summer 2010

gmt
graduate
market trends

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graduate employment and careers**

HECSU

Note from the editor

Welcome to Graduate Market Trends Summer 2010. This issue is all about graduate work experience. We will explore its significance in honing graduate soft skills and improving employability, both from an employer's and from a student's perspective.

As you will already know, the subject matter in question is quite pressing - especially in the context of the increasing globalisation of the higher education sector and graduate labour market and the growing foci of UK and EU employability agendas in linking higher education and business through "lifelong learning". These issues are reflected in the articles.

The present edition has an international flavour: We have included a special "Australian" section, in which colleagues from down-under enlighten us in "work integrated learning" (WIL) and other practices.

Closer to home, Heather Collier, Director of the National Council for Work Experience (NCWE) explains how employers can benefit from providing graduate work experience. We hear from the University of Central Lancashire's research team on their ongoing graduate work experience study, and Barnados' innovative and inspiring 'Pathways Interns Scheme' is the basis of an investigation into third-sector internships.

The online edition of GMT Summer 2010 has more work experience articles: Rounding off the Australian section is Dr Peter McIlveen's "Aussie Blueprint for Employability" on career development and WIL.

It is followed by a research paper written by Aston Business School's Matthew Hall, Helen Higson and Nicola Bullivant, based on an ongoing five-year survey of employers and examining the role of work placements in developing soft skills among management undergraduates. Finally, a very busy Alin Dobrea outlines the benefits of work experience from the student perspective.

As ever, we aim to provoke debate and discussion. This is my first edition as editor – I don't need to say how much I will welcome your comments and contributions.

Aphrodite Papadatou

In brief

CBI:

Good times ahead for STEM graduates, but does the challenge now lie in forging more effective links between higher education and industry?
A recent Confederation of British Industry study, *Ready to Grow: Business Priorities for Education and Skills,* surveyed 694 employers, and found that more than half thought they would not be able to find adequate staff to fill the "high-level jobs" of the coming years. Employers feared that they would not be able to fill in essential vacancies that need mathematics, science and technology graduates.

The study also found that there is still a long way to go until proper working links are established between industry and higher education. Employers believed that the problem lay with universities' administrative red tape which often discourages companies from initiating links with the sector. View the full report at: *www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/ 2010-cbi-edi-ready-to-grow-business-priorities-for %20education-and-skills.pdf*

New European Commission research into higher education reform in Europe:

Research highlights the overarching trend in higher education governance towards institutional autonomy and more freedom in financial management

Two new independent studies look at the progress of reforms of governance and funding in higher education in 33 European countries. Analyses and recommendations cover the main trends and themes across the EU, but also provide detailed analyses of national contests. They were carried out by a consortium of research bodies led by the "Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies" (CHEPS) in the Netherlands

In terms of funding reforms, the research emphasises that the expansion of the sector has brought budgetary pressures for many governments, resulting in cost-cutting policies and the rethinking of tuition fees. These findings are used as lessons for recommendations. *http://ec.europa.eu/education/ news/news2259_en.htm*

European Commission backs up university and business sector cooperation:

High level representatives from business, higher education, and politics met in Brussels.

The European Commissioner of Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth hosted the "2010 European University – Business Forum", on 4-5 May. Participants discussed how universities and businesses, in particular SMEs, can join forces for their mutual benefit. The forum explored how new forms of working together can contribute to the EU's reform agenda, in particular to regional development, innovation, and the quality of education through the supply of highly qualified graduates. *http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/ news2261_en.htm*

Forecasting the EU labour market in 2020:

New labour market research report by Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

This recent report's findings support the key objectives of both the EU "New Skills for New Jobs" initiative and the "Europe 2020" strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (focusing on future needs and on adapting education and training more closely to the world of work).

Some key research findings are:
- There will be 10 million fewer jobs in the EU over the next decade as a result of the economic crisis, but employment levels are expected to recover so that they almost reach 2008 levels by 2020.
- 77 million job openings are forecast over the next decade, the vast majority of which will replace retiring employees as the EU's population ages.
- Transition towards a service economy will intensify: almost seven million jobs will be created in knowledge and skill intensive occupations, such as high-level managerial roles and professional or technical jobs.
- The report also anticipates labour force polarisation: Even though medium-qualified workers will still make just over one half of all jobs, the share of the jobs held by the highly-qualified will increase from 29 to 35%, at the expense of those jobs now held by low-qualified workers. View the full report at: *www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3052_en.pdf* Europe 2020 strategy: *http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/ index_en.htm*

New employability and skills paper launched in May by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills:

A Research and Policy Briefing paper provides a review of recent research on the theme of employability skills by exploring the evidence base and recent policy trends and initiatives

The paper outlines some of the key challenges and barriers in employability policy and suggests some areas for future work. It contributes to a wider programme of work being undertaken by the UK Commission into the best way to develop employability skills. View the full report at: *www.ukces.org.uk/reports/employability-skills-a-research-and-policy-briefing*

Bristol University launches volunteering award:

The university has launched the "Outstanding Achievement Award" in order to formally demonstrate Bristol University graduates' employability skills

The award is based on 50 hours of work experience, attendance to at least four skills and employability workshops (including interview techniques and related skills-intensive activity) and the writing of a summary of the skills gained, aimed specifically at employers.

Bristol PLuS aims to help students acquire work and life skills alongside academic qualifications, and it is supplemented by a "Sporting PLuS Award" for those who perform well in sports. *www.bris.ac.uk/careers/plusaward/index.asp*

The Best Thing About Summer For a Busy Employer

Heather Collier, Director of UK's National Council of Work Experience (NCWE), is the author of this introductory article. She writes about the variety of reasons as to why employers should regularly recruit student and graduate interns, based on mutually beneficial outcomes.
The author provides employer tips on how to make the first steps in recruiting the right candidates, and also with a successful student-employer case study to inspire.

If you ask anyone about workloads, there is always too much to be done in too short a period; and, of course, there is always that nagging job still in the in-tray (which by now may even be out of sight and relegated to the bottom draw)

It may be that you currently don't have the time, resources or in-house skills to tackle a certain piece of work but you know that its completion would enable the company to move forward…

What if, you could find a cost-effective, short-term, talented individual that you could rely on to complete the project; someone who could bring new ideas and fresh thinking to the project and would be able to pick it up and run with it with minimal supervision? You can!

Now is the ideal time to tap into the short-term student and graduate workforce on your doorstep. For the next eight to 12 weeks higher education institutions have shut their doors for the summer and students are available and eager to use their skills, putting hard-learned theory into practice and earn experience for their CVs. In fact students can be available to plug skills and workforce shortages all year round: Christmas, Easter and possibly one or two days per week, timetable permitting.

Many universities have also been recently successful in securing grants from the funding council HEFCE, to provide undergraduate and graduate internships with employers in the professions, companies in priority sectors for economic growth and small businesses.

So what are the other benefits of taking on a student or graduate intern?
Work placements can add value to your organisation in the following ways:
- You gain an intelligent, motivated, cost-effective labour resource with valuable skills, knowledge and fresh ideas.
- Flexibility of availability – interns may be available at times of the year when the need is greatest. Temporary staff shortages can be overcome at low cost.
- Projects can be undertaken that would otherwise take valuable time from full time employees or where there aren't the relevant skills in-house.
- Graduates come with fresh thinking and new ideas; sometimes learning about cutting edge technology ands innovation which can be passed on within the company.
- Permanent staff gain opportunities to develop supervisory skills by mentoring and monitoring placement students.
- Recruitment and training costs can be cut by employing placement students when they graduate. It's a taster session for both parties with no commitment.

- Students are good brand ambassadors – they tell their friends and classmates about the good experience they have had at the company, thereby encouraging others to apply. Having had that taster session themselves they also have a knowledge of the company and a loyalty and often want to go back there as a full-time employee.

How to take the first steps:
- Establish what gaps you have that an undergraduate might be able to fill, or projects to be done that would suit a student with specific skills.

- Get the buy-in of all relevant personnel.
- Find out which higher education institutions run courses with the appropriate content for your business or speak to the Careers Advisory Service at the institution if relevant.

So… what's holding you back?
You're not sure how to go about recruiting and managing a student, you're not sure what is involved and wouldn't want it to fail? You cant afford the time right now?... You can't afford not to!

Employer – Student Case Study: *Barclays Wealth*

Benefits
Our internship adds value for both the participant and the business, never exclusively one or the other. For interns, the first hand experience they gain within Wealth Management allows them to fully understand what to expect in their career. Our innovative curriculum blends formal training with on-the-job learning and succeeds in both teaching and motivating. Our unique real-life client prospecting and pitch task last year saw our Chief Executive challenging the interns to prepare a business proposal for a genuine potential client of the firm. The target client himself and the Company Chief Executives assessed all of the pitches from the interns together. Called "a great experience" and a "very unique contest", one participant said the project was "more dynamic than anything I have had from any other internship". Benefits to the business include developing new business, informing strategy, opportunities for business enhancement, engagement with all levels of seniority at the firm, and an ideal way to accurately assess if this if the right place for students. Interns leave Barclays Wealth having had a remarkable experience, one which compares excellently to that of their peers. The knock-on effect of this anecdotal ranking is clear – time and time again, our internship programme attracts first class student who've heard great things about us.

Results
We have reported year-on-year improved satisfaction over the past three years, and now engage an independent third party to undertake quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the intern cohorts after their internship: by allowing the interns to feedback anonymously, we were guaranteed an unbiased look at what our students really valued and – crucially – where improvements could be made.

- 92% of our interns would not hesitate recommending the *Barclays Wealth Summer Internship* to a friend
- The average rating of our internship was eight out of 10.
- 78% of applicants felt that the contact they'd had with our team was better than other firms.
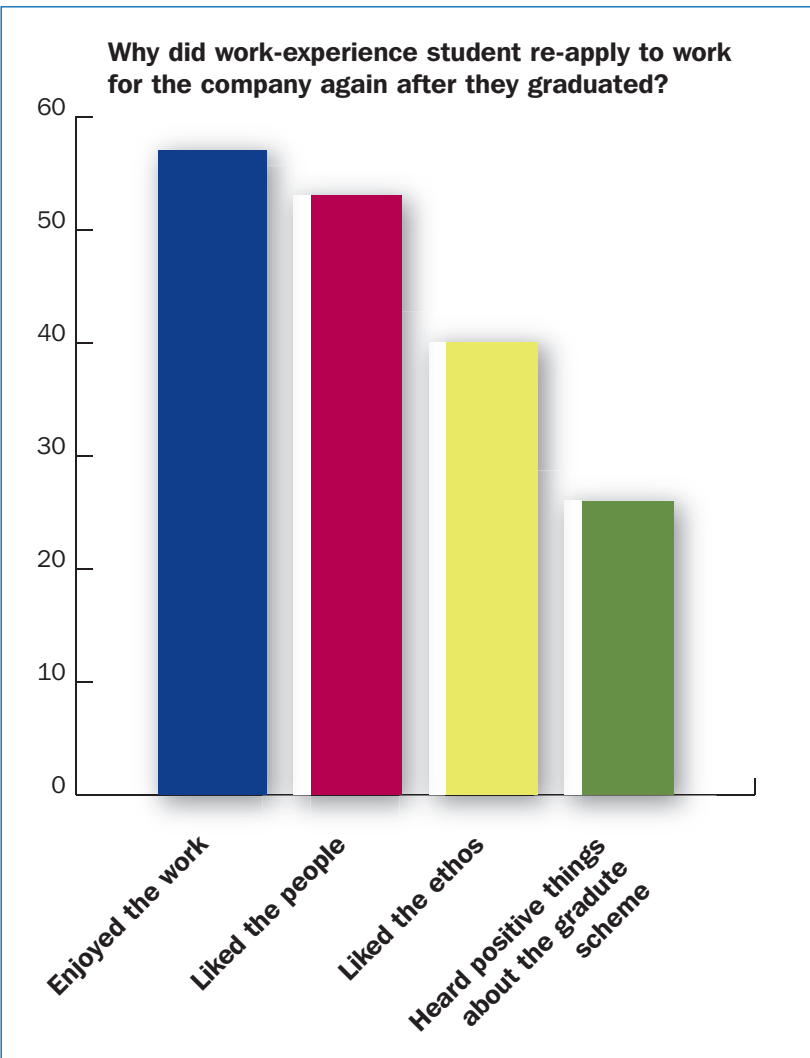
Key tips
Regular open dialogue with students and current graduates as well as research such as focus groups and surveys, ensure that our marketing strategies and internship/graduate programmes remain relevant to our target generation.

Real Prospects 2010: Work Experience

HECSU Researcher and "Real Prospects 2010" author, Holly Higgins, provides GMT with qualitative research evidence pointing to the significance of work experience placements in helping graduates think about their career development and in securing permanent employment within their preferred sector. The evidence shows that work placements not only provide networking opportunities and the chance to hone talents but, most significantly, they introduce graduates to professional spheres that they may otherwise not have chosen.

The Real Prospects survey is designed to evaluate how employers recruit, select and develop their graduate employees. Over 14,000 graduates responded to the survey, which was launched online in January 2010. Around 20% of the graduates we surveyed had worked for their current employer as a student before they applied for a graduate role. We asked those respondents who had undertaken work experience why they decided to re-apply to the same company again after they graduated. Why did work-experience students reapply to work for the company again after they graduated?

Research

For one graduate, "work experience was my main inspiration for pursuing a career as a chartered surveyor. For me the best thing about my work experience was the people I worked with, so I was very keen to return to the same office". Another, a trainee solicitor, explained how "after two weeks' work experience, I knew this company was where I wanted to train. Great people and a lively atmosphere". Real Prospects graduates feel that working for their employer whilst a student gave them a valuable opportunity to find out more about

Why did work-experience student re-apply to work for the company again after they graduated?

(bar chart, vertical axis 0–60; categories: Enjoyed the work, Liked the people, Liked the ethos, Heard positive things about the graduate scheme)

their chosen career before they committed to a permanent role. It also enabled them to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation as an employer.

Recruitment

Real Prospects graduates found that the contacts they made during their work placements were invaluable when it came to sourcing job opportunities when they graduated. One philosophy graduate described how a work placement led to his current research role. "I did work experience with the organisation, and they rang me a few months later saying they had a vacancy available offering me an interview. I had an interview, took some tests and was offered the job as a result".

In some cases work experience students were offered jobs or interviews as a direct result of their performance during the placement. One graduate trainee explained that in her firm, "all work experience students are offered an interview for a training contract". She was interviewed while working for the firm in July, and was offered a permanent position at the end of August.

For some graduates, the opportunity to secure a job at the end of their work placement prompted them to rethink their career plans. This trainee accountant described how she came to be in her current role. "I originally applied for an internship over the summer.

I was not particularly interested in accountancy but I thought it would look good on my CV and I could earn some money. I really enjoyed my internship and was offered a graduate job and accepted." Another explained that "although I hadn't planned a career in journalism, I took the opportunity to get into the field when the vacancy arose during my work experience… journalism jobs are quite rare in the north-east so it was a chance I couldn't miss".

Selection

Some employers consider work experience to be an integral part of their selection process. They assess students over the course of their work placements, and those who perform well are 'fast tracked' through the application process for a permanent role. One Real Prospects graduate explained that her employer prefers to recruit people through work experience "because they get to see how individuals perform in a variety of situations over several weeks".

Most students know that work experience looks great on their CV, but they may not be aware that it is fast becoming a strategy for recruitment and selection. The feedback we received from the graduates who participated in Real Prospects 2010 suggests that work experience opened even more doors than they had originally anticipated. In an ever more competitive graduate labour market, students would do well to bear this in mind.

Beyond Placement Extinction: Coming Up For Air

Authors, Francesca Walker, Employability and Alumni Fellow at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) - and Michael Bowerman, Research Assistant at UCLan are conducting an on-going study on the factors influencing a sample of UCLan's students' decisions in taking up work placements. The present article summarises the findings and implications of their research.

Their findings show that there is a variety of reasons affecting these decisions - ranging from student motivation to financial and emotional factors - and point to the need for individual institutions to actively support students in accessing work placements. The economic effects of the recession have made this a priority, and the authors point to interventions made by UCLan in the light of their research, and highlight the scope for their further development.

Introduction and Background

Over the last ten years, the Lancashire Business School and the School of Sports, Tourism and the Outdoors at UCLan, have experienced a decline in students undertaking work or industrial placements. We define a work or industrial placement as being part of a sandwich degree, over 48 weeks, in which the student is a formal employee of an organisation and for which they receive a salary.

Figure 1 below maps the downward trend, with the notable year being 2000/01, the year that compulsory placements became optional. We wanted to understand this decline and what we could do to stop the downward trend. This article covers our findings and the interventions that we have introduced.

Figure 1. Faculty of Management - Students placed 1996/97 - 2008/09
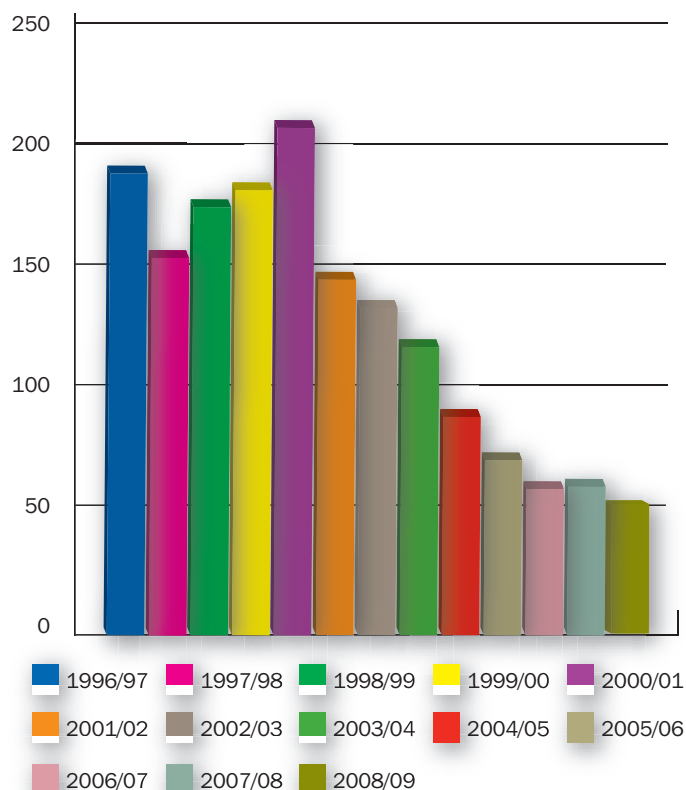
Methodology

We commenced our study in November 2008. Our aim was to ensure that we gained the views from as many students as possible within the two schools. To guarantee a good response we opted for paper questionnaires, visiting classes and asking students to complete them while we waited. We surveyed all years, First, Second, Third (who had opted out of their placement), Third Years on Placement and Fourth years, who had completed a placement.

This approach resulted in 670 student responses, with the detail shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Number of student responses per year group category

Year Group	Responses
First Years	283
Second Years	113
Third Year	
(Finalists who opted out)	180
Third Years on Placement	25
Fourth Years	69
Total	670

Why we surveyed all years

First Years – Our aim was to obtain the initial views of students who have pre-conceived ideas about the course and the option of an industrial placement.

Second Years – At this point the students start their placement search. This group provided a snapshot of current views about placement searches.

Third Year Finalists who opted out – By comparing this group with the fourth years it was possible to gather data on why students had chosen to opt out of their placement and whether that decision had impacted on their employability.

Third Year Students on Placement – This group provided an insight into the experiences of students undertaking a placement, gathering data on what had been learned, what skills needed development and what, if anything, the students would have done differently.

Fourth Year Finalists – This group provided further insight into the views of students in their final year

who were able to provide a reflective account of their experiences on placement and whether this had made a difference to their employability. The questions asked related to a number of issues, some of which were:

• Placement length – too short, too long or just right;
• Student mobility – how far from home were they prepared to travel;
• Their views of the value of work experience and whether they thought that employers wanted this from students;
• Whether they were in part-time work and whether that work was related to their course of study.

Findings 2008/09

There were a number of findings from the first year of study, some of which are noted below:

(a) Student Mobility
This study highlighted the fact that student mobility for UK students within the Faculty of Management at UCLan was proving to be a barrier to undertaking a placement. Many of the students were from the local area, a recruitment pattern that is increasing. Figure 3 below maps the recruitment pattern of UK students to the two schools over a three year period. Preston is in the centre of the highest density of dots.

Figure 3. UK Recruitment Pattern 2006-2009

2006-07

2007-08

2008-09
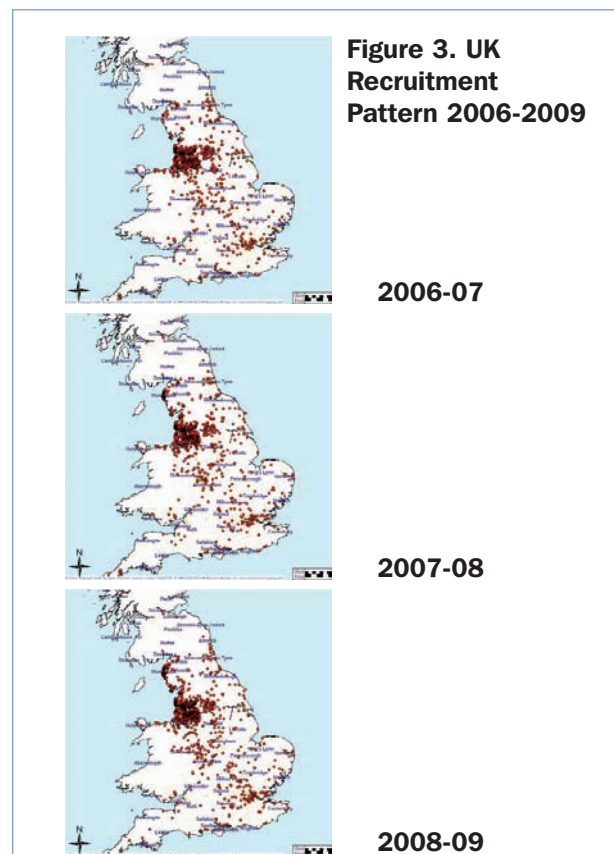
Students were more likely to be mobile (i.e. travel more than 30 miles from their homes) when accommodation was found for them. We found that views changed radically from the first years who were willing and eager to travel away from home, to the second and third years, when the cost of travel and the fact that they would be living independently became a reality.

(b) Finding the 'Right Role'

Students indicated that a major reason for not undertaking a work placement was that they were unable to find the right role. It is clear that third years on placement and fourth year students considered that early application for placements would have provided them with a wider variety of choice and therefore assisted in finding the 'right role'. In short, student motivation was a major issue.

(c) Students in Part-time Employment

The last grant funded university courses were over a decade ago, which has increased necessity for students to work on a part-time basis to supplement their incomes. We found that students were selecting part time work which often corresponded to their academic subject areas. Therefore, they opted to remain within in their part-time roles and complete their courses rather than lose a role that they may not be able to get back in the future.

(d) Key Influencers

Students noted that their key influencers were the sixth form tutors, who provide advice and guidance on the right course to take.

(e) The Importance of Work Experience for Employers

All students, without exception noted that work experience was key to getting a graduate role in the future. The level of importance differed slightly, from 'very important' to 'quite important', but the value was recognised.

Interventions

To address some of these issues, the research team embarked on a number of interventions:

Student Mobility

Encouraging students to talk to students already on placement living away from home/university to share their experiences and promote the value of independent living.

Finding the Right Role

A significant support system was put in place to allow students access to staff at any time (within reason), this included monitoring the number of applications made to placements, overseeing the quality of applications and general encouragement.

Students in Part-time Employment

To encourage students to engage not just with their part-time roles, but with other options, 'Employer Forums' were developed to introduce their views on what they were looking for from a student and what they found was lacking.

Key Influencers

An annual '6th Form' forum was resurrected to allow our staff to meet the tutors who were the key influencers, to explain the value of work placements.

Findings 2009/10

Although the findings from 2008/09 were powerful and able to influence the way in which we supported students, a funding bid from the CEPPL at the University of Plymouth enabled us to extend the research and survey students again in 2009/10, allowing us to measure the impact of the interventions that we had introduced and develop some new ones.

Using the 2008/09 methodology, but taking the lessons learnt from the first year and other studies, we were able to revise some of the questions asked. We surveyed a further 650 students, bringing the total number of students surveyed across the two years to 1,320.

We wanted to know whether the recession had an impact on their view of a need to get work experience.

Figure 4. Has the recession changed your opinion on the value of a placement?

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3 F	Year 3 P	Final
Yes - I feel it is more important now	29%	34%	35%	58%	55%
No	69%	64%	60%	38%	43%
Yes - I feel it is less important now	2%	2%	5%	4%	3%

The results showed that there is a changing view as students in their final years see that it is increasingly important, this is highlighted by the fact that when asked **'Has the recession changed your opinion on the value of a placement?'**, the students responded as show in Figure 4.

Although many of the findings were the same over the two years, we saw a difference in some areas:

Parents of Generation Y
The parents of Generation Y are incredibly important, as more students choose to live at home, their key influencers have changed.

Students want to do a Placement
But they need more support than ever from academics and employability teams.

Future Thinking
The recession is beginning to influence the students, to the extent that they are starting to see that a degree is not enough, they need to think ahead and get the edge on those students who have no work experience. A placement fulfils this.

Too much Competition for Placements
Competition is rising for placement roles. We are seeing robust selection processes with employers seeking placement students who already have work experience. Their part-time work experience is now essential, even for those looking to enhance their future prospects by getting a placement.

Living at Home is even more Important!
As fees rise, living at home is even more important to our students, so we need to work harder to engage with local employers.

What are we doing to help our students?
Building on the interventions from 2008/09, we have developed additional interventions to assist the students as they make their applications:
- Mock Assessment Centres
- Development of online psychometric tests
- Mock interviews
- Peer to Peer Views
- *The Parent's Survival Guide*
- Using social networking to raise student engagement
- Targeting of first year students
- Monitoring the number of applications for placement per student

- Guerrilla marketing
- Local marketing campaigns to engage local employers with the placement process
- Production of a 'by students, for students' film.

If you are reading this and wondering (a) whether this is happening anywhere else and (b), whether our interventions are working, the answer is 'Yes'. Our research has included presentations at *PlaceNet* (a national body that promotes and supports placement tutors and staff), ASET (a professional body for placement and employability staff) and the CEPPL Conference at the University of Plymouth. At these sessions we gathered the views of universities from around the country, many of whom are experiencing the same issues as ourselves.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Our research is not yet over; we consider it to be a work in progress. We have discovered that we (those who support students) have stayed the same, but:
- Students have changed;
- The climate has changed;
- Communication has changed;
- Employers are seeing a rich field of talent – only the best will do.

Generation Y have experienced a great deal of support throughout their educational careers, our assumption that they are suddenly independent and able to work their way through the minefield that is the path to the workplace and work experience is letting them down. Our research has shown that greater support is required for our students. We now have to work harder and communicate better; we consider this to have been a wake-up call for us all.

Contacts
If you would like a copy of the first paper 'Approaching Placement Extinction' (Walker and Ferguson), or would like to find out more about this project, please contact Francesca Walker *fdwalker@uclan.ac.uk*

ASET can be found at *www.asetonline.org/*

PlaceNet can be found at *www.placenet.org.uk/* or join the discussions on LinkedIn – PlaceNet - Placements in Industry

CEPPL can be found at *www.placementlearning.org/*

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and the Aussie Work Experience: The Opportunites and Challenges of Developing Fairly Accessed Graduate Employability skills

Author, Judie Kay is an Associate Director at Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. She is also part of a project team implementing a major initiative to embed "Learning in the Workplace and Community" as part of 25% of the assessment of all 700 courses across Victoria University. Judie is currently National Director of the Australian Collaborative Education Network which is the professional association for practitioners and researchers from the higher education sector, industry, community and government involved in work integrated learning (WIL) in Australia.

This article overviews the increased focus and expansion of work integrated learning activities in the Australian tertiary sector and indicates some challenges and opportunities this presents, particularly focusing on industry/tertiary collaboration and access and participation in WIL for students from diverse backgrounds. These themes have resonance with similar challenges being faced in the United Kingdom.

Australian Context

There is a significant trend in Australia to shift or link learning to outside the classroom into real environments through work integrated learning activities. This change is being driven by a range of factors including the continuing call by Australian industry for improvement in work readiness skills of graduates with another recent survey of CEOs (AI Group,2008) indicating dissatisfaction with the skills of graduates and mounting evidence of the benefits of work integrated learning (WIL) to students in engagement, learning and enhancing career preparedness.

This is resulting in significant curriculum change, encompassing a wide range of disciplines, well beyond traditional areas such as nursing, engineering and education with long standing practices in this area. The first national scoping study of WIL, *The WIL Report,* (*Patrick* et al 2009), confirmed the rich diversity and creativity involved in WIL approaches across Australian tertiary education sector including placements, project work, simulations and virtual WIL.

This expansion of WIL activity in Australia presents the sector with a number of challenges identified by Patrick et al (2009) including provision of worthwhile WIL opportunities, adequately preparing and supervising students, resourcing the activity in addition to mechanisms to engage effectively with growing numbers of industry and community organisations involved. At the same time the Australian Government is seeking to address an identified long term trend for skill shortages and is pursuing an ambitious social

inclusion agenda to increase the enrolments to 20% participation of low socio economic students by 2020 with 40% of 25-34 years olds in 2025 holding a bachelors degree or above.

How this Government policy will impact on the provision of WIL in Australia is yet to be fully explored. In this paper I will briefly overview current strategies and challenges in relation to these two key areas, industry collaboration and broadening participation in tertiary education and WIL in Australia.

Collaboration with Industry

As in the UK, many reports (Precision Consulting,2007, Patrick et al,2009) and the recent *Australian Workforce Futures Report* (Skills Australia, 2010) have identified the need for systems to better link Australian industry with tertiary institutions for work integrated learning. In *The WIL Report* employers noted the complexity of communicating with tertiary institutions and the lack of information about how to engage with institutions for work integrated learning. Currently, although there are some specific industry sector and institutional initiatives of varying levels of success and sophistication addressing these issues, there are few system wide initiatives. Consequently while there is an expansion of activity, engagement between the tertiary institutions and industry for WIL in Australia remains largely fragmented and uncoordinated.

In recognition of this, universities Australia the peak university body, has developed and advocated for the establishment of a *National Internship Scheme* (2007) resourced to support and broker internships nationally. Although a submission to the federal Government for inclusion in this year's budget was unsuccessful, backing for the scheme continues with support from key Australian industry and WIL related bodies including ACEN. (Australian Collaborative Education Network).

In the interim, other initiatives are being put in place. The Australian Government has funded the development of a web based portal to link industry and community to tertiary institutions for WIL. This *National WIL Portal*, currently in development, and led by Victoria University with 34 participating universities is supported by all key industry and professional groups in Australia. It will provide a web based portal aimed at streamlining the engagement with tertiary institutions and thereby encouraging expansion of WIL opportunities. The project findings, from a consultation with over 300 Industry and community organisations, identified overwhelmingly support for the initiative and confirmed the complexity of engaging with tertiary institutions for WIL. Fifty six percent of respondents report liaising with 2-6 different tertiary institutions for WIL and at each Institution with 1-3 contacts, multiple times per year. (Bufton,2010)

Another recent initiative aimed at achieving greater collaboration involves a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) between the Innovation Research Universities (IRU), a group of seven universities from across Australia, and a peak industry group, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). The MOU focuses on boosting graduate employability skills through actively

promoting a quality WIL framework, expanding WIL opportunities and streamlining engagement between the IRU and ACCI members.

The WIL Report identified the need to develop a national professional development approach and leadership programs at institutional and employer level to build staff capability and capacity in WIL. With calls for greater collaboration between the sectors there is also an increased focus on developing staff capability to manage and enhance this collaboration. In addition to institutional based activities and the initiatives outlined above, ACEN has been active in attempting to address these needs. Activities have included regular state based symposiums and workshops, a bi-annual conference, establishing links with other national and international associations, dialogue and collaboration with peak industry associations, publication of WIL research and plans for dedicated research symposium linked to all future national conferences. Although these have gone someway to addressing the needs, much more should be done. Limited resources and overcoming vast distances are some of the constraints limiting further initiatives in this area.

The recent Australian Workforce Futures Report (*Skills Australia* 2010) has recently made a series of recommendations to boost industry/education partnerships and workforce development strategies to lift pedagogical expertise and skills in industry engagement with some additional resources over the 2010 - 2016 period. As these recommendations are resourced and implemented, related issues of recognition and reward for academic and professional staff involvement will need to be addressed to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

Widening Participation

Several recent reports (Patrick et al., 2008,Smith et al., 2008) have identified issues regarding equitable participation in WIL by students from a range of backgrounds including international students, students with a disability, indigenous students, students with family responsibilities and low social economic backgrounds and students from remote and regional areas. The 2009 AUSSE, *Australasian Survey of Student Engagement* (ACER 2010) confirms inequities in participation with international students, students speaking a language other than English at home, students experiencing socio economic disadvantage all having lower levels of involvement than the average in work integrated learning, whereas indigenous students and students from remote or provincial areas had slightly higher levels.

A recent analysis of applications for *ACEN WIL Scholarships*, established to support students in need, gives some insights into the issues effecting students. Applicants included a quarter identifying themselves as mature age, and half with home or family responsibilities impacting on their participation. Over half cited loss of paid work to undertake unpaid WIL activities as a major issue, whilst the inability to access either family or government support was cited by half the applicants. Major additional costs associated with WIL were child care and travel and location costs. These included 16% indicating a need to pay double rent while undertaking WIL placements either located in or away from regional areas, and 34% indicating general costs in relation to undertaking WIL in regional or remote areas. The scholarship applicants were a small sample but many believe they represent the tip of an iceberg. Unlike the United Kingdom there is only emerging recognition of these issues in Australia and currently no specific government funded strategies to address them.

Results from the *2009 AUSSE* also confirm that students from lower socio economic status backgrounds gain from involvement in a number of learning activities that enhance engagement, including work integrated learning. WIL is, therefore, an important strategy for not only enhancing graduate skills but ensuring cohorts such as first in family, mature age and lower socio economic backgrounds are engaged with, and successful in, their studies (Brimble et al., 2010) Nevertheless it is evident that some groups of students currently have less access to WIL than others. The Australian government's aim of increasing the availability and participation by a broader cohort of students in tertiary education over the coming years will amplify challenges in ensuring equitable access to WIL. This requires immediate action to research and identify the complex range of factors at work in order to develop appropriate strategies to ensure equitable participation in WIL by all student cohorts.

Conclusion

The recent growth in WIL in Australia has been characterised by innovation and creativity, resulting in diverse approaches across all disciplines. Continued calls from industry for enhanced graduate skills and the proposal for the *National Internship Scheme* has raised the focus on the need for systems to enhance communication and collaboration between the tertiary sector and industry. This has given rise to several initiatives including the *National WIL Portal*.

The alignment of the Australian government's policy of widening participation of low socio economic background students in higher education with the critical role WIL can play to support this goal presents a real opportunity to address current inequities of access. Increased involvement through enhanced systems and communication with industry will be an important enabler to achieving that outcome.

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Linking Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning: Australian Research and Practice

Authors, Joanne Tyler (Director of Employment and Career Development at Monash University) and Martin Smith (Head of Careers Central at University of Wollongong) summarise the findings of their recent research into issues surrounding career development learning and its interface with work integrated learning in Australia. The research was carried out in 2008 and 2009 by a project team working on behalf of Australia's National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, and funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

The article describes examples of good practice as identified by the research and makes recommendations for academics, policy makers, career development practitioners, employers and senior university administrators.

Introduction

Work integrated learning (WiL) is learning which is embedded in the experience of work. It may be a formally endorsed component of a university course, extra curricular and complementary to studies, or independent of studies. Work integrated learning is not a new concept – learning through work has been part of the curriculum in clinical disciplines for decades. However its growing popularity across a broad range of study areas provides an opportunity for career practitioners to add value to the student experience through explicit, reflective career development learning opportunities.

Career development learning (cdl) is learning about both the content and process of career development from a life long learning perspective involving ongoing reflection.

Key findings of the research: Current Australian approaches to work integrated learning and recommendations:

The growth of work integrated learning presents challenges. In Australia there are insufficient available work settings to absorb students through individual placements.

The future lies in placing groups of students in workplace projects – with learning enhanced if student teams are multidisciplinary in order to provide an opportunity to develop the team skills which are so often a challenge to new graduates.

The example of HEWSO and other team-based approaches

An example of this team approach is *The Higher Education Workplace Skills Olympiad (HEWSO)* which ran across Australia from 2000 to 2005, and continues in a regional context – rebadged *Univative Illawarra,* at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the program is to provide students from all disciplines and cohorts (domestic or international, undergraduate or post graduate) with the opportunity to gain exposure to organisational structures and cultures, in order to enhance their career development and their employability skills.

A national program supported by key organisations at the education/work interface, HEWSO provided experiential learning in a competition framework. HEWSO was designed to link universities with organisations in the business, industry, government, and community sectors.

The aims of HEWSO were to provide:
1. Students from trans-disciplinary backgrounds with exposure to corporate workplace settings, so as to contribute to their capacity to make informed career decisions and increase their commercial awareness;
2. Students with the opportunity to develop employability skills, such as project management, commercial research, teamwork, negotiation, time management and presentation skills;
3. Graduate recruiters with access to motivated students at the commencement of their final year; and
4. A program that further developed active partnerships between higher education and business/industry, with increased understanding between both parties.

Innovative universities combined HEWSO with explicit reflective career development learning opportunities across the program. It is critical that students are able to articulate their employability skills to be competitive in the labour market and fully benefit from these types of experiences.

Other approaches to team-based skill development include final year projects in Engineering degrees. These capstone tasks place students in groups to work on a project of benefit to industry, in a workplace-like setting. Typically the task provides students with the opportunity to utilise all graduate attributes developed during their degree, and is complemented by a reflective essay often cited in employment applications.

Service learning approaches

The current Australian federal government focus on social inclusion in education provides an impetus for adding service learning approaches to the suite of student opportunities. In the Australian context, service learning is the production of a good or service for the benefit of the community, where the activity is instigated by the community rather than the university. Consequently a number of universities are encouraging volunteering as part of the student experience. The development of the *Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement* provides an opportunity to recognise this as a learning opportunity, particularly when it is accompanied by structured reflection to support life long learning through the development of career management capacity. All too frequently universities do not maximise the value of the experiences they provide by neglecting to provide students with the training to understand and articulate their skills in a manner which makes them competitive in the graduate labour market. The recommendations of this study go some way towards remedying this deficit.

The importance of paid work roles

Students' engagement in paid work roles, such as casual and part time work, also needs to be fully addressed in terms of their capacity to broaden career development learning opportunities. Students are not empty vessels, and the diversity of the experiences they bring with them to the university setting should be respected and capitalised on through sharing with peers to broaden understanding of workplace settings and requirements.

However the project found that the reflective opportunities so important to career development learning were sometimes lacking, and rarely occurred before, during and after a single WiL experience. This lead to development of the model which follows over the page.

This model assists the conceptualisation of career development learning as a pedagogical framework for reflective practice and work-integrated learning. The model depicts the career development and work integrated learning relationship, and it can be applied in the curriculum in university programs as a learning resource.

Workplace experiences where career development learning is effectively embedded provide benefits to the student, their educational institution, and the workplace. A critical success factor in the workplace experience being transformational for all parties is

A model for CDL & reflective practices - before, during and after each workplace experience

CDL & WiL: Looking from both sides of the two-way mirror
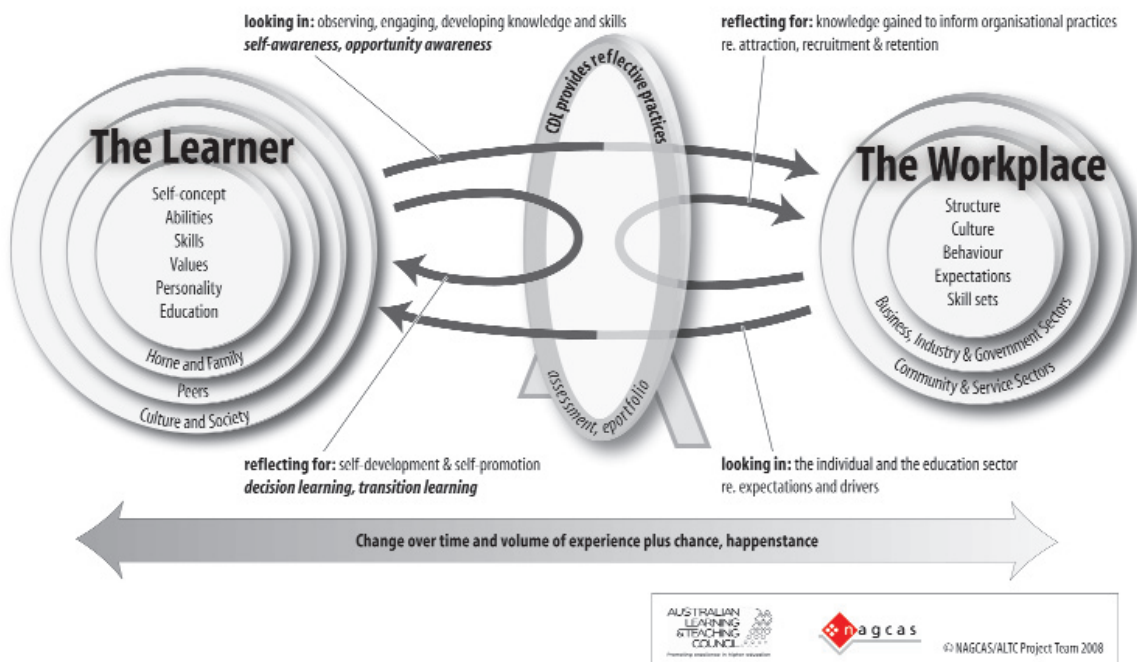
that the underpinning reflective practices are designed around career development learning. The metaphor of the two-way mirror embodies the unique capacity which career development learning brings to the experience. Therefore, career development learning becomes the process which brings clarity and understanding to workplace experiences.

The need to strengthen industry's understanding of career development learning

The study also found that in Australia workplace supervisors frequently did not have sufficient understanding of career development learning to be able to significantly contribute to this aspect of the student experience. The need to invigorate career development of individuals engaged in supporting or supervising "placement students" provides an opportunity to value-add from the perspective of the host organisation. There is scope to consider staff career development opportunities through their assisting the career development of students. This has implications for a potential dual role for human resources staff as career development practitioners as well as their traditional operational roles; or alternatively a strengthening of the industry/ university nexus to facilitate higher education career development practitioners in providing a stronger consultancy role to industry.

Benefits of this would extend beyond the work related learning context to supporting industry responsiveness to workforce development needs, particularly in the case of smaller organisations. For workplaces to obtain the best outcomes from work integrated learning, career development support needs to be explicit and articulated in the workplace for students and employees.

It is valuable to provide a wide spectrum of workplace experiences to facilitate student participation in work related learning; hence curriculum reform and design (including learning tools and resources) should enhance wider access to career development learning and work-integrated learning across the sector.

Conclusion

This project involved consultations with UK institutions about their experience in recent years in response to increasing interest in the emerging agendas of employability and career development, and enterprise and workplace learning. Their experience with Centres of Excellence has highlighted challenges revolving around higher education careers services being appropriately recognised as equal partners in driving curriculum reform associated with these converging agendas.

Successful practice has resulted when government funding is provided to institutions and project teams where adequate representation from career development practitioners and associations has occurred.

Many of the project recommendations point to the need for increasing funding to the sector, to support career development learning, employability enhancement and workplace learning initiatives. Linking external funding to mutually developed targets and measures will underpin good practices across these important agendas.

Australian institutions are reporting an increased interest in career development tools and resources for embedding in the curriculum. This has lead the NAGCAS ALTC Project team to submit a related funding proposal, *Career development curricula: a new paradigm for transformational work-integrated learning.* Active contribution to the developing pedagogy of career development learning is the next frontier.

Support for the original work was provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The complete study is available at *http://nagcas.org.au/ALTC/uploads/file/63267%20SS %20ALTC%20Report.pdf*

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The Aussie Blueprint for Employability

This article is a snapshot of career development and work integrated learning in the Australian higher education sector, which is aimed at gearing-up graduates with the skills that demonstrate their employability. Such practices are now recommended by Australian government and are based on self-management theory. They are designed to enhance graduate soft skills in the context of collaboration between academic and work environments. The article concludes with a commentary on Australia's national statement of career development competencies.

Author, Dr Peter McIlveen is a lecturer at the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia[i]. He teaches career development studies and adult learning, and coordinates that university's graduate certificate qualification in higher education practice. He is a representative on the Career Industry Council of Australia, editor of the *Australian Journal of Career Development,* and a founding member of Career Development Research Australia.

Australian industry and government have been forthright in their demands for 'employable' graduates who can demonstrate certain skills and attributes, and recently recommended work-integrated learning as a way to enhance the development of those qualities (Precision Consultancy, 2007). The notion of graduate employability has been the focus of attention for university management, research, and teaching staff. It has also been addressed by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), which has sponsored national projects such as the convergence career development learning and work-integrated learning (Smith et al., 2009).

Graduate career self-management in Australian skills and employability policy agenda

Career development learning *"represents learning about self and learning about the world of work.... [and] the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career"* (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003, p. 6). Within this scope, career self-management can be conceptualised as a over-arching attribute to be developed throughout the student learning journey (Bridgstock, 2009). As an inherently personal attribute that contributes to the construction of career identity, career self-management has the capacity to influence the meaningfulness of learning experiences constitutive of other graduate skills, such as communication, team work, and ICT skills, which might be experientially developed through work-integrated learning.

Although they are ostensibly important contributors to employability, there is nothing inherently self-constructive about such skills when removed from their context; being a good team-worker, for example, is just one potential dimension of a self-constructed career identity, but it does not in itself constitute career identity and commitment to a particular career trajectory. A student who is aware of his or her career goals, however, could be expected to make decisions that positively impact upon his or her achievement of those goals, and effectively recruit and exploit resources to facilitate transition into and through the world-of-work. Such a student is in a good position to construe, from his/her unique perspective, the relevance of textbook readings, lectures, tutorials, practicum experiences,

and assessment tasks. He or she would have thus contextualised those skills in question.

Although already well established separately as services delivered to students (e.g., career counselling, industry placement coordination) or as part of their degree curricula (e.g., career education classes, final year practicum), the conceptual and pragmatic convergence of career development learning and work-integrated learning presents an enticing avenue for the design and delivery of transformative learning experiences for students: Work-integrated learning can be made meaningful in line with a student's career aspirations, decisions, and actions.

This explicit student-centred meaning-making process contributes to the skills-development focus of work-integrated learning that is designed around the requirements of particular disciplines and professions. Their convergence should therefore enhance students' development of graduate attributes and ultimately contribute to graduate outcomes, particularly employability.

There is evidence of the growing acceptance of career development learning as pedagogical framework for higher education and work-integrated learning in Australia. A recent review of university Career Services by the Australian government found that career development practitioners have focused upon curriculum integration of career development learning and have been working closer with academic staff to embed it in courses (Phillips KPA, 2008). An ALTC study into the convergence of career development learning and work-integrated learning (Smith, et al., 2009) found that a model for career development learning (Watts, 2006) was endorsed by university staff, employers, and students as a useful framework for the design and implementation of work-integrated learning in a way that appealed to students' career interests. Furthermore, the recent launch of a new scholarly journal devoted to the topic of graduate employability, *The Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability,* listed career development learning as a topic of focus within its focus and scope.

Curriculum integration in career self management: A Case Example

The following précis presents some evidence of the convergence of career development learning and work-integrated learning in a final-year, multi-disciplinary undergraduate Business Studies course that was taught in collaboration with the university's Careers Service at the University of Southern Queensland[ii]. The contribution of the Careers Service

was formulated upon the recommendations of an earlier project that had pilot-tested various career development learning interventions (McIlveen & Pensiero, 2008).

In this course, students had to conceptualise and deliver a project that would serve their self-identified learning needs as well as the operational needs of a local small business. The identification of these respective needs was the subject of initial career development learning tutorials and had to be approved both by academic staff and by participating small business supervisors. The project was then completed within the time frame of the academic semester in which the course was offered; these parameters ensured that the project was sufficiently achievable, yet substantively valuable to the small business (a student of marketing, for example, would prepare a marketing plan for a particular product). There were two items of summative assessment: an interim written report and a written final report that was presented before the class, and to which the business delegates of the concerned organisations were invited.

Prior to formulating their project ideas, students were required to participate in career self-management classes in which they learned about meta-cognitive career decision making theory, employability, graduate attributes, and industry trends, whilst being taught management theory by academic staff; the tutorials also included personality and interest self-assessments. As part of a formative assessment, these activities were delivered to enable students to systematically work through a decision-making process that would enable them to conceptualise a project. Career development learning also included explication of the links between the project and learning goals that had been formulated in terms of the employability skills and attributes each student wanted to develop through the experiential learning of the project's design and implementation in a real work environment. This process required the students to understand their needs in context of their industry's/discipline's trends - specifically in the context of meeting the needs of a local small business. Aligned with the interim report was a self-assessment of progress toward learning goals established in the first phase of the course; site supervisors were also asked to provide a brief progress report. Similarly, upon completing the final report students completed a final self-assessment of their learning goals and wrote a brief reflective statement in terms of career self-management. Finally, worksite supervisors provided an assessment of the student's performance against the project's deliverables, and rated them against employability skills.

A notable point is that this course demonstrated the valuable contribution of career development learning to academic course content and process, rather than its stereotypical contribution at the end of a student's learning journey (i.e., resume, job search, and interview preparation). Outside of the coursework curricula, this approach to career development learning has been implemented with other interventions, including an industry mentoring scheme, in which skills and graduate attributes targeted for development in a relationship between an industry mentor and student protégé.

The Future

The *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2009) sets out 11 career development competencies subsumed under the following broad areas: personal management (building and maintain a positive self concept; interacting positively and effectively with others; changing and growing throughout life); learning and work exploration (participating in lifelong learning; using career information resources; understanding the nexus of work, society, and economy); and career building (sustaining work; making career decisions; balancing work and non-work roles; understanding change in life roles; engaging in career development processes). Learning and work exploration, and career building are surely relevant to employability; however articulation of the competencies of personal management attests to the "lifelong" concept of career within the Australian context.

Readers in the UK might recognise some similarity with the USEM framework for employability (Yorke, 2006). Each competency in the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* is composed of units that are described in terms of four developmental stages spanning childhood to adulthood. The degree of specificity of units and their breadth of coverage virtually establishes the Blueprint as a career self-management curriculum in itself; yet, its purpose is to inform the design and delivery of curricula and services in educational and workplace settings, rather than be implemented prescriptively. Given the challenge of pragmatically implementing graduate attributes in higher education curricula (Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009) there is scope to use the Blueprint as a framework for developing and assessing career self-management as a graduate attribute (Bridgstock, 2009), and thus advance the utility of career development learning as a way to better engage students in their work-integrated learning.

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Graduate Employability From a Student's Perspective: The Importance of Soft Skills

Students graduating this summer are entering one of the most challenging labour markets in history. Alin Dobrea is a third year Advertising student currently undertaking a sandwich year work placement.

Alin will be using his own experience and two other scenarios to show-case existing opportunities outside of the curriculum which enhance student employability. He confirms that the most important thing for students to remember is that achieving top grades is not the only thing that matters to graduate employers. First and foremost they are looking for people with strong personalities, and this is often reflected by what students do outside of their studies.

Alin's Story:

Study abroad and immerse yourself in a new culture: *Study China Programme,* Easter 2009

Employers value graduates who have relevant experience in foreign countries. I like to think of the current generation of university students as global citizens, prepared and willing to work in any country around the world. I initially wanted to apply for an *Erasmus* exchange programme but my course did not offer the shorter term placements I was looking for.

It took me one *Facebook* browse in December 2008 to accidentally stumble upon the *Study China Programme,* a government-funded three-week study programme in the said country. It seemed a tremendous opportunity to learn about China, its language and its culture, and it was open to undergraduates in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The idea of spending my Easter holiday in China learning Mandarin appealed to me from the very beginning and I immediately applied for the place. Even though the selection for this programme is really competitive (when I applied there were over 1300 students competing for 200 places) students shouldn't be discouraged to apply. In February 2009, I was elated to find out that I had won a place on the *Study China Programme.* I applied for the programme as I always wanted to visit China and the opportunity of being immersed in Chinese cultural and social activities sounded surreal. The programme was supported financially by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and as part of it I did a three-week intensive course in Mandarin Chinese at Beijing Normal University during the university Easter break.

The three weeks spent in China, as well as the way the programme was structured provided an optimal context to achieve a better understanding of one of the major world players in the international arena.

The whole experience was a real eye opener and it has made me more aware of the changing world we live in. As a future graduate I understood that I have to be prepared to embrace new cultures and job opportunities in developing markets such as Asia. In addition, I believe that this programme has offered me a unique opportunity of networking with students from other British universities who were selected take part in the programme and had a common interest with me in the Asian culture and the Chinese ethos respectively. Finally, I found the *Study China* experience a great talking point at interviews and I think this particular experience has opened a lot of doors for me.

Summer internships: *Institute of Practitioners in Advertising Summer School Programme,* 2009

I was keen on gaining work experience in an advertising agency because I wanted to put the theory that I have learnt at university into practice on real business. Securing an internship can be extremely competitive, especially during a recession. I got my lucky break in June 2009 - I was one of only twelve students, chosen from hundreds of applicants, to be awarded a place on one of the most important schemes in the industry, the *Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) Summer School Programme.*

My three month placement was at I Spy Marketing, one of the fastest growing digital advertising agencies in the UK. In my first week I was introduced to all the different departments and the intricacies of agency processes. The next three months were very busy, and unlike university, the company won plenty of new business, which meant many simultaneous projects. My summer work-placement gave me the chance to work alongside the professionals - account handlers, planners, creatives - on real clients. In addition to the work placement, there were a series of special evening seminars and social events so I got to meet other students, see other agencies, and meet industry experts.

My course work and the books I have read were a good starting point to understanding the industry, but no amount of reading prepares you for living and breathing the job.

A typical day on placement was very diverse: I got to sit on agency meetings with clients; visit large agencies like Ogilvy or Proximity for weekly workshops; play rounders in Hyde Park for the agency summer party; learn to use new research and planning tools; promote a 80s roller-skate party in a secret London location to launch the new Vauxhall Corsa through social media; write online ad copy for big clients like QVC or ITV; participate in brainstorming sessions; present my ideas to senior executives; attend workshops at the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB), Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft; learn the fine art of making the perfect 'cuppa' for an industry that runs on tea.

The cherry on the top was winning the *IPA Summer School Project* with three other interns. Our task was to produce direct mail, website and email communications for the new MINI Convertible and pitch our ideas to senior professionals at our graduation ceremony.

The internship convinced me that advertising was where my interest resided and allowed me to get a foot in the door in this highly competitive industry, one full of talented and interesting people and, perhaps most importantly, one where the work is always extremely rewarding. It also gave me a lot of exposure through networking – especially in winning the *IPA Summer School Project.*

Why are work placements important? *The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning* work placement

If the course provides the option, students should take the opportunity to undertake a work-placement. Work experience enables a better understanding of their chosen industry and the roles within it before embarking on a career. A work-placement also makes them stand out from the crowd when applying for graduate jobs and provides invaluable networking contacts to further your career.

Students should be encouraged to take a sandwich year industrial placement as part of their degree before going into the final year of study. I cannot stress enough the value of a course which integrates work with learning as it equips you with transferable skills and some much sought-after work experience. In my case, I knew I didn't just want to do my course and wanted to gain some work experience before graduating and going into the labour market. I decided to undertake a 12 month work placement before my final year with the *Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)* at my university as a Student Liaison Officer. The main reason behind my decision was because I thought the role suited my interests and would help my future career. I gained invaluable experiences by doing this job and some great additions to my CV through the opportunities I came across here.

I gained experience in research, as a speaker at conferences, and got involved in the other side of higher education by working with the staff from the

Teaching and Learning Directorate and students and staff from within all the departments of the university on various projects. In addition, I managed to publish two chapters about employability in two different books produced by the CETL. All these experiences summed together gave me a whole new perspective on university life. I also got to attend various trainings within the university which helped me recognise and develop other skills I wasn't aware that I have.

I now understand what a future career as an academic would entail, and in the future I might also consider teaching as a result of this work placement.

Student entrepreneurship, *FLUX 2010*

FLUX is the largest student enterprise and employability competition in the UK and comes in the form of an intense three day business challenge, wrapped up by a careers fair. The competition bridges the gap between higher education and the world of work through the provision of concrete job opportunities.

FLUX is a fast paced business competition which involves teams of six students in an intensive process to imagine and plan a business, culminating with a head to head pitch in front of a packed auditorium.

I was selected to represent the University of Bedfordshire alongside five other students at the national finals in Nottingham in March 2010 after an internal selection process which saw over 40 students apply.

The students had to act as a group of newly recruited graduates working at Remploy, a large UK-based organisation that provides employment services and employment to people with barriers to work. The challenge was to develop a framework for a new business division of the company that will be able to generate significant income and profits over time.

The challenging inter-university FLUX enterprise national competition saw our team at the University of Bedfordshire emerge as the winners after competing against 33 teams from universities across the UK.

In the competition finals we had just five minutes to pitch our business strategy to a panel of judges which comprised of over 40 senior business experts – who went from consultants in the day to 'dragons' in the evening - before facing serious cross-questioning and receiving feedback. After the preliminary heats, we were chosen to compete in a head-to-head challenge against teams from University College Plymouth MarJon, Nottingham Trent University and University of Bristol. We had only 15 minutes to prepare and we faced a tense press conference style grilling from four of the toughest business experts. The presentations were done in front of all the other teams in the competition with well over 250 people in the audience - each with an individual vote. After all the votes were counted we emerged as winners and national champions of *FLUX 2010.*

Winning was an extraordinary feeling. To come out number one out of over 30 leading universities was just unbelievable. In our situation, we had surpassed all expectations and in retrospect, it is true that the journey was the most important part of the process. I think that we learnt a lot about ourselves and about how to work efficiently in a team, under intense pressure.

Day three was the final day of the event and it included the *Expo* - a careers fair for students to meet with the organisations behind the experts, many of whom had spent the previous days spotting talent for specific roles. Networking with the business experts was an invaluable experience and a great opportunity to learn more about some of the most successful businesses in the UK. One of our team members even got offered a 12 month work placement as a direct result of our performance in the competition.

Students should not miss out on opportunities like *FLUX* during their studies because the knowledge and experience gained is invaluable and will provide a plethora of future opportunities.

Conclusion

All the above mentioned experiences have been both challenging and fun. The myriad of opportunities available have helped me broaden my horizons, but most importantly they have shaped what I am today – a confident well rounded individual prepared for the next big challenge.

The Role of the Undergraduate Work Placement In Developing Employment Competences: *Results From a Five Year Survey of Employers*

In this paper, Matthew Hall, Helen Higson and Nicola Bullivant from Aston Business School examine the role of the work placement in developing 'soft' competences among management undergraduates. They draw upon a five-year survey in which students and their employers are asked about the personal development and performance of the students during their placement year.

The authors' findings provide confirmation of the value of the placement year, particularly as an opportunity for building self confidence, and for developing the inter-personal competences necessary to integrate effectively in a collaborative environment. In contrast, competences necessary for the effective performance of individual roles, and in particular competences relating to leading, persuading and influencing others, are less highly rated.

Whilst not wholly conclusive, these findings provide some important pointers to the need for further research into the complementary roles played by university-based and work-based learning in developing the competences needed to enhance graduate employability.

Introduction

In recent years higher education has been moving more towards a focus on competence-based learning rather than the acquisition of 'technical' knowledge (Andrews and Higson, 2008; James, 2002). There is considerable debate about the role of higher education institutions in developing so-called 'employability' competences, at the same time as greater convergence between universities and industry in delivering the skills which employers require (Connor and Hirsch, 2008). The role of the work placement has attracted particular attention (Archer and Davison, 2008; Little and Harvey, 2006). This is true of Aston Business School, where an integral feature of the undergraduate curriculum is work-based learning gained through an assessed placement year. Up to 600 students a year gain the experience of working with well known companies, and this is widely seen as a key contributor to the high level of employability amongst Aston Business School graduates. For the past five years we have conducted a survey of these employers to assess their experience of employing our undergraduates on work placements, and to examine the skills and competences developed by students in the learning process. We focus specifically on the so-called 'soft' competences which are generic to many organisational roles, rather than the 'hard' technical knowledge which is specific to certain professions and industries.

Fig. 1. Soft competences surveyed during the Aston Business School placement year

Competence	Description
Verbal and written communication skills	How successful was the student in putting across ideas/information verbally and in writing?
Leadership	Consider the student's planning, organisation, leading, delegating and follow-up skills
Influencing and negotiating	Did the student make valid suggestions for improvements and have the ability to develop/improve ideas, successfully persuading others to put their suggestions into practice?
Customer awareness	Was the student's attitude appropriate when dealing with customers (internal and external to the organisation), clients etc.
Self development	Did the student develop their skills through their work, perhaps demonstrated in their *Reflective Learning Journal?* Did they actively seek out opportunities for development, training, additional tasks etc?
Managing change	Did the student respond positively to change throughout the year? Did they manage themselves and their workload appropriately during periods of change?
Critical thinking and problem solving	Did the student demonstrate a logical approach to problem solving? Were they able to reach well-thought through resolutions?
Time management skills	Did the student manage their time effectively? Was s/he able to meet deadlines?
Networking skills	Was the student an able networker?

We therefore have five years of data on students' development of these soft competences during the placement year. In this paper we draw upon this data to consider the question 'what is the role of the work placement in developing employment competences?'

Methodology

In order to address this question we draw upon data from our annual survey of the Aston Business School work placement taken over five years between 2004-5 and 2008-9. In this survey we ask both employers and students about knowledge gained during the placement year.

A significant aspect of this learning is the development of soft competences necessary for working in organisational (often office) environments. In order to elicit this data we present a list of competences for respondents to rate in terms of its importance as learning gained on the placement. The list has been taken from the *European Framework for Work Experience* (*www.efwe.org*).

In addition employers and students are given the opportunity to write open comments on what they have valued about the placement. We have taken these qualitative comments from the last year's student and employer survey, and developed a list of further soft competences which employers and students feel are important to the placement experience.

Findings from the placement survey

In the placement survey, employers are asked to rate the student in terms of their demonstration of specific competences. The following table shows the proportion of employers who rated their students as excellent or above average in these specific competences.

Fig 2. % of employers who rated the placement student as excellent or above average in specific competences

Competency	2004-5 %	2005-6 %	2006-7 %	2007-8 %	2008-9 %
Verbal/ written communication skills	67	65	71.4	71.5	71.5
Leadership	54	56	55.1	60.7	57.3
Teamwork skills	78	82	83.7	85.4	84.5
Influencing and negotiating	58	59	65.3	66	65.7
Customer awareness	77	80	80.2	80.9	76.8
Self development	69	73	75.5	77.4	76.8
Managing change	75	80	81.1	82.2	80.2
Critical thinking and problem solving	66	67	71	71.3	70.7
Time management skills	69	72	73.6	82.1	72.8
Networking skills	61	62	66	71.2	67.3
Number of respondents and response rate (%)	315 (79%)	343 (86%)	316 (74%)	379 (72%)	379 (74%)

First it is important to say that, from the year-on-year data presented in Fig. 2, we are not able to draw any conclusions about how these values have changed over the 5 years. Although it is interesting to note the increases across the board, variations between the years may simply reflect the increasing quality of our student intake, rather than any specific interventions relating to the placement year of which we are not aware.

From this data we can make the following broad observations:
- All of the competences, although to a much lesser extent leadership, were deemed to be excellent or above average among the students included in the survey
- Team-working, self-development and customer awareness particularly stand out as consistently highly rated over the 5 years
- Leadership, influencing and negotiating, and networking skills rank relatively low in the extent to which these are demonstrated by placement students

In the survey of employers we also asked for open comments on the student's progress. From these comments the following key competences were identified. It is important to stress that although these may appear low as a percentage of the total number of respondents, they are significant results in view of how the data was elicited, where respondents were given a blank space to write whatever came to mind.

Fig 3. Additional competences identified by employers in the placement survey

Competency	Number (N=365)
Belonging/establishing relationships	156
Confidence	108
Communication skills	91
Conscientious/strong work ethic	52
Organisational/time management	49

In the survey of students we asked for open comments on what are their biggest personal gains. These were aggregated to form a list of additional soft competences which students particularly identify as arising from the placement experience. From a total of 289 respondents, the following were identified.

Fig 4. Additional competences identified by students in the placement survey

Competency	Number (N=289)
Confidence	126
Interpersonal skills	60
Experience of work environment and office politics	42
Organisational/time management	40

The most striking result from the open-ended questions, both from the employers and the students, is 'confidence,' in many cases described as 'self-confidence.' The students also particularly mentioned 'interpersonal skills' which shows a similar notion of the growing of one's self and one's ability to interact with others in a work environment. Communication skills and the ability to manage oneself and one's time in an organisational environment are also perceived to have developed significantly in the placement year. These findings are consistent with research by Little and Harvey (2006). From the employers' point of view 'belonging and establishing relationships' is a significant feature, perhaps akin to 'team-working' which is consistently highly rated in fig. 2.

Conclusions

Overall these results are showing that key learning from the placement is principally about the development and confidence of the individual, particularly the necessary interpersonal and communications skills to integrate effectively in a collaborative working environment. It is interesting to observe that these are predominantly social skills important in an organisational environment. In

contrast, the faculties which may be seen as more important to effectiveness within the technical demands of one's individual work – such as critical thinking, problem solving and time management – are not as highly rated. For example, critical thinking and problem-solving are often thought of as 'higher-level' academic skills, which other research also suggests is a less important aspect of the placement year than personal and inter-personal development (Little and Harvey, 2006). Finally it appears that competences which require a student to make an impact on others, and to extend their sphere of influence beyond their individual role – such as leadership, influencing and negotiating, and networking – are not as highly rated during the placement year.

It is important to remember that all of the competences are perceived to be a significant feature of the placement year, and therefore we can reach the broad conclusion that the placement year is an important opportunity to put into practice the soft competences important for organisational work. In particular the growth of self-confidence and the development of inter-personal relationships, which contribute to effective integration into the world of work, are clearly important aspects of the placement experience.

It is also important to emphasise that the employers are surveyed at one point in time, and it is therefore not possible to conclude from our data to what extent these are competences which the students already possess at the beginning of the placement year, or to what extent the competences are developed as a result of the placement. For example team-working may be well developed because group work is an important aspect of the curriculum at Aston Business School during the first and second years. Similarly leadership is rated relatively low in employers' perceptions of our placement students, while at the same time it is not a competence which we particularly emphasise during the taught elements of our programmes. In order to determine whether leadership is a competence which should be developed during an undergraduate degree, we would need to compare our findings with what competences are valued by employers when recruiting for graduate posts.

In terms of implications for policy and curriculum therefore, we should be cautious about drawing conclusions without conducting further research.

Broadly speaking our research provides quantitative and qualitative evidence of the value of the placement year in developing soft competences important for organisational work. We can be sure that in particular the placement year presents an opportunity to build the self-confidence and the social and inter-personal competences necessary for working effectively with others. While we can also see that the ability to lead and influence others is not so clearly demonstrated, we need to ask employers whether these competences are expected of students in the placement year. The extent to which any of these competences are developed before or during the placement may be elicited in future by surveying employers both at the beginning and end of the placement. The impact of the placement year on securing graduate employment may be elicited in future by comparing this data with research into the competences valued by employers when recruiting for graduate posts. When put together such research would enable us to provide more targeted support for the development of employment competences before, during and beyond the placement, and ultimately lead to a better understanding of the relative roles of university-based and work-based learning within the wider discourse of employability.

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HECSU Introduces: Charity Internship Scheme

For many graduates today a corporate job just doesn't fit. More and more people are considering careers in the charity sector, which offers the chance to work with the one thing that keeps life interesting - people. Equally, the recent recession has proved that whereas profit making organisations are vulnerable to economic downturns, the charity sector is less so.

HECSU has scoured through the best of the flourishing UK charity internship crop. We recommend:

Barnado's Internship Scheme

The Pathway Interns Scheme

The scheme was initially piloted in 2006 where 10 roles were created and filled in Barnado's Head Office in London. Ever since the scheme has grown with 12 week intakes happening three times a year in spring, summer, autumn, and with over 200 Pathway Interns volunteering for the charity.

Kelly Butler, Barnado's Intern Volunteer Coordinator, said: 'The aim of the scheme is to give a real opportunity to the young people who volunteer with us. We want to give them the skills and confidence they need to pursue the career of their choice - so their internship won't be dominated by making cups of tea and filing. They will be a valued member of the organisation and given responsibility for their own work."

Case Study

The scheme works to do just that by providing a step in the career ladder, as student intern Emma's story proves:

Emma did a degree in English at Exeter University followed by a Masters. She had her first taste of volunteering there by signing up with the university's volunteering scheme, *Community Action.*

This insight into work with children made Emma realise it was where she'd like to develop her career. "I knew my heart lay with the not-for profit sector, specifically a children's charity. When I was job hunting on the web I found about internships and thought it looked like a great way of gaining some relevant experience and getting a foot in the door... Everyone's heard of Barnardo's and when I saw they were offering internships I jumped at the chance. They were advertising a communications role for children's services - the perfect combination!"

Emma applied for a three month internship at Barnardo's Head Office and was successful. She was given two projects to get her teeth into – internal communications, more specifically how departments were communicating their messages to staff in children's services and the external marketing of family placement.

As well as being given the opportunity to drive a Barnardo's campaign forward, Emma got first-class support and guidance from colleagues and managers, constantly receiving personal development support and managerial guidance.

"During the three months I was really enjoying my time at Barnardo's and knew that I didn't want to leave."

Emma's managers were so impressed with her achievements, drive and dedication, that they identified scope for a paid position so she could carry on developing the role after her internship finished. She was given a nine month paid contract to continue the work, and was later successful in applying for the post of Brand Marketing Executive.

Emma has since moved role again – a re-organisation of the team led to Emma applying for the post of Children's Services Marketing Officer with a specific focus on family placement.

For more information, visit: *www.barnados.org.uk/internships*