by the

26 students who took part in this study to enhance future employment, not only because they

27 felt that employers were more likely to view their work experience as favourable, but also

28 because the work experience provided career links with valued, external employers and

1　individuals. Students also felt that the work experience, regardless of its location, provided

2　them with career insight via real-world experience, through which they were able to re-affirm

3　or re-evaluate their career aspirations. Students thought that both in-house and off-campus

4　work experience allowed them to gain and put into practice a variety of skills and

5　experiences (such as job-specific skills, confidence, and communication skills), enhanced

6　their university grades, and allowed them to build relationships.

7

8　Issues (viewed positively and negatively) that arose for both in-house and off-campus work

9　experience included: the level of supervision during the work experience; the amount of

10　observation versus 'hands-on' experience involved in the work experience; and travel and

11　time costs.

12

13　When comparing in-house and off-campus work experiences, based on the data collected in

14　the current study (which was limited to students undertaking a work experience that was

15　integrated, short in duration (75 to 150 hours) and specific to one faculty of one university),

16　in-house work experience was deemed advantageous in that students did not have to find

17　their own work, and was deemed cost effective in terms of travel and , to some extent,time.

18　In addition, in-house work experience allowed students to feel supported, and allowed them

19　to develop relationships with their tutors and other students. The in-house students

20　specifically identified how their work experience enabled them to see clearly the link between

21　theory and practice. Off-campus work experiences were, however, deemed to 'look' better to

22　the employer than were in-house experiences, but if the in-house work experience involved

23　some kind of external clientele, then career links were believed sufficient. A lack of variety

24　seemed to occur with in-house work experience, but also with off-campus experiences,

25　which were restricted by, for instance, time.

26

27　The study is limited in terms of sample size and cohort. There was, however, an appropriate

28　size of participants in each focus group, and the focus group participants were segmented,

1   following recommendations regarding qualitative data collection (e.g., Carlson and Glenton,

2   2011). Sampling was from one cohort of students (those who were studying for an

3   undergraduate degree in sport and exercise), who met the inclusion criteria, which also

4   restricted, to some extent, the number of focus groups that were achievable, as well as the

5   generalizability of the findings. Although the study is limited in these aspects, based on the

6   findings of the students in the current study, further evaluation of in-house and off-campus

7   work experience is warranted, since perceptions of their relative value revealed some

8   differences. That said, there may have been other reasons for the differences that were

9   found between the in-house and off-campus work experiences. For instance, the in-house

10   group was unique in that the student knew (or knew of) the employer, which may have

11   influenced students' perceptions. In addition, all students volunteered for the study, which

12   may have influenced findings, since students may have volunteered for their own motives,

13   such as wishing to share their frustrations or conversely, to express their gratitude over their

14   work placement experience. Undertaking a study on a larger and more diverse cohort of

15   students, and attempting to control for potential confounding variables, is required.

16

17   *Practical implications and recommendations*

18   Based on the findings of the current study, when offering work experience opportunities for

19   students, consideration should be given to level of support, supervision, observation, and

20   travel and time costs. In-house work experiences are recommended, since, in the current

21   study, they were perceived to be as beneficial as off-campus work experiences, having the

22   added advantages that they were cost effective, allowed students to be more closely

23   supervised and supported, were good for relationship building between and within

24   students/staff, and, if set up specifically to enable students to put theory into practice, were

25   beneficial for increasing student attainment. Tutors should be mindful, however, that variety,

26   and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders may be compromised when offering

27   in-house work experiences that are similar to those investigated in the current study. Further

28   research on the value, impact, advantages and limitations of off-campus and in-house work

1

2

3   1   experience could be undertaken, by not only investigating perceptions of a greater number

4

5   2   and diversity of students, but also by gathering quantitative data regarding the value of such

6

7   3   work experience for degree and employment success.

8

9   4

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

1 **References**

2

3 1. Aggett, M. and Busby, G. (2011), "Opting out of internship: Perceptions of hospitality,

4   tourism and events management undergraduates at a British University". *Journal of*

5   *Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education,* Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 106-113.

6

7 2. Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology". *Qualitative*

8   *Research in Psychology,* Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77-101.

9

10 3. Brooks, R. and Youngson, P. (2016), "Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of

11   the effects on career progression". *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 41 No. 9, pp. 1563-

12   1578.

13

14 4. Bullock, K., Gould, V., Hejmadi, M. and Lock, G. (2009), "Work placement experience:

15   should I stay or should I go?" *Higher Education Research and Development,* Vol. 28 No.

16   5, pp. 481-494.

17

18 5. Carlsen, B. and Glenton, C. (2011), "What about N? A methodological study of sample-

19   size reporting in focus group studies". *BMC Medical Research Methodology,* Vol. 11, p.

20   26.

21
22 6. Cornelius, S., Medyckyj-Scott, D., Forrest, D., Williams, A. and MacKaness, W. (2008),

23   "The virtual placement: An alternative to the traditional work placement in the

24   geographical sciences?" *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* Vol. 32 No. 2, pp.

25   287-302.

26

7. Eagle, L., Bennett, R., Ali-Choudhury, R. and Mousley, W. (2008), "Reassessing the value of work-experience placements in the context of widening participation in higher education", *Journal of Vocational Education & Training,* Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 105-122.

8. Gamble, E. and Bates, C. (2011), "Alternatives to industrial work placement", *Higher Education Management and Policy,* Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 41-58.

9. Harvey, L., Geall, V. and Moon, S. (1998). *Work experience: Expanding opportunities for undergraduates.* Birmingham, England: Centre for Research into Quality (supported by DfEE and CIHE), University of Central England.

10. Helyer, R. and Lee, D. (2014), "The role of work experience in the future employability of higher education graduates". *Higher Education Quarterly,* Vol. 68 No. 3, pp. 348-372.

11. Jones, C.M., Green, J.P. and Higson, H.E. (2015), "Do work placements improve final year academic performance or do high-calibre students choose to do work placements?" *Studies in Higher Education,* Published online 09 Oct 2015, pp. 1-17. doi:10.1080/03075079.2015.1073249

12. Kettis, Å., Ring, L., Gustavsson, M. and Wallman, A. (2013), "Placements: an underused vehicle for quality enhancement in higher education?" *Quality in Higher Education,* Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 28-40.

13. Langworthy, A. and Turner, T. (2003), "Learning for the workplace and beyond: the challenge of university-community engagement". in *Learning for an Unknown Future, Proceedings of the 26th HERDSA Annual Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand,* 6-9 July 2003: pp 369.

14. Little, B. and Harvey, L. (2006), *Learning through work placements and beyond. A report for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit and the Higher Education Academy's Work Placements Organisation Forum*. England: Sheffield Hallam University: Centre for Research and Evaluation.

15. Mansfield, R. (2011), "The effect of placement experience upon final-year results for surveying degree programmes". *Studies in Higher Education,* Vol. 36 No. 8, pp. 939-952.

16. Marks, D.F., and Yardley, L. (2004), *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. SAGE publications, London.

17. Moore, T. and Workman, B. (2011), "Work based learning: Creative, imaginative and flexible approaches". *The International Journal of Learning,* Vol. 17 No. 12, pp. 67-80.

18. Nduna, N.J. (2012), "The relevance of workplace learning in guiding student and curriculum development". *South African Journal of Higher Education,* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 232-247.

19. Patel, N., Brinkman, W. and Coughlan, J. (2012), "Work placements and academic achievement: undergraduate computing students". *Education and Training,* Vol. 54 No. 6, pp. 523-533.

20. Tallantyre, F. (Ed). (2010), "University management of work-based learning". Higher Education Authority, available at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/flexiblelearning/UniversityManagement.pdf (accessed 26 January, 2014).

21. Tomlinson, M. (2008), "The Degree is not enough: Students perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability". *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 49–61.

22. Wilkinson, S. (1998), "Focus groups in health research: exploring the meanings of health and illness". *Journal of Health Psychology,* Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 329-348.

23. Wilson, T. (2012), "A review of business–university collaboration. The Wilson Review", available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32383/12-610-wilson-review-business-university-collaboration.pdf (accessed 26 January 2014).