



Department  
for Education

# **Evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials**

## **Research report**

### **October 2013**

**David Sims, Clare Southcott, Sarah Lynch &  
Pauline Wade**  
**The National Foundation for Educational  
Research**

## Acknowledgements

The research team would like to express our gratitude to Jonathan Johnson at the Department of Education for his valuable advice and guidance. We also acknowledge the helpful support of the steering group throughout the project.

We are indebted to all the colleges which provided information for the evaluation, and in addition, to the colleges which hosted case-study visits. Students, staff and employers made a vital contribution to the evaluation.

We would like to thank NFER staff for their inputs: Tami McCrone who led the project and conducted case-study visits, Gill Featherstone who contributed to the interim scoping report and Richard White who carried out some of the case studies; Jo Morrison, Palak Mehta, Rose Cook and Ben Durbin who provided statistical support; Marian Sainsbury who read and commented on the report; and Rachel Trout who provided administrative support to the research team.

## Foreword by Alison Wolf



In today's competitive and globalised labour market, experience of work can make a critical difference to a young person's start in life. The value of being or having been employed is well established, at all ages. It is much easier to get a new job if you have a job already; and we know that highly valued skills are developed in the workplace which are rewarded by employers over and above skills learned formal education. Experience of a real workplace is also the best way to discover what you really like doing and where you want to go in life.

However, it has become increasingly difficult for young people to get this valuable experience. The youth labour market has, in many places, simply collapsed. That is why, in my 2011 review of vocational education government, I highlighted the need to develop many more substantial work placements for young people, especially those aged 16-18. And it is why I am greatly encouraged by this excellent report.

The pilot schemes reported here were carried out under the old funding regime, when 16-19 year olds' programmes were funded on a qualification-by-qualification basis. This approach was a serious barrier to establishing the flexible, individualised but substantial work placements which both employers and young people need. The fact that colleges were able to create so many placements in these circumstances, using quite modest amounts of pump-priming, bodes well for the future. The evaluators estimate that the average cost per placement was £11.45 a day on top of normal expenditure, so this is easily affordable given the new funding flexibility introduced alongside study programmes.

The evaluators' recommendations all seem eminently sensible and practical. I would like, in particular, to endorse one which can all too easily slip through the cracks of college life: - namely to consider providing feedback to employers. I would say 'Provide' not 'Consider providing'. The success of placements depends fundamentally on the direct, personal relationships formed, as I'm sure we all know. The trick is to build feedback and continued contact into the way placements are organised and I hope this will be one of the respects in which colleges and schools are able to share ideas and good practice.

### **Alison Wolf**

Sir Roy Griffiths Professor of Public Sector Management

# Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Foreword by Alison Wolf	3
Table of figures	6
List of tables	6
Executive summary	7
1. Introduction	14
1.1 Background	14
1.2 Aims and objectives	16
1.3 Methodology	17
1.4 Structure of the report	18
2. Delivery of the work experience trial	19
2.1 Motivations for college involvement	19
2.2 Profile of the participating students	20
2.3 The nature of work experience	24
2.4 The length of placements	28
3. Models of Work Experience	31
3.1 Introduction	31
3.2 Work experience models: profile and operation/delivery	32
4. Engagement in the trial	40
4.1 Staff engagement	40
4.2 Employer engagement	41
4.3 Student engagement	46
4.3.1 How students engaged in the trial	46
4.3.2 Employer views on student engagement	47
4.3.3 Student views on work experience placements	47

4.3.4 Student views on employability skills	48
5. Impact of the trial	50
5.1 Monitoring impact	50
5.2 Impact on providers	51
5.3 Perceived impact on students	52
5.4 Perceived impact on employers	55
6. Value for money	57
6.1 Economy	58
6.2 Efficiency	60
7. The future of work experience	63
7.1 What contributes to successful work experience?	63
7.2 Future employer involvement	64
7.3 Sustainability of the work experience programme	65
8. Conclusions and recommendations	67
8.1 Conclusions	67
8.2 Recommendations	68
Messages for the DfE	68
Messages for colleges, schools and work-based providers	68
References	71
Appendix A	73
Appendix B	74

## Table of figures

Figure 1: Eligibility for free school meals (percentage of placements)	22
Figure 2: Special Educational Needs (percentage of placements)	23
Figure 3: Students with Learning difficulties and Disabilities post-16 (percentage of placements)	23
Figure 4: Participating students' level of course, Year 2 (percentage of placements)	24
Figure 5: Length of placement, Year 2 (percentage of placements)	29
Figure 6: How work experience was provided, Year 2 (percentage of placements)	29
Figure 7: Work experience models implemented by colleges	32
Figure 8: Number of work experience models implemented by colleges	32
Figure 9: Size of employer (percentage of placements)	43
Figure 10: Employment sector (percentage of placements)	43
Figure 11: Steps to providing quality work experience	70

## List of tables

Table 1: Numbers of placements	21
Table 2: Average expenditure, overall and by model	59
Table 3: Average over- and under-spend	60
Table 4: Number of placements (in ascending order), at college-level, and proportion of LLDD (Years 1 and 2 combined)	73
Table 5: College-level financial breakdown (Year 2)	74

# Executive summary

## Introduction

This summary presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations from an independent evaluation by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) of the Department for Education (DfE) Work Experience Placement Trials. The trials aimed to test different work experience placement models for 16 to 19 year olds. The models were as follows:

- Model 1: Removing cost barriers for employers (for example, by providing materials or financial incentives).
- Model 2: Investigating specific challenges faced by small to medium-sized employers (SMEs) when offering work placements.
- Model 3: Providing extra resources to colleges (for example, to employ staff to organise work placements and liaise with employers).
- Model 4: Exploring the timing of placements for students (for example, investigating whether a block of time or individual days throughout a course is most effective and why).
- Model 5: Supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) or vulnerable/disadvantaged students (for example, considering support employers need to employ young people with specific needs).

Twenty-five colleges tested one or more of the models and each of the colleges was allocated a sum of £80,000 in 2011-2012 and £97,000 in 2012-2013 for this purpose. The colleges were located in specified areas with high levels of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and high proportions of students at level 2 or below.

This summary sets out the key findings of an analysis of management information (MI) data provided by the 25 colleges, case studies of ten colleges and a value-for-money (VfM) assessment. The MI data provided information on the number of work experience placements provided by the trial, the number and size of employers who had participated, the length of placements, total expenditure and the additional cost of placements. The case studies involved interviews with 49 staff across the 25 colleges (including senior leaders, work experience coordinators/managers and teaching and learning support staff), focus groups with 59 students participating and 33 students not participating in work experience placements, and interviews with 14 employers. The assessment of VfM included a descriptive analysis of financial data alongside qualitative assessments from the case studies.

## Key findings

The key findings are drawn from the evaluation evidence base comprising MI, case-study data and VfM information.

### Delivery of the work experience trial

- At least 9,725 placements were provided during the two-year trial. The number provided across the colleges ranged from 40-1,742 (with an average of 389). Although it is unclear how many placements would have been provided without the trial, case-study evidence suggests that work experience had expanded in trial colleges and therefore this number is likely to have been much lower.
- Numbers involved depended greatly on the approach adopted in the college and the students being targeted.
- All ten case-study colleges offered students external placements with an employer, while nine colleges also placed students in internal commercial enterprises which colleges felt constituted genuine work experience.
- Case-study evidence suggests that work placements were predominately *vocational* (focussing on a particular vocational area to contribute to a study programme) and aimed to give a 'real world' experience.
- There were examples of 'extended' external placements for LLDD, following the 'Supported Internship' model, whereby they are supported during their placement by a Job Coach or Learning Support Assistant employed by the college.

### Models of work experience

- Individual colleges trialled a combination of work experience placement models. On average, three models were piloted by each college.
- Providing extra resources to colleges, for example to employ staff to organise placements and liaise with employers (Model 3) and supporting LLDD (Model 5), were the two most prevalent models.
- Work experience coordinators funded by the trial played a significant cross-college role in managing the placement process and developing a more structured and systematic approach to the organisation of work experience.
- Flexibility in the timing of placements was important in meeting the needs of students' course requirements and employers' capacity to provide work experience.

### Engagement in the trial

- The students who participated in the trial were very positive about the benefits and particularly valued experiencing a real working environment and gaining skills and confidence.
- Staff in some colleges were initially reluctant to engage with work experience programmes, but this changed when the benefits for students became evident.



- There was a perception amongst all colleges that employer engagement had improved considerably as a result of the trial, but this had required much time and effort on the part of coordinators. Financial incentives for employers were unnecessary as employers did not want them.
- Colleges were pleased with the level of student engagement and thought there was increased understanding of the advantages of undertaking a placement.
- The employers interviewed felt that offering work experience was part of their 'corporate social responsibility' and saw it as contributing to their local community.

## Impact of the trial

- The key benefit of additional funding was widely perceived to be enabling colleges to employ work experience coordinators who were instrumental in establishing and developing relationships with employers and in coordinating placements. In turn, this helped work experience become more holistic and centralised and changed the college's work experience ethos. The funding also provided the opportunity to extend placements to more students.
- Colleges considered it important to capture the benefits of work experience. They were developing and applying monitoring methods and tools including collating feedback from students and employers, placement visits by staff to carry out assessments to gather evidence for student portfolios and the use of individual learning plans.
- The work experience trial was widely perceived by students, colleges and employers to have helped develop the skills necessary for employment, including team work, communication and interpersonal skills, enabling students to be more work-ready.
- Some students gained or were in the process of securing employment or apprenticeships following their work experience, including opportunities associated with the placements they undertook.
- The trial had helped to maintain and develop colleges' relationships with employers.
- Employer benefits from providing work experience included increased capacity, staff development and recruitment of apprentices.

## Value for money

- Eight colleges in Year 1 and 13 colleges in Year 2 reported spending over the budget allocated to them by DfE, an additional £2,633 and £15,400 on average respectively.
- Some colleges had not spent all of the funds during the trial period, although evidence from progress reports and case studies suggests that some colleges had spent considerable time *planning* for the provision of work experience which would gradually be expanded.
- The average additional cost to the college of a work experience placement in Year 2 was calculated as £236 by dividing the total number of placements by

actual additional expenditure. This equates to £11.45 per day. Set-up costs are likely to have inflated the average cost of a placement in Year 1. However, the context of work experience is important when calculating costs; the average cost varied across colleges, depending on the number of students placed, their characteristics and level of support needs, and the length of placements.

- College staff thought that particular elements of the trial were essential for success, namely the role of the coordinator, support for students (particularly more intensive support for LLDD), and investment in pre-placement preparation. Although some elements might be considered expensive, they are likely to achieve efficiencies through centralising management and organisation functions.

## **The future of work experience**

- The principal factors contributing to successful work experience placements were: effective coordination, good matching of students to placements, ensuring students were well-prepared for placements and flexibility in timing of placements.
- All the employers who were interviewed, including those who had not offered work experience before or to students across the FE sector, planned to offer placements in future.
- Staff in all the case-study colleges were committed to making their work experience provision sustainable but most had concerns about the long-term financial implications of resourcing this.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

The main conclusion from this evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trial is that it supported the development of a more systematic and structured approach to the planning and delivery of work experience for 16 to 19 year old students. The ten case-study colleges participating in the trial valued the additional funding which enabled them to test different placement models, innovate and assure the quality of the work experience they offered. As a result, work experience was gaining a more strategic focus and a higher status in colleges. There was seen to be a positive impact on students, who developed employability skills including teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills.

Investment in a work experience coordinator is key to making work experience a more centrally managed and coordinated college-wide process. Providing extra resources to colleges was the most prevalent work experience placement model trialled and funding the recruitment of a coordinator accounted for most of this investment. College senior managers highlighted the additional capacity work experience coordinators gave them to manage the cross-college procurement and organisation of work placements. Coordinators played four significant roles: they managed the contact with employers to

secure placements; they worked with heads of departments and programme teams to help integrate work experience with the curriculum; they coordinated the preparation of students for going on placements; and they visited students on placement.

Flexibility is instrumental in managing the demand and supply of work experience placements. College senior managers and coordinators valued the opportunities the trial gave them to innovate and try out different ways of organising placements. They used a variety of placement timings as appropriate to balance the requirements of students and their courses on the one hand and the capacity of employers on the other. The feedback from students and employers was equally positive regardless of the approach.

Support for students undertaking placements can make a useful contribution in enabling them to benefit from work experience. Colleges were supporting students in several ways including briefing and preparation, one-to-one advice, visiting students on placement and in some cases paying for travel and work clothes. They provided enhanced support for LLDD which was the second most prevalent work experience model trialled. Coordinators, mentors, coaches and support assistants worked with these students to support them through the placement process and assist them in maximising the benefit from work experience.

Providing placements that expose students to a real work environment with an external employer is of key importance. The experience had helped them to develop employability skills such as technical, social and communication skills.

## Recommendations

The evaluation findings suggest the following points for consideration by policymakers:

- DfE should continue to help employers to understand that work experience placement health and safety and Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB checks) requirements are not bureaucratic processes. This would help to support the procurement and provision of placements. In readiness for the introduction of study programmes and the greater demand on employers to offer work experience placements, DfE have been committed to reducing the bureaucracy around work experience and simplifying the guidance. For more details: <https://education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/b00223495/post-16-work-exp-enterprise-educ/creating-work-exp-opp-young-people>.
- DfE should disseminate good practice examples of internship-type models of work experience for LLDD. This would help to address employers' apprehension by showing that with the right support LLDD can flourish in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Supported Internships for LLDD, currently being piloted by the DfE, provide a structured study programme, based at an employer, that is tailored to the individual needs of the young person and will equip them with the skills they need for the workplace. This will include on-the-job training, backed by expert job coaches to support interns and employers, and the chance to study for relevant qualifications – where appropriate.

- DfE should advise colleges, schools and work-based learning providers on what counts as success in work experience. For example, if a student is offered and takes up a job or apprenticeship as a result of doing work experience and does not complete their course, should this be recorded as a success rather than being counted as course drop-out?

The evaluation findings suggest the following points for consideration by colleges, schools and work-based providers who should:

- Consider appointing a work experience coordinator. This is a cost-effective way of driving forward work experience and centralising the management and organisation of placements. A coordinator is an important part of the college structure for effective work experience delivery.
- Explore what they need to put in place to scale up work experience provision for their students including sourcing enough placements of the right type and integrating work experience in study programmes.
- Think about how best to share their work experience 'story' across their institutions to maximise student and staff engagement by explaining the benefits with real life examples and illustrations. This could be included in continuing professional development for heads of faculty/department and tutors. Students who have completed work experience can be used as ambassadors to describe their placement 'journey' and explain the benefits gained.
- Examine how effectively they are monitoring the quality of work experience placements including evaluating and reviewing the outcomes. For example, are learning objectives agreed at the beginning of the placement and is progress towards the objectives reviewed at the end? Are employers as well as students and college staff involved in this process? How consistent is this process across the institution?
- Consider what follow-up contact and communication is required for employers who have offered placements. This could include providing feedback on the post-placement progress made by students including qualifications achieved and their progress to higher education, employment and apprenticeships. Employers appreciate finding out about what students go on to achieve.

## Background

The Wolf Review of Vocational Education (2011) made a strong case for reforming the vocational education system in order to equip young people with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to prosper and progress in their working lives. The government accepted the review's recommendation that 16 to 19 study programmes be introduced to offer students breadth and depth without limiting their options for future study or work. Reflecting Wolf's suggestion that work experience 'should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years' (p.130), work experience will be an integral part of the 16 to 19 study programmes which will be introduced from September 2013. Wolf recommended that 'DfE should evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds who are enrolled as

full-time students, not apprentices, and for reimbursing local employers in a flexible way, using core funds' (Recommendation 21, p.131). The Department launched the Work Experience Placement Trials in response to this, allocating funding to 25 institutions across 2011-12 and 2012-13 to test models for providing placements for 16 to 19 year olds.

## Methodology

The DfE commissioned the NFER to undertake an independent evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials between May 2012 and July 2013.

The evaluation methodology comprised the following activities:

- A **scoping study**: carried out June-November 2012, including analysis of pilot colleges' action plans and progress reports, an email survey of colleges, and MI submitted by colleges.
- **Case studies**: in-depth investigations carried out in January-March 2013 with staff, students and employers linked to ten colleges offering varied approaches to work experience. Interviews were undertaken with 49 staff across 10 FE colleges, including senior leaders, work experience coordinators and teaching and learning support staff. In addition, 14 employer interviews were undertaken. We conducted focus groups with 59 students participating in work experience placements and 33 students not participating in work experience. Students undertaking work experience were also asked to complete a survey about the employability skills they felt they needed to develop and their perceptions of the skills valued most by employers. A total of 35 students completed the survey.
- **Analysis of MI collected from pilot colleges**: explored, for example, the *number* of placements provided overall, the number and size of *employers* who had participated, the length of *placements* (for example, the number of hours/days), total expenditure, and the cost of placements.
- **Assessment of value for money**: including a descriptive analysis of financial data, alongside qualitative assessments

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Skills are essential to the UK's prosperity, employers' business competitiveness, individuals' labour market prospects, lifetime earning capacity and wellbeing. However, the government's Plan for Growth (2011) notes that '... the education system is not giving young people the skills that businesses need' (p.36). This issue was also identified by the Heseltine Report (2012) which observes that: 'Employers complain regularly about the shortcomings in the employability of young people leaving school and college' (p.161). The report advocates increasing the employability of young people by 'educating and enthusing them about the world of work, and demonstrating to them the applicability of what they learn in the classroom' (p.162). Equally, the report maintains that employer involvement in education 'can also increase understanding of career opportunities and ensure better and higher-quality work experience' (p.162).

Recent skills surveys point to the value of work experience in helping to enhance young people's employability skills. The CBI/Pearson education and skills survey (2013) found that employers considered that too few young people leave school with work experience or having developed personal attributes such as self-management and attitude to work. The report underlined the importance of work experience: 'For the 14-19 age group, employers believe schools and colleges should be developing work awareness and relevant skills, with more opportunities to acquire work experience identified as the main priority' (p.7). The UKCES Employer Skills Survey 2011 (2012) reported that most employers considered education leavers to be well prepared for work. Where leavers were considered to be poorly prepared, this was attributed to 'a lack of experience (of the world of work or, more generally, life experience or maturity), or to personality (poor attitude, or lack of motivation). This suggests that young people would benefit from increased work experience opportunities offered by employers (p.iv). Another employer survey, reported by the British Chambers of Commerce (Reid, 2011), revealed that businesses were keen that young people were supported to develop employability skills as well as to gain qualifications. These findings are reflected in the views expressed by young people aged 13-25 in a survey by the Young Foundation (Kahn *et al.*, 2011): only about half (51 per cent) thought that their education and experience at school prepared them, or is preparing them, for the world of work and more than a quarter (28 per cent) identified lack of work experience as a major barrier to employment for them.

The value of work experience is endorsed by the Education and Employers Taskforce's Expert Working Group on Work Experience which considered a range of evidence. Its report (Mann (2012) stated that: '... work experience is overwhelmingly relevant to the vast majority of students. As an activity, it is perhaps best understood, and conceptualised, within the school to work transitions of young people, helping them to explore and confirm career aspirations and navigate their way effectively towards them. In thinking about work experience in these terms, the value of post-16 experience is

clear ...' (p.35). The role of work experience in young people's transitions was also identified by recent research on the mismatch between jobs and young people conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (Rudiger, 2013) which concluded that: 'Employers find it difficult to assess young people with limited work experience and young people find it difficult to 'market' themselves to employers' (p.4).

The Wolf Review of Vocational Education (2011) highlighted the importance of work experience for helping young people to develop the skills required for employment:

'Helping young people to obtain genuine work experience – and, therefore, what the CBI calls 'employability skills' – should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years. It is far more important than even a few years ago, because of labour market trends; and is made critical by the impact on youth unemployment of the most recent recession'. (p.130).

Wolf made a strong case for reforming the education system in order to equip young people with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to prosper and progress in their working lives. The government accepted the review's recommendation that 16 to 19 study programmes be introduced to offer students breadth and depth and without limiting their options for future study or work. Reflecting Wolf's suggestion that work experience 'should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years' (p.130), work experience will be an integral part of the 16 to 19 study programmes introduced in September 2013. Wolf recommended that 'DfE should evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds who are enrolled as full-time students, not apprentices, and for reimbursing local employers in a flexible way, using core funds' (Recommendation 21, p. 131).

The post-16 funding reforms being introduced to support raising of the participation age (institutions will attract a standard rate of funding for each student weighted for necessary course costs, retention and with additional funding for those at a disadvantage) will allow schools and colleges more autonomy to expand work experience as part of their post-16 provision. All schools and colleges will be expected to offer their students high-quality and meaningful work experience as part of their 16-19 study programme to give the student a valuable experience of the work environment, help focus their career aspiration and develop their employability skills.

The work experience offered can be:

- Experiential – one or two short periods of work experience or other work-related learning connected to future study or employment options, such as study visits, projects and engagement with local enterprise. The target audience for this is likely to be students taking A levels (level 3, academic-only route).

- Vocational – work experience focused on a particular vocational area to contribute directly to a study programme. The target audience for this is likely to be students taking larger vocational qualifications.
- Extended – work experience focused on developing employability skills, with English and mathematics covering the majority of the study programme time. The target audience is likely to be students not taking a larger vocational qualification or studying below level 2.

The Department for Education (DfE) funded an initiative that aims to support young people to participate in high-quality work experience placements as part of the implementation of Wolf's recommendation on post-16 work experience. Sums of £80,000 per institution in 2011-2012 and £97,000 in 2012-2013 were allocated to 25 colleges to test work experience placement models for 16-19 year olds. The colleges were located in specified areas with high levels of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and high proportions of level 2 or below students.

The DfE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an evaluation of this initiative to test work experience placement models between May 2012 and July 2013. The aims and objectives of the evaluation are set out below.

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the study was to evaluate different models of work experience placements for post-16 students, exploring the impact on students and employers and identifying lessons learned. Five work experience placement models were being tested (see executive summary for details) and colleges could apply for funding to pilot one or more of them.

The specific research objectives were to explore:

1. The extent to which, and how, the different approaches adopted by providers enabled young people, particularly those from vulnerable/disadvantaged backgrounds, to access high-quality work experience (including the facilitators and barriers to access).
2. The impact the different approaches had on young people, particularly those from vulnerable/disadvantaged backgrounds, with regards to the development of relevant workplace skills and their intended post-16, post-17 or/or post-18 destinations.
3. How, if at all, relationships between providers and employers had been established, exploring differences between the different approaches being tested.



4. The impact of the provision of work experience on employers' practices and attitudes to work experience placements.
5. Lessons learned, including challenges and success, of designing and delivering high-quality work experience placements.
6. The numbers of students participating in the different approaches and an exploration of their characteristics, including, for example, level of deprivation, LLDD and level of learning.
7. The numbers of employers providing placements to students through the different approaches and their characteristics, in terms of, for example, size of employer and sector.

It should be noted that colleges often offered both external work-based placements and internal college-based placements and tended not to differentiate their experiences and views of each type of work experience.

The research methodology used to conduct the evaluation is outlined below.

### 1.3 Methodology

This section provides details of the methodological approach which was used to assess if, how and why different aspects of work experience placements have had an impact on young people's decision making about post-16 destinations. The methodology comprised:

- A **scoping study**: carried out June-November 2012, including analysis of college action plans and progress reports, an email survey of colleges, and Management Information (MI) submitted by the 25 colleges.
- **Case studies**: in-depth investigations carried out in January-March 2013 with staff, students and employers<sup>2</sup> linked to ten colleges offering varied approaches to work experience. The sample was informed by the data analysed during the scoping study. Colleges were selected using region, the index of multiple deprivation, size of college, approach to delivery, target number of placements, number of employers involved and types of students targeted (for example, LLDD or those at risk of becoming NEET). Coverage of the different work experience models and activities delivered were also considered.

In total, interviews were undertaken with 49 staff across 10 FE colleges, including:

- nine members of the senior management team (SMT)
- seven work experience managers

---

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with undertaken with employers working with 8 out of 10 colleges. In two cases, contact details were not provided.

- ten work experience coordinators
- one head of skills and enterprise
- one head of business development team
- one job coach
- one work experience case leader
- 19 teaching and learning support staff.

In addition, 14 employer interviews were undertaken. We conducted focus groups with 59 students participating in work experience placements and 33 students<sup>3</sup> not participating in work experience. Students undertaking work experience were also asked to complete a survey about the employability skills they felt they needed to develop and their perceptions of the skills valued most by employers<sup>4</sup>.

- **Analysis of MI collected from colleges:** exploring, for example, the *number* of placements provided overall<sup>5</sup>, the number and size of *employers* who had participated, the length of *placements* (for example, the number of hours/days), total expenditure, and the additional cost of placements.
- **Assessment of Value for Money (VfM):** including a descriptive analysis of financial data, alongside qualitative assessments of value for money from case studies.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 explores the delivery of the work experience trial including motivations for college involvement and curriculum areas targeted. Chapter 3 describes the models of work experience used. Chapter 4 explores staff, student and employer engagement in the trial and reports on student views on employability skills. Chapter 5 examines the perceived impact of the trial on students and the extent to which the funding has helped to support work experience. Value for money, including the expenditure by college, is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 outlines plans for the future of work experience, including how provision can be scaled up and sustained. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of the evaluation and recommendations for policymakers and colleges.

---

<sup>3</sup> Interviews were undertaken in nine of the ten colleges with young people participating in work experience. In the remaining college, students were unavailable during the case study visit and their support needs meant that it was not appropriate to carry out interviews over the phone at a later date. In addition, we conducted interviews in seven out of ten colleges with young people not participating in work experience. Where students were not interviewed, reasons related to adopting a whole college approach to work experience and availability of students.

<sup>4</sup> In total, the survey was completed by 35 students (a response rate of 59%).

<sup>5</sup> Note that from analysis of the MI data, it seems that a proportion of students included fall outside of the 16-19 age range, likely because colleges had included all work experience rather than just that provided with trial funds. See Section 2.2 for details on the profile of students included in the MI.

## 2. Delivery of the work experience trial

### Key findings

- Across the 25 colleges, at least 9,725 placements were provided during the two-year trial. The number provided across the colleges ranged from 40-1,742 (with an average of 389). Numbers involved depended greatly on the approach adopted in the college and the students being targeted.
- Case-study colleges wanted to broaden access to work experience across departments and to extend its reach to students who would have not previously benefited. For example, around a quarter of placements were undertaken by students categorised as ‘Special Educational Needs School Action Plus’ and a similar proportion were LLDD post-16.
- Case-study colleges saw the trial as a way of ‘testing’ new approaches to work experience, particularly in preparation for 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Colleges hoped the trial would help to create a more centralised and holistic approach to the provision of work experience in their institutions.
- All ten case-study colleges offered students external placements with an employer, while in nine colleges, students were also involved in internal commercial enterprises which colleges felt constituted work experience.
- Case-study evidence suggests that work placements were predominately *vocational* (focussing on a particular vocational area to contribute to a study programme) and aimed to give a ‘real world’ experience.
- There were examples of ‘extended’ external placements for LLDD, following the ‘Supported Internship’ model, whereby they are supported during their placement by a Job Coach or Learning Support Assistant employed by the college.

This chapter reports on college motivations for involvement in the trial. It also explores the profile of the participating students and the nature of the work experience they have participated in.

### 2.1 Motivations for college involvement

Across the ten case-study colleges, most hoped the trial would help them to ‘broaden’ access to work experience to *all* departments, so there was a universal offer. By doing so, they hoped they would extend their reach to departments where work experience was not compulsory and to students who might not have previously benefited (including LLDD), seeing it as an opportunity to upgrade their offer. Staff in two colleges specifically mentioned that they hoped to help employers understand the needs and skills of LLDD. With the removal of the statutory duty on *schools* to provide every pupil at Key Stage 4 with a standard amount of work-related learning, one college senior manager felt it was important to ‘build a better rapport with employers who can provide real skills for our students’.

Colleges saw the trial as an opportunity to innovate, take some risks and find out what works: as one work experience coordinator said, 'it gave us the chance to try something new'. They wanted to 'test' models and to understand any issues or barriers, to prepare them for 16 to 19 study programmes from September 2013. In preparation, they hoped the trial would assist work experience in becoming more embedded and integrated across departments. As one senior manager commented, 'we have worked through the faculties, towards work experience being embedded in schemes of work'. They hoped for a more 'holistic' and 'centralised' approach. As one senior manager commented, 'it [the trial] gave us the strategic focus that we needed', while another said, 'it was about bringing together careers advice, employment and work placement support in a one stop shop'. Colleges wanted to expand and diversify types of work experience on offer, including placements in different sectors, with different sizes of employers.

Staff in five colleges hoped the trial would help students gain employability skills, to combat what one staff member described as the local 'NEET epidemic'. As one senior manager said, 'employability skills are so important with the introduction of the Wolf report and the Government's aims...work experience is one way of building employability skills'.

## 2.2 Profile of the participating students

The MI submitted by colleges has been matched to the National Pupil Database (NPD), to explore the characteristics of students participating in work experience across the two years of the trial. Table 1 below shows the number of placements provided in both years and the number successfully matched to the NPD to explore student characteristics. The table shows that **at least 9,725 placements had been provided**<sup>6</sup> across the two years (two colleges did not submit MI data in Year 1 in time to be included in the analysis, so this figure is likely to be an under-estimate). Although quantitative baseline data on the number of students who would have been placed without the trial funding was not collected, qualitative case-study evidence suggests that the trial had helped to expand work experience to greater numbers of students and thus this figure is likely to have been lower without the trial.<sup>7</sup> For example, as noted in Section 2.1, colleges were using trial funds to broaden access to work experience to *all* departments, including those where work experience would not have been traditionally offered.

---

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that some students could be listed more than once in the MI, if they participated in more than one placement. As the entries were anonymised, excluding student Unique Learner Number (ULN), we were not able to ascertain to what extent this was the case. Therefore, we refer to number of *placements*, rather than number of students.

<sup>7</sup> Note that colleges were already providing work experience and would have been doing so without the trial funding. Some also supplemented trial funds with other budgets (see Chapter 6). Case-study evidence suggests that colleges were not always able to separate work experience provided by the trial from other work experience, as funds will have been combined. Moreover, the funds were not used to pay for placements provided through the trial as employers did not charge for their time. Rather, funds were used to employ a coordinator, for example, who will have worked across the whole college and will have benefited all students doing placements. Therefore, we are unable to say what proportion of the 9,725 placements will or will not have taken place without the trial funds.

The number of placements across the colleges ranged from 40-1,742 (with an average of 389). Note that the college with the smallest number of placements had focused on ‘work pairings’, which was a model offering 16-18 year olds who were at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) an intensive period of work experience and mentoring with a small business, aiming to help them move on into an Apprenticeship. Other colleges with a small number of placements had focused on provision for LLDD<sup>8</sup>. Other colleges with much greater numbers were expanding work experience across departments as a universal offer. Therefore, numbers involved depended greatly on the approach adopted in the college and the students being targeted.

Students participating in 8,421 placements (across Years 1 and 2) were successfully matched to the NPD by the DfE and so we are able to comment on their characteristics. Students participating in 8,739 placements (90 per cent) were matched to the Individual Student Record (ILR), which includes information on whether participating students were LLDD.

**Table 1: Numbers of placements**

	Placements listed in MI	Number matched to NPD
2011-12 (Year 1)	3,202, across 23 colleges	2,649 (83 per cent), across 22 colleges
2012-13 (Year 2)	6,523, across 25 colleges	5,772 (88 per cent), across 25 colleges
Total	9,725	8,421 (87 per cent)

From those matched to the NPD, their characteristics are described below.<sup>9,10</sup>

- **Achievement:** A total of 59 per cent of placements were undertaken by students who had achieved the level 2 threshold (five or more A\*-C GCSEs or equivalents overall), with a range of 0-84 per cent across colleges. The national average for 2011-12 was 84 per cent, suggesting that participating students were below national average achievement.
- **Age:** Students had an average age of 17 (32 per cent of placements were undertaken by students aged 16; 24 per cent were 17; 11 per cent were 18; four per cent were 19; five per cent fell outside the target 16-19 age range<sup>11</sup>; and age information was missing for 24 per cent).

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A, which shows the number of placements in each college and the proportion which were undertaken by LLDD (although note that not all students were matched to the Individual Student Record/ILR to be able to explore their characteristics).

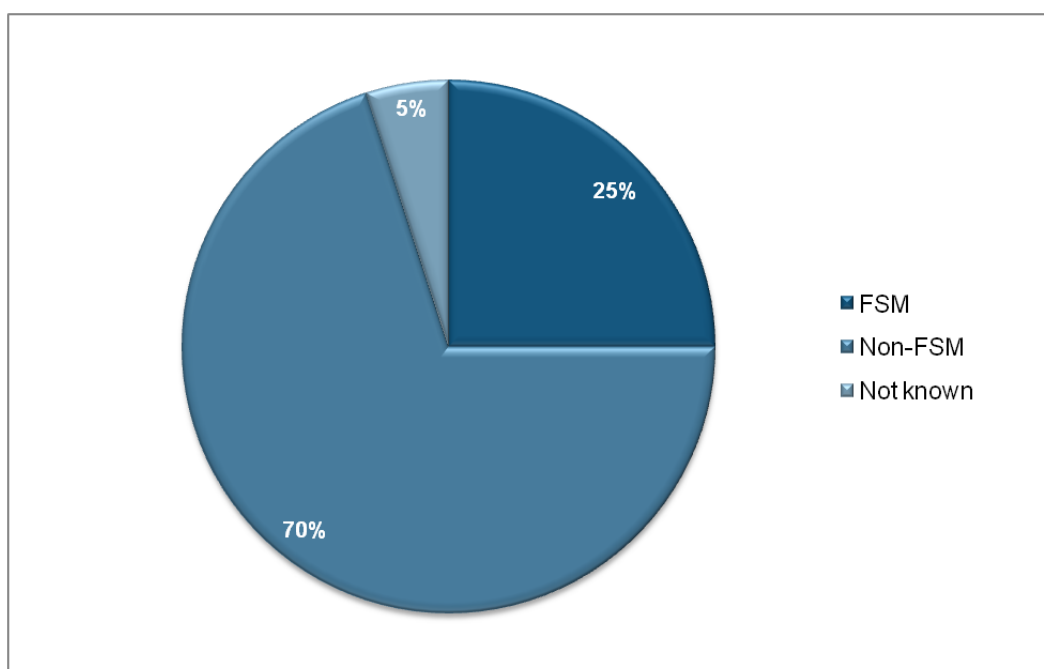
<sup>9</sup> Note that some of the ranges quoted, which refer to percentages within a college, might be based on small numbers of participating students.

<sup>10</sup> Note that these characteristics are of participating students for whom data was available via matching with NPD/ILR.

<sup>11</sup> Note that of 529 placements undertaken by students who were aged 20-23, 65 per cent were LLDD, although of the 137 who were aged 24-27 only 39 per cent were LLDD.

- **Gender:** Just over half (58 per cent of placements) were undertaken by females, while 41 per cent were by males (data for those remaining was missing).
- **Ethnic group:** 82 per cent of placements were undertaken by students who were white British/white other (this ranged from 13 per cent to 100 per cent across colleges). Exploring the profile of *all* students across colleges, not just those participating in the trial, an average of 77 per cent of students were White (which ranged from 26-98 per cent across colleges).
- **Socio-economic status:** A quarter (25 per cent) of placements were undertaken by students who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) when at school (Figure 1 below). This ranged from 13-47 per cent across colleges, which compared to the national average of 16 per cent for age 11-15 year olds across all schools<sup>12</sup> suggests that participating students were above the national average proportion of students receiving FSM.

**Figure 1: Eligibility for free school meals (percentage of placements)**

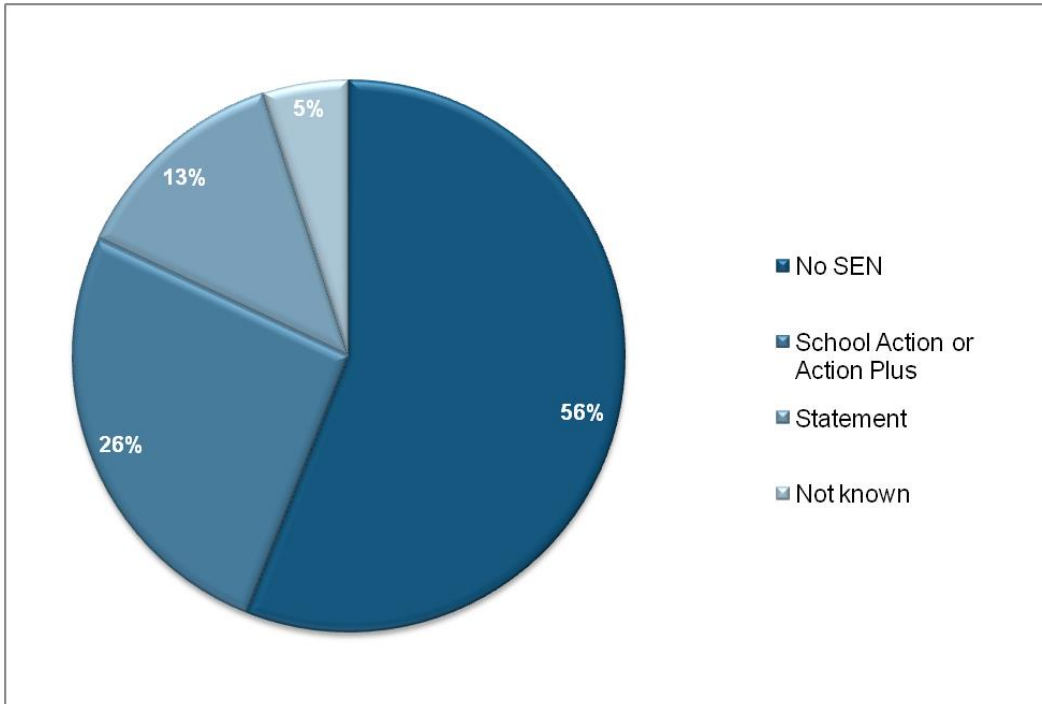


Source: National Pupil Database, N=8421

- **Special educational needs:** A quarter (26 per cent) of placements were undertaken by students categorised as SEN School Action Plus, while 13 per cent had an SEN statement (Figure 2 below). These figures ranged across colleges from 18-52 per cent and 2-71 per cent respectively.

<sup>12</sup>See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/219065/main\\_20national\\_20tables\\_20sfr122011.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219065/main_20national_20tables_20sfr122011.xls)

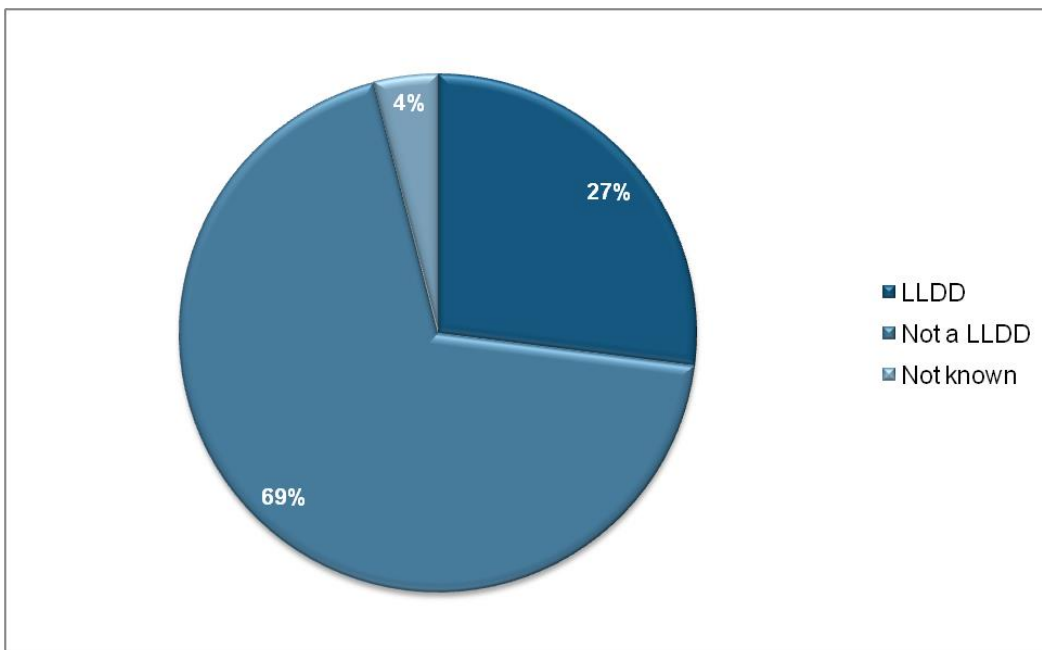
**Figure 2: Special Educational Needs (percentage of placements)**



Source: National Pupil Database, N=8421

- **LLDD:** Over a quarter (27 per cent) of placements were carried out by students who had identified that they had a LDD post-16 (Figure 3 below), which ranged from 9-100 per cent across colleges. Exploring the profile of *all* students across colleges, not just those participating in the trial, an average of 15 per cent were LLDD (which ranged from 9-23 per cent across colleges), suggesting that LLDD were a particular target across some colleges.

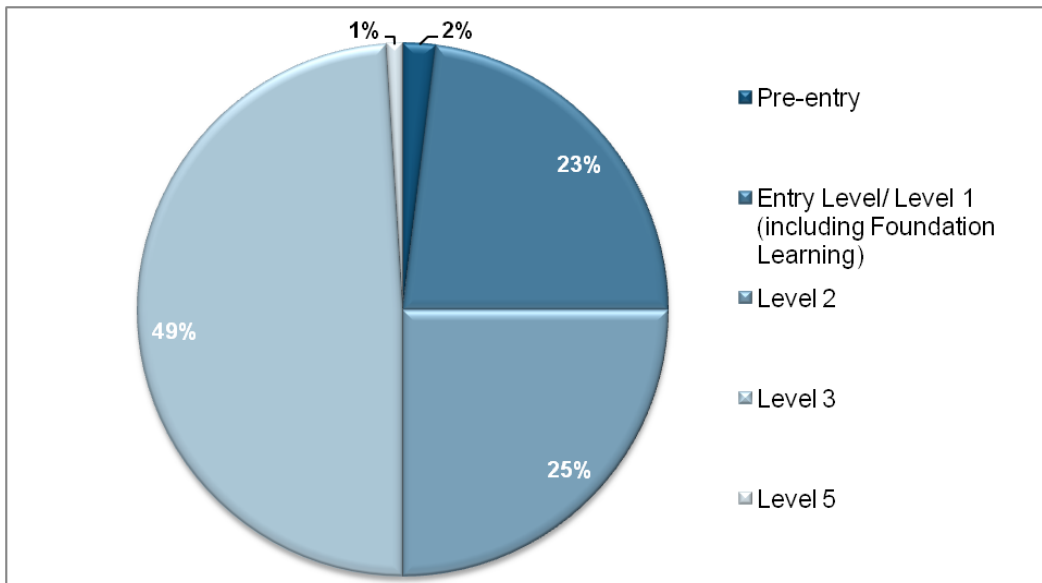
**Figure 3: Students with Learning difficulties and Disabilities post-16 (percentage of placements)**



Source: Individual Student Record, N=8739

MI for Year 2 showed that just under half of the placements were carried out by students who were studying for level 3 courses (see Figure 4 below). Case-study evidence from ten colleges suggests that work placements were *predominately* vocational (focussing on a particular vocational area to contribute to a study programme); therefore the level 3 students were likely to be mainly studying for Applied General qualifications or a combination of Applied General and A levels. A quarter of placements (25 per cent) were carried out by students studying for level 2 courses and just under a quarter (23 per cent) were entry level or level 1 students.

**Figure 4: Participating students' level of course, Year 2 (percentage of placements)**



Source: Management Information for 25 colleges, Year 2 (September 2012-March 2013), N=6523

## 2.3 The nature of work experience

Preparation prior to work experience was considered important for success by case-study staff and employers. This included drafting students' CVs, developing their interview skills, matching students with employers, and carrying out health and safety and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (formerly CRB checks). It also involved helping students to understand protocols, such as turning up for the placement on time and communicating appropriately with staff at the placement company. Preparation was most often carried out by college work experience coordinators, so as not to over-burden employers (further discussed in Chapter 4). Although considered important, preparation was 'informal' and there was no evidence of any formal learning or of students doing qualifications in work preparation.

All ten case-study colleges offered students external placements at an employer site (see section 4.2 for details on types of employers involved). Across students interviewed, placements related to their course subject (predominately vocational). As one coordinator commented, 'vocational studies are a driver for the placement'. Colleges reported the importance of work experience being 'meaningful and relevant'.



Examples included Animal Care students working at a country park or vets, Health and Social Care students working with speech therapists at a care home or working at a nursery school, Engineering students putting their learning into practice at an engineering company, and Creative Arts students helping to edit a local radio programme (case-study examples are illustrated below). Careful matching of student to an employer in a sector of interest was considered important. As one employer said, for example, 'it is important that the work experience is in an area that interests them because if they're not interested then they wouldn't stay'. Coordinators had spent time working with students and employers to match-up interests with organisation-type. Where students had specific needs, such as LDD or if they were lower achievers (such as Foundation students), coordinators had spent time communicating with employers about their needs in order for an appropriate match to be made.

### **Work experience at a country park**

A country park, with a small farm as a visitor attraction, has 23 full-time staff and relies on additional volunteers. The park has a 'culture of work experience', linking with ten secondary schools and a number of departments at the local FE college (including Animal Care, Construction, and Information Technology). At any one time, they can have up to 50 volunteers and work placement students, some of whom are LLDD (although not those with severe needs). The park has an Education and Community manager, who felt that work experience at the college had become more centralised since the appointment of a coordinator. The manager commented, 'it's part of our community role [to offer work experience]'. Students go for a two-week block and they have a structured programme of work experience, at first shadowing staff or volunteers and then progressing to 'hands on' work themselves. They also offer two extended placements, whereby two students are placed for two days a week for a whole year. This particular employer preferred 'significant' blocks of time 'as we give a lot of investment as an employer and it wouldn't be worth it for one week'. As the employer provided work experience for many students, they felt it was important that the college carried out any preparation prior to placements, including interviewing/matching students to employer and briefing them about how to conduct themselves on site: 'colleges need to support the employer as much as possible, by doing much of the preparation'. However, the employer did a general induction on arrival. Anecdotal feedback from students suggested their work experience was having a positive impact, although this was not formally evaluated: 'they encounter the public and learn how to conduct themselves in a real job'. Some students go back as volunteers in their own time. The manager felt that the park gained from the experience too, not only by having 'extra volunteers' to help out, but also by helping their own staff to develop their management and teaching skills.

### Level 3 Childcare Diploma student

This student had a pattern of spending one week in college, then the following week on a placement, as a rolling programme. They had been placed in a nursery, a primary school, a special unit for babies in a hospital, a special needs centre, and in someone's home to work alongside a child's mother. The student enjoyed 'the variety...having the difference between being in a family home where the mum is your supervisor, then being in a primary school where the teacher or senior staff are your supervisor and you're working in a big team'. They commented that going into different settings had helped them to decide whether it was the right career: 'I went to a nursery and ruled it out that I didn't want to be a nursery nurse. It finalised my decision on not taking that step'.

### A Business Studies student at a recruitment agency

This student spent one day a week at a recruitment agency working as an administrator, typing CVs, answering the telephone, and communicating with people registering for work. The student enjoyed 'meeting new people, working in a real world environment, and working with the other people in the office...it is an opportunity to develop new skills'. They said, 'I'm more confident, it shows that I can work with lots of different people, turn up on time, be reliable and trustworthy'. It had helped them develop generic employability skills, and to see what they need to do to be a manager: 'I'd like to be in management'.

There were case-study examples of 'extended' external placements for LLDD, following the 'Supported Internship' model<sup>13</sup>, whereby they are supported during their placement by a Job Coach or Learning Support Assistant employed by the college (often paid for with trial funding, as discussed in Chapter 3). See details of impact and a case-study example in Chapter 5.

Overall, students interviewed reported participating in 'real world' activities and were 'treated like employees', experiencing 'real pressures to deliver'. Note that students interviewed were participating in placements external to the college, and there is no evidence *from students* about the type of activities undertaken if they were placed on the college site (see below). There were examples of external employers who tried to link explicitly with students' college courses. For example, 'we tried to give them exercises based on their college work...use of lathes when they were covering that at college'. A major national supermarket was providing work experience to students in

---

<sup>13</sup> Supported Internships, currently being piloted by the DfE, provide a structured study programme, based at an employer, that is tailored to the individual needs of the young person and will equip them with the skills they need for the workplace. This will include on-the-job training, backed by expert job coaches to support interns and employers, and the chance to study for relevant qualifications – where appropriate. See: <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/send/changingsen/b00211325/sen-supported-internships>

one college and, when interviewed, the development manager commented that they looked at how the activities in store could complement the college courses (see case-study below).

### **Work experience with a major national supermarket**

This supermarket had supported local careers events before, but their experience of work placements had not always been positive. In the past, schools had sent students who did not really want a career in retail, so they were not appropriately matched to the placements, which had limited their success. Nevertheless, the HR manager met with the local college to see how they could support their new Food Retail course, as those students were felt to be better matched. In the company, they have a 'You Can' agenda, part of which is to 'make a difference to the community'. They felt they could be involved in supporting the whole college course and curriculum delivery. The manager said, 'we would be able to show them how [the theory] works in practice'. For them, it was broader than providing a two-week block of work experience, rather 'it's been about building a relationship with the students over the whole year'. Students are placed for two days a week for four weeks. The manager liaises with the course tutor, who suggests activities that students could do in store, which have included merchandising, displays, customer services, and organising a fashion show. Each student has a store 'buddy'. Supermarket managers also deliver the customer services training to students in college. The supermarket is now mentioned in the college prospectus for its retail course. The manager felt 'we have opened their [students'] eyes to the career opportunities available...supervisors, managers, etc. They've learned a bit about the real world, and we've given them a lot of feedback on what they need to do in a successful interview'. They went on to say that, 'providing real work experience ....will be invaluable for employers because these students are our employees of the future'. Some students were interviewed for jobs in the supermarket after their placement. Overall, 'involvement in the trial has had a huge impact. It has increased relationships with the college, it is a great PR opportunity for the company as well, [and] we feel like we've made a real difference....we were mentioned in the Ofsted report. It's a great sense of achievement...it's just been brilliant'.

Nine case-study colleges also offered internal placements within the college and considered this to be a 'creative way of providing work experience', as students were involved in commercial enterprises, some for external clients. Colleges reported that they were offering internal placements as a way of providing what they considered to be real 'work experience' across their cohort of students, at the same time as not over-burdening external employers. They were in the process of 'scaling-up' provision to larger numbers of students and felt unable to provide external placements to all students at this early stage, although they considered internal placements to be genuine work experience. An example is given below.

### Internal learning companies

In one college, a senior manager described 'learning companies' (internal commercial enterprises) as providing 'excellent work experience for larger numbers of students' (hence she thought it was a cost effective approach). For example, some students were involved in media/marketing projects for the National Trust, others did projects for the local council and some did product design/screen printing for an external client. The senior manager had used part of the trial funding to pay for screen printing equipment to support some of the commercial activities.

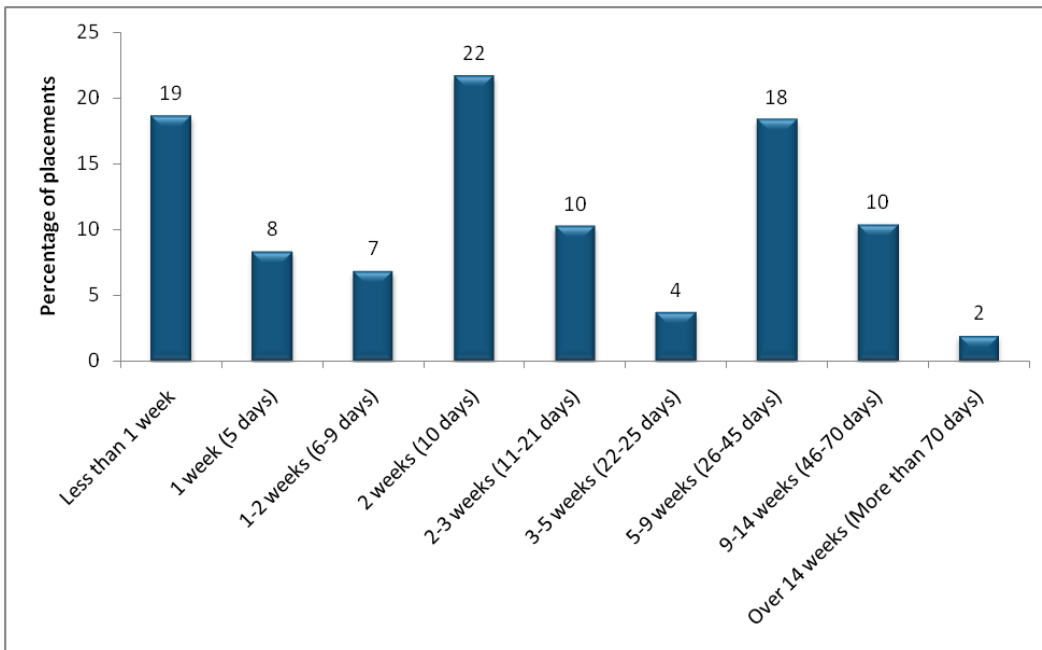
Other than the learning companies explained in the example above, other internal placements included working in the college restaurant or hairdressers. It was also the case that some colleges placed LLDD in placements in-house, as they felt some 'aren't ready to go out'. However, there were a number of examples of LLDD in external placements, supported by job coaches or learning assistants. It should be noted that the DfE question whether internal placements provide a full exposure to real work experience, and is publishing policy advice for providers on what will count for funding purposes i.e. external work experience only.

A minority of colleges also defined taster days, employer visits and talks as work experience, and one college was considering running an 'internal work shadowing project' as work experience in the future. In the light of this evidence, the DfE will be publishing the advice on what counts as work experience.

## 2.4 The length of placements

As Figure 5 shows: nearly a third (32 per cent) of placements were two to three weeks in length; around a fifth (22 per cent) were three to nine weeks; and a small but notable proportion (12 per cent) were for more than nine weeks. However, around a third (34 per cent) of placements lasted less than two weeks (of those, 19 per cent were less than one week). The MI form asked for *number of days*, which was translated into weeks (based on five working days in a week). Those with longer periods of work experience were likely to include students on extended placements, such as those with LLDD who were involved in a model similar to Supported Internships.

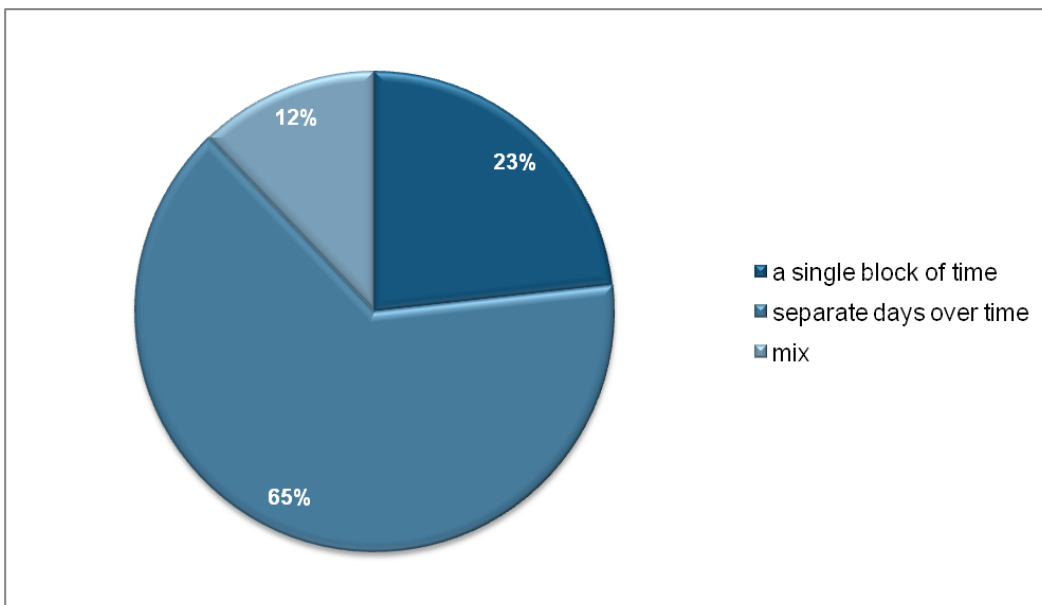
**Figure 5: Length of placement, Year 2 (percentage of placements)**



Source: Management Information for 25 colleges, Year 2 (September 2012-March 2013), N=6523

It was most commonplace (64 per cent) for placements to be provided over separate days, over a course of weeks, rather than as a block of time (23 per cent), although some (12 per cent) were a mix of both (see figure 6). Case-study evidence revealed that some students had placements in different locations, rather than with only one employer (for example, see Childcare Diploma student case study above).

**Figure 6: How work experience was provided, Year 2 (percentage of placements)**



Source: Management Information for 25 colleges, Year 2 (September 2012-March 2013), N=6523

As is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, case-study colleges took a 'flexible' approach to providing either separate days or blocks of work experience. As one senior manager commented, 'flexibility of timing is very important, so we vary the approach to suit employers and students'.

The following chapter looks more specifically at the models of work experience trialled by colleges.

## 3. Models of Work Experience

### Key findings

- Individual colleges trialed a combination of work experience placement models. On average, colleges piloted three models.
- Providing extra resources to colleges to fund dedicated staff and supporting LLDD were the two most prevalent models.
- Work experience coordinators funded by the trial played a significant cross-college role in managing the placement process and developing a more structured and systematic approach to the organisation of work experience.
- The provision of one-to-one support by tutors, mentors, coaches and support assistants made a useful contribution in enabling students to benefit from work experience.
- Cost was not a barrier to employers offering work experience. Employers did not want financial incentives. They considered providing placements a contribution to the community and good publicity for their company or organisation.
- Flexibility in the timing of placements was important in meeting the needs of students' course requirements and employers' capacity to provide work experience.

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents research findings on the models of work experience being piloted and tested in the Work Experience Placement Trials. Drawing on MI data, the chapter presents the overall picture and pattern across the 25 colleges participating in the trials in addition to an in-depth examination of the models based on the evidence from the ten case studies.

The Work Experience Placement Trials piloted and tested the five models of work experience. Colleges could apply for funding to pilot one or more of the following models:

- Model 1: Removing cost barriers for employers (for example, by providing materials or financial incentives).
- Model 2: Investigating specific challenges faced by small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) when offering work placements.
- Model 3: Providing extra resources to colleges (for example, to employ staff to organise work placements and liaise with employers).
- Model 4: Exploring the timing of placements for students (for example, investigating whether a block of time or individual days throughout a course is most effective and why).

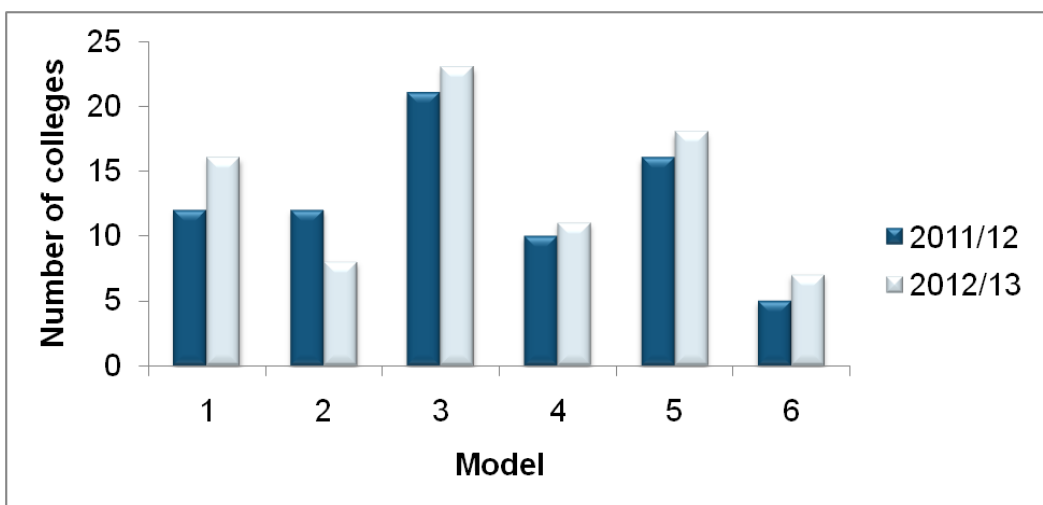
Model 5: Supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) or vulnerable/disadvantaged students (for example, considering support employers need to employ young people with specific needs).

In addition, colleges could trial other approaches to delivering work experience referred to here as model 6.

### 3.2 Work experience models: profile and operation/delivery

The analysis of financial data provided by colleges revealed that models 3 and 5 were most prevalent as indicated in Figure 7.

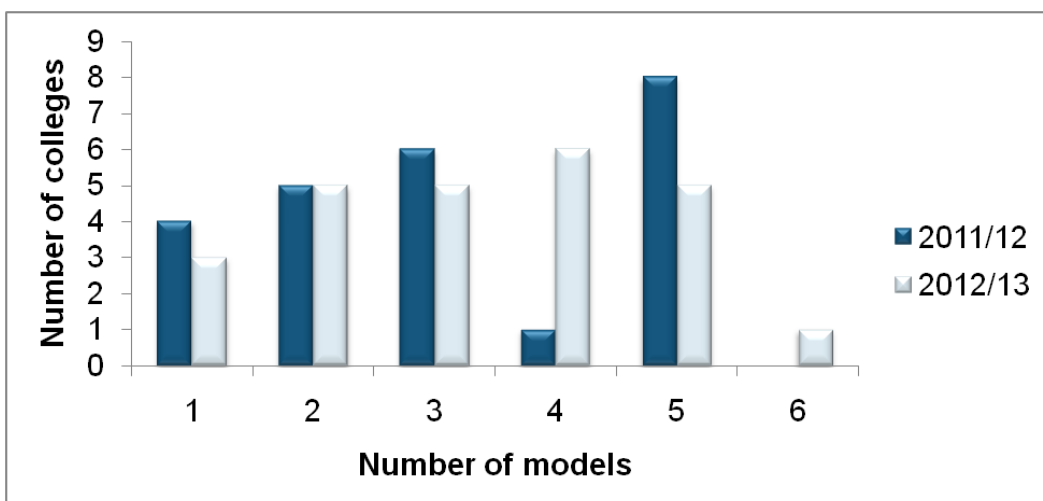
**Figure 7: Work experience models implemented by colleges**



Source: Work Experience Placement Trial MI data, submitted September 2012 and March 2013

Figure 8 shows that it was common for colleges to adopt a combination of models. This is not surprising, as the above models are unlikely to be mutually exclusive. The mean number of models piloted by colleges was three.

**Figure 8: Number of work experience models implemented by colleges**



Source: Work Experience Placement Trial MI data, submitted September 2012 and March 2013



The distribution pattern of work experience models presented in the figures above was reflected in the ten case studies. One college was piloting another model (6): its creative arts faculty was using some resources to devise a framework for evidencing skills that students were developing through their practical activities.

Details of the models in practice are presented below.

### **Model 1 Removing cost barriers for employers**

Five of the ten case-study colleges were using trial funding to explore removing cost barriers for employers (model 1). College staff found that in their experience cost was not a barrier to employers providing work experience. Colleges did not offer financial incentives to employers for two reasons: first, they believed that employers should offer work experience in the right spirit, that is, for the benefit of young people; and second, employers did not want inducements or subsidies because they see providing placements as a contribution to the community and good publicity for their company or organisation. Employers finding capacity and time to provide a placement was sometimes a challenge, and 'offering £250 to offset this is not going to make much difference', as one college manager remarked. Employers' fear of bureaucracy and form filling was identified as another challenge, though college managers said that it had not significantly inhibited employers providing placements because they had made the process as streamlined and employer-friendly as possible. Colleges' work experience coordinators (funded by the trials) and their colleagues were developing productive working relationships with employers which in some cases included inviting employers to college-based work experience events or providing training for their staff, for example in customer service or mentoring. More evidence of employer engagement is provided in section 4.2.

### **Model 2 Investigating specific challenges faced by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) when offering work placements**

Three case-study colleges were using trial funding to investigate the specific challenges faced by SMEs when offering work placements (model 2). They reported that they were not experiencing major difficulties in engaging SMEs, noting that these companies liked work experience because it acts as a 'try before you buy' or pre-apprenticeship trial. One of the colleges explained that the local economy was not conducive to SMEs taking on additional staff and pointed out that market stall holders, who used to provide a lot of placements, now offered far fewer. The college said that some small IT companies found data protection issues a challenge in offering placements. Another college said that it had worked with the local chamber of commerce to contact employers, including SMEs, observing that companies were willing to offer placements and appreciated having their involvement acknowledged. 'Employers want their input to be highlighted, i.e. that they have a social conscience and are a good employer', was how one work experience coordinator expressed it. Trial funding was used by a college to expand the range of SMEs in the engineering sector which could offer placements. It offered incentives but employers did not want these, preferring alternatives such as the college providing students with personal protective equipment, access to college

training courses and use of college premises. Some SMEs, which are community-based organisations, rely on volunteers and placement students help to support their workforce. In one of the case studies students' placements contributed to the running of a community farm.

### **Model 3 Providing extra resources to colleges**

All of the case-study colleges used trial funding to provide additional resources to manage and support the delivery of work experience placements (model 3). Nine colleges had used trial funding to recruit one or more work experience coordinators who played a cross-college role in liaising with employers, procuring placements and organising the provision of work experience. In one case, the posts were allocated to the college's business development team which sourced work experience placements and apprenticeships. Following a review, another case-study college was moving towards centrally coordinated work experience and was going to appoint a work placement manager.

College senior managers valued the work of the coordinators who they said had extended the college's reach into the business community, enhanced employer engagement, expanded the employer base and improved the organisation and management of work experience by developing a more centralised cross-faculty and cross-departmental placement process. Coordinators helped to match students to placements and prepare students for their work experience. Some senior managers noted that the work experience coordinators played a valuable associated liaison role internally with college staff to ensure that placements had appropriate links to the curriculum and apprenticeships. Another benefit from appointing work experience coordinators reported by one of the case-study colleges was that it freed up existing college staff from organising placements which enabled them to concentrate on developing and embedding work experience opportunities in their curriculum areas to support the teaching and achievement of vocational qualifications.

Work experience coordinators organised one-to-one support for some or all students to prepare them for their placements. This was provided by staff including tutors, mentors, coaches and support assistants. Some coordinators also provided support for students during their placements to help them maximise the learning and development gained from the experience. This was particularly the case for LLDD and detail on support for these students is presented later in this chapter. A college reported that the appointment of a work placement case worker for foundation learning students has been effective in ensuring these students have been able to engage successfully with their work experience opportunities. The colleges were using trial resources to support students by subsidising their travel costs to their placements and, where necessary, to pay for uniforms or clothing. Other examples of support were funding a preparation booklet for students, a student's food hygiene qualification and providing deaf interpreters.

The trial funding had also enabled colleges to provide:

- employability events for students
- events for employers and training providers
- an online tool for employers to advertise work placements and for students to apply for them and upload CVs
- a bespoke pre-apprenticeship programme in IT
- DBS checks
- training for college staff in supporting work experience
- training for employers in mentoring, customer services and deaf awareness.

An interesting example was the college which used some of the trial funding to pay for a screen printing machine for one of the businesses run by students. The college's departments run companies linked to external business where, for example, students design and produce a product for an external client. The staff said that this provided excellent cost-effective work experience for large numbers of students (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the nature of work experience).

The following college case study provides an illustration of investing additional resources to augment work experience provision.

### **Additional resources**

This college was trialling all five work placement models. The focus was on putting in place central coordination of work experience and to embed work experience in the curriculum. A senior leader explained the benefit of the trial to the college: They [DfE] wanted us to do for that money what we were already trying to do in lunchtimes and after the day job. We were trying to map work experience across the college. This gave us the strategic focus that we needed'. These gains were further articulated by a manager who noted that 'before this trial we were approaching work experience with a silo approach, i.e. each faculty doing their own thing. We wanted a holistic approach across the college to making young people work-ready. We are aspiring to be 'outstanding' with Ofsted and believe that the world of work and work-relatedness is key'. The college used some of the trial funding to appoint a cross-college work experience coordinator whose role included liaising with employers and with all faculty heads about the internal organisation of placements and the coordination of work experience for LLDD who had their own key workers. The college was positive about what the trial had enabled them to achieve as the following staff observations illustrate: 'Work experience has been transformed as a result of the trial' and 'work experience in the college has changed dramatically. It has given us the chance to focus on how things work best and to enable more students to take part. The way we work with employers is more innovative, i.e. building and nurturing relationships. We have also managed to raise the perception of work experience with students and those who have undertaken work experience have become ambassadors and helped to raise aspirations'. The role of the coordinator was considered instrumental in improving the management and organisation of work experience as summarised by this senior leader: 'Having a work experience coordinator has proved to very effective. She has played a blinder as she has facilitated work experience to flourish'.

### **Model 4 Exploring the timing of placements of students**

Eight of the ten case-study colleges used trial funding to explore the timings of placements (model 4). Staff emphasised the importance of the flexibility of placement timing to suit the needs of students and their course requirements as well as employers. For example, a work experience coordinator reported that his college organised placements to fit around the terms of programmes of learning, schemes of work, assignments and stages in the academic year. Another coordinator said that flexibility is essential as placements have to be tailored to students' requirements: some need a long period of time with one day a week (see case-study example below), others need a consolidated period where they go every day. Flexibility also meant that the organisation was less of a concentrated operation for colleges as this work experience coordinator remarked: 'The new variety, modes and times etc. have allowed us to stagger the placements'.

The case-study evidence revealed different approaches to the timing of placements as the following examples illustrate. Feedback from one of the case-study colleges

indicated that it used a range of placements: some one or two days a week over a period, some six-week blocks, some undertaken in vacation time. Another college reported that placements are easier to manage if they are organised into blocks of time: the academic year has been split into three ten-week blocks and students can select which block is most appropriate for them. The college takes a graduated approach where the proportion of work experience in a student's timetable increases the closer he or she is to employment. One day a week for ten weeks is the most compatible for students' timetables. Another college used part of the trial to pilot business studies students and year 2 and year 3 students to undertake one-day per week placements with the possibility of full-week placements during vacations throughout the year.

A coordinator explained that the organisation of placements was dependent on what suited employers rather than the college. The college had used a range of placements including blocks of one to four weeks, one or two days per week over a period of time, and combinations of term-time and holiday placements. Some coordinators said that employers preferred to offer a placement in a block in order to provide a real experience of what it is like to work in business or industry. A coordinator observed that block means that '... they understand what it's like to go to work, whereas just the one day a week, it fits in with their college life to a degree ... whereas if they're out for an entire week, it takes them away completely into a different environment'. In contrast, another college noted that long and thin placements were advantageous as they give students the opportunity to build relationships with employers and develop a sense of what working entails.

Interestingly, a coordinator considered that the timing of placements is less important than the value of work experience; that is, its appropriateness and relevance to young people.

### **Work experience with an engineering company**

An engineering company with 60 employees had placed five work experience students over the past two years. They attended the company for one day a week for six months and were 'treated as apprentices...so they got good grounding in all areas and saw all departments'. The operations manager commented that they 'tried to give them [students] exercises based on their college work, [for example] use of lathes when they were covering that at college'. The employer had interviewed college students prior to their placement. Each student had a mentor and supervisor at the placement site. The students were said to 'relish in the opportunity to get out of college and see a real working environment. They are able to practice what they have learnt and build up their social skills'. No challenges in providing work experience were reported. The employer commented, 'we are really satisfied with our experience of taking students and we get benefits too. After a while those on work experience contribute'. He went on to promote work experience by saying 'engineering needs new blood and these schemes are a good way of getting that. Employers need to know that there is nothing negative about providing placements and it's worth it in terms of investing in the future'.

## **Model 5 Supporting students with LDD**

Nine of the case-study colleges used trial funding to support LLDD (model 5). They invested the funding in one or more of the following activities:

- procuring work placements
- providing one-to-one support, which was critical in enabling students to benefit from work experience. This involved supporting them to attend the placement, providing details about what the placement would involve and breaking down what was required so that they felt confident to attend
- resourcing mentors, coaches and support assistants to work with young people and employers to ensure that vulnerable young people are protected
- paying for transportation to work placements and accompanying students if necessary
- visiting students on placement.

Staff explained that they attempted to give LLDD appropriate and realistic work experience. For example, a coordinator pointed out that without the funding the college would have placed LLDD in-house which would have given them a less realistic experience. Another college used funding to resource learning support assistants to assist LLDD to do their work experience at a community centre café which they ran alongside café staff. This helped the students to develop confidence and gain some degree of independence.

The following case study provides a good practice illustration of supporting LLDD to gain the maximum benefit from work experience.

## Supporting LLDD

This college has a business development team, including a work experience coordinator, who has built up a relationship with local employers. The team wanted to extend work experience placements to LLDD some of whom have multiple disabilities and others who are on Foundation Learning courses. The team used trial funding to build up a bank of employers who would take these young people, providing as much flexibility as possible to fit in with employer preferences. A senior leader explained that ‘this cohort needed support and we wanted to give them opportunities as part of our holistic approach. We also feel we are helping to educate employers to understand the needs of individuals’. Staff pointed out that finding the right placements is very time-consuming and running the system is an intensive task because of the level of support these students require. Trial funding has been used to pay for students’ bus fares, uniforms and the use of support assistants’ time and for training for employers’ staff. The work experience coordinator reported that ‘we have got some very willing partners as a result of the trial. Our focus on LLDD has made choosing the right employers very important. We know that most of them will help in the future too because we have prepared the students well and employers were aware of what to expect’. Students did their placements in a supermarket office and shop, a housing association office, a large food and drink distribution company and a deaf centre charity. The students thought they had benefitted from the work experience and valued the opportunity it had given them to show how well they could do: ‘I learnt a lot from it, like how to do Excel spreadsheets and how finances work’ and ‘I’m a lot more confident now – I helped another student there who wasn’t sure what to do’ were typical comments. Employer feedback was equally positive: ‘The impact is very positive. They pick up communication skills, team building and even some technical skills’.

## Model 6 Other

One of the case-study colleges was using trial funding to resource an additional model (model 6) which examined how the impact of work experience can be evidenced in creative arts. College staff noted that putting on shows and doing performances develops the employability skills of young people and skills developed can include the use of blogs and YouTube clips. The college considered that this was useful because it enabled them to think through how to capture, record and express the development achieved by students on placement.

The next chapter presents evidence from the evaluation on the engagement of students, staff and employers in the Work Experience Placement Trial.

## 4. Engagement in the trial

### Key Findings

- Staff in some colleges had initially been reluctant to engage with work experience programmes, but this had changed when the benefits for students became evident.
- There was a perception amongst all colleges that employer engagement had improved considerably as a result of the trial, but this had required much time and effort on the part of coordinators.
- Financial incentives for employers were considered unnecessary and difficult to operate.
- In general, colleges were pleased with the level of student engagement and thought there was better understanding of the advantages of undertaking a placement.
- Extending placement opportunities to LLDD was seen as particularly successful in those colleges that had used this model.
- The students who had participated in the trials were very positive about the benefits and had particularly valued experiencing a real working environment and gaining skills and confidence.

This chapter considers the level of engagement of college staff, students and employers in the placement trials. It draws on evidence from the case-study visits, alongside the MI data on the profile of employers in section 4.2.

### 4.1 Staff engagement

The majority of case-study colleges were positive about staff engagement in the placement trials which had grown in momentum over the two years. Staff interviewees felt that there had been initial misgivings amongst some staff because of concerns about disruption to students' progress on their courses if they were absent from college on placements. However, the benefits for students of having been on a placement were recognised and there was better understanding of how placements could raise aspirations and improve social, employability and course-related skills. Some staff gave individual examples of how students had been 'transformed' by a placement which had helped them mature, overcome a lack of confidence, or increase their level of independence. All this had an effect on staff 'buy-in' to the trial and had encouraged the widely held view among the staff interviewed that a work experience placement should be a universal offer to all their students.

In a few cases, there had also been staff concerns about how much time they might have to give to setting up and monitoring placements, but as almost all the case-study colleges had appointed coordinators, or coordinating teams, to manage the trials, this concern had been overcome quickly.



Staff interviewees did highlight, however, that in order for this positive engagement to flourish, the following conditions should be considered:

- Identifying and managing placements needs to be undertaken by a dedicated coordinator, or team, rather than teaching staff, who are unable to take on the role in addition to their existing duties (although in some cases personal tutors and teaching staff were involved in preparing students and monitoring placements).
- Placements need to be directly related to the course the students are taking, to provide a real insight into work in their chosen area (for example, see case study in Chapter 2 of how a national supermarket providing work experience assisted with curriculum development). Senior managers also pointed out that placements need to be discussed and negotiated with teaching staff, taking course deadlines into consideration. Although organising placements in college holidays, or students' 'free time' had sometimes been a means of avoiding conflict with some staff worried about loss of curriculum time. Placements which were seen as an integral part of the course, and fully supported by staff, were regarded as the most appropriate option.

Staff involved in teaching, tutoring and assisting with LLDD students were particularly enthusiastic in their engagement with the trials, and although this type of placement was often focused on general employability skills, the benefits for the young people involved were seen as very important, as it gave them the opportunity to show, as this tutor said, 'how well they could contribute' [to the workplace]. It also greatly boosted the confidence of students, who had often been overlooked as placement candidates, and were sometimes considered to be 'over-protected' by parents and staff.

In one of the case-study colleges, some staff were reluctant to support placements which was attributed, in part, to the way in which the trial was introduced. The coordinator explained: 'Timing was an issue for some tutors. They had their year planned, then this was sprung on them and they had to find time to work with us to set up placements'. More broadly, a reason for lack of staff engagement was explained by one interviewee as: 'Historically, a lot of staff haven't seen student progression out of college as being their job. It's a mindset. Their job is to teach them a subject and that's it'. The challenges to staff engagement here reflect the importance of the lessons that other colleges had already been able to learn: that placements must be carefully planned and negotiated with staff, and that the introduction of study programmes may encourage a broader view of student progression than just completing their course. One of the achievements of the trials appears to be the way in which successful placements have brought about that wider perspective.

## **4.2 Employer engagement**

There was a consensus amongst all the case-study colleges that employer engagement had improved as a result of the trials. In most cases, this improvement was considered

substantial, although in two colleges, interviewees still felt there were barriers to overcome related to DBS checks and health and safety. Most colleges already had good links with local employers, as a result of running apprenticeship programmes, and they had taken the opportunities presented by the trials to build on this relationship and to involve a greater variety of employers. As a senior manager explained: 'Employers locally know and respect the college and this is key to the project's success'.

Encouragingly, all of the 14 employers interviewed were engaged to the extent that they planned to continue offering students placements in the future.

The role of coordinators who had a specific remit to improve employer engagement across most of the colleges was regarded by interviewees as crucial to the development of employer links. This was mainly because employer engagement was seen as a time-consuming and labour-intensive task, and so could only be carried out successfully by someone with dedicated time. The role also provided a central point of contact within the college for employers, and helped facilitate the organisation and monitoring of placements. A college senior manager commented on the significance of the coordinator's role in building up employer links: 'As far as I'm aware, all the employers we are now using are new, and identified by (the coordinator). This has been a huge success'. Through the trial, colleges were working with more employers across a wider range of sectors.

#### **The role of the coordinators in engaging employers**

In one college, a large proportion of funding had been used to employ three work experience coordinators with dedicated time available to visit employers to discuss the needs of placements from the perspective of the college and the company. As a result of these conversations, some areas of industry had expressed an interest in working closer with the college through, for example, providing employability talks to students, while in other cases, helped to develop new relationships and secure placements across new sectors. When visiting employers, the coordinators will engage in conversations about the range of opportunities the college can offer. One coordinator said: '[it's] not just [about] creating the relationship around work experience, it's the whole package'.

In general, a specific type of employer was not targeted by colleges during the trial, rather the aim was to get as many employers engaged as possible. Having a broad range of employers, in terms of size and scope, was seen as important in order to provide a variety of placements.

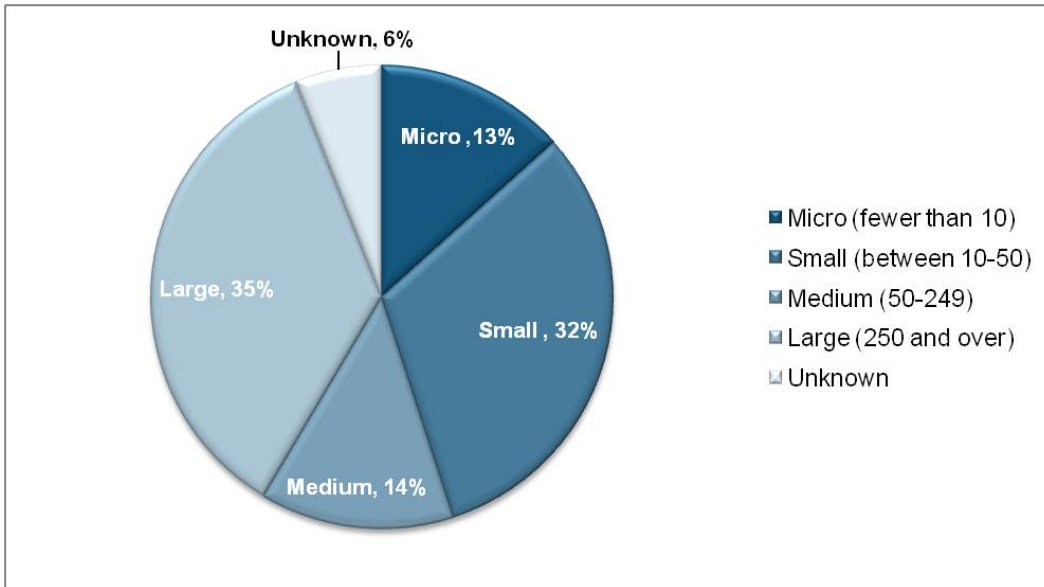
In total, 3,918 employers were listed in MI data as offering placements across the 25 colleges<sup>14</sup>. The MI data revealed that over one third of placements (35 per cent) were with a large employer and just under one third (32 per cent) with a small employer (as

---

<sup>14</sup> In some cases, employers may have been counted more than once if the company has been named slightly differently.

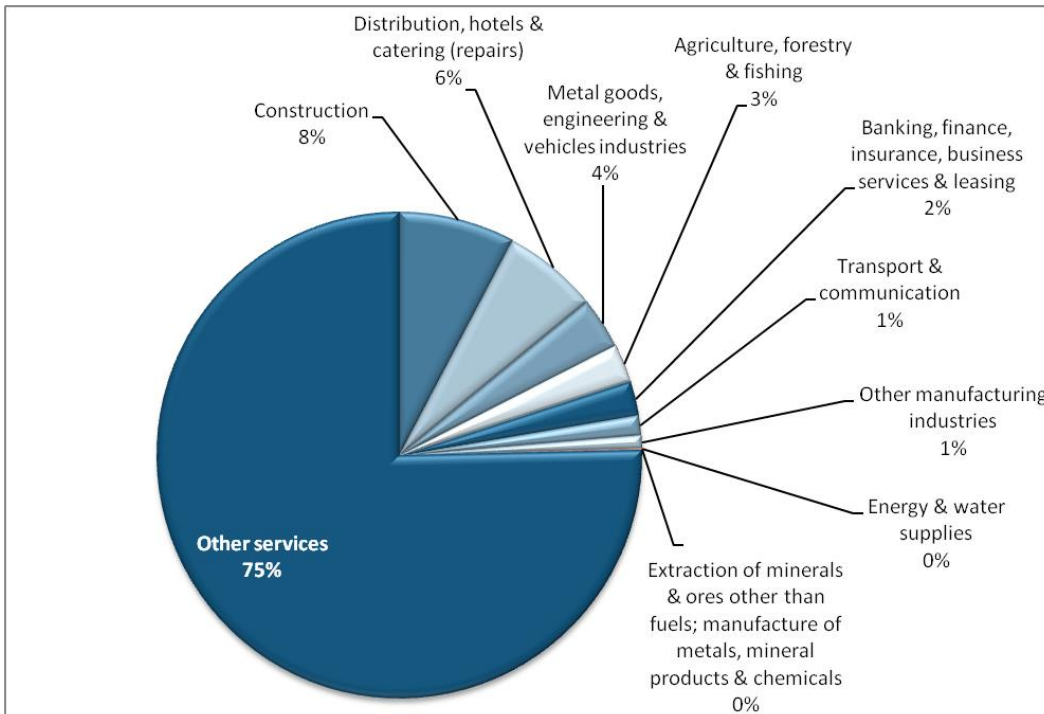
shown in Figure 9). This compares with 14 per cent with medium sized employers and 13 per cent with a micro employer.

**Figure 9: Size of employer (percentage of placements)**



Source: Work Experience Placement Trial MI data, submitted in March 2013.

**Figure 10: Employment sector (percentage of placements)**



Source: Work Experience Placement Trial MI data, submitted in March 2013.

As Figure 10 shows, three quarters of students undertook placements in ‘other services’<sup>15</sup> which included education settings (such as nurseries and children’s centres) and the retail sector for example<sup>16</sup>. Eight per cent of students carried out placements in the construction sector, while a further six per cent were placed in the distribution, hotels and catering sector.

The employers interviewed felt that offering work experience was part of their ‘corporate social responsibility’ and saw it as contributing to their local community. As discussed in Chapter 3, they did not require financial incentives for involvement. Those who often relied on volunteers to support their business (particularly charities) benefited from having work experience students carrying out valuable tasks for them and felt it was important to ‘give something back’ to society by offering young people the opportunity to develop skills. It is important to note that employers did not want young people to be treated as ‘cheap labour’. Employers invested time in giving students worthwhile experiences, at the same time as gaining benefits themselves. For example, one employer offering placements to LLDD at a country park had a structured programme in place. Each placement takes the same format involving work shadowing, followed by more hands-on work covering different areas. Students on placements are very much seen as part of the workforce.

The expansion of placements for LLDD was considered a particular success in four of the colleges, where not only had the students benefited greatly, but staff interviewees felt that employers had been made aware of how much such students could offer – as one coordinator put it: ‘Employers are often surprised by how good some of these young people are. Sometimes [they are] better than their own employees’. This, it was felt, would assist in finding such placements in future.

Some colleges had targeted particular vocational areas because they wanted to expand their placements to cover curriculum areas, such as construction or engineering. However, in two colleges, finding enough placements in these areas was challenging. Another college reported difficulties in finding placements for ICT students, which was attributed to data confidentiality issues.

In the two case-study areas where employer engagement had been most challenging, college interviewees referred to issues with the DBS checks and delays in documentation being returned, and concerns in engineering companies about taking students below the age of 18 due to perceived insurance issues. One of these colleges had also been less successful than others in persuading employers to take LLDD. This was thought to be because employers were put off by the level of support required for these placements and found it difficult to ‘look past the disability’. The contrast with other areas where LLDD placements had been very successful suggests that the

---

<sup>15</sup> These sectors were not nationally recognised categories and are therefore grouped within ‘other services’. This figure may also include some internal placements.

<sup>16</sup> Other examples include healthcare, security services, local authorities and the charity sector.

sharing of information about what works well in gaining employer engagement could be very helpful.

The obstacles to employer engagement of DBS checks, health and safety issues and insurance cover are interesting, as some colleges (as referred to above) had found these difficult to overcome, whereas others had been successful in dealing with them. The view of the successful colleges was that these concerns were largely the result of a lack of information for employers, and that once they were aware, for example, that students were covered by college insurance policies, it became less of an issue. However, there was recognition of the need for colleges to reduce the burden on employers where possible. Colleges that had been successful in dealing with barriers to engagement were involved in carrying out risk assessments, dealing with the processing of DBS checks and ensuring students had the correct insurance cover. College staff felt that employers generally responded very well to having these concerns removed, and it also meant that employers could no longer use them as an excuse not to engage (which was sometimes thought to be the case).

None of the case-study colleges had used financial incentives for employers. While some had considered doing so the overall perception was that they were not helpful. Some interviewees for example, held the opinion that any employer who wanted a financial incentive was providing placements for the wrong reasons, and most thought that they were unnecessary, because employers did not want them. The main drivers for employers to provide placements were considered to be community involvement, and the advantage of having a stake in building the skills of the future workforce. These advantages were considered important to emphasise when seeking employer engagement. Suggestions for ways in which incentives could be used related to providing facilities for employers (for example, cost-free meeting places, or catering outlets), or training courses (such as customer service, or mentoring training). Removing additional costs for employers, by providing students with personal protective equipment, was also considered important, particularly for smaller businesses.

In several colleges, interviewees commented on the need to overcome some initial reluctance amongst employers to provide placements due to previous negative experiences. In these cases, there was the perception that young people had not been adequately prepared, matched or supported. These factors were considered important for the successful engagement of employers. Overall, the role of the coordinator was crucial in overcoming any reluctance and engaging sufficient numbers of employers.

The intensive support for both students and employees was considered particularly effective amongst those colleges placing LLDD. College staff<sup>17</sup> visited students on placement once and sometimes twice a day, or were present for the duration of the placement. In addition, effective communication channels between the college and employer was important to ensure that any issues could be dealt with promptly. It was

---

<sup>17</sup> This could include coordinators, teaching staff and learning support staff.

also important for employers to be well briefed on the students they were placing. Some coordinators asked employers what they would expect of students prior to the placement to help with necessary preparations such as discussions about time management and appropriate behaviour, for example.

## **4.3 Student engagement**

### **4.3.1 How students engaged in the trial**

In eight of the ten colleges visited, staff interviewees were very pleased with the level of student engagement and positive impact of attending a placement. The general opinion was that students who had been on placement returned with greater motivation, more self-confidence, and a better understanding of the world of work and what would be expected of them as employees. Students on level 2 vocational courses were considered to have benefited in particular, because placements provided the opportunity to put their theoretical learning into practice, and this was confirmed by many of the students who were interviewed (further details of the impact of the placements can be found in Chapter 5). As this engineering tutor explained: 'A work placement is the most important thing that the college can do for a student, otherwise they are not prepared for the workplace'. There was also the indirect benefit for the minority of students, who realised that the career that they thought they wanted was not what they expected, and perhaps not what they were suited to.

A lack of confidence was considered to have been the main challenge to student engagement. In some colleges where students were described as coming from family backgrounds with little experience of employment, 'fear of the unknown' meant that students were nervous about the experience and required a great deal of reassurance from college staff. In order to overcome this, one college for example, arranged for employers to come in to talk to students prior to them starting their work experience placements. Again, this highlights the importance of good preparation for students prior to starting their placement.

In general, very few challenges were experienced once students had settled into their placements and student absence was a rare occurrence.

Geographical location was raised as a particular issue amongst staff in one of the case-study colleges, but is likely to be true for some other areas too. This related to the resistance of students to attending placements outside their immediate neighbourhood, and the need for staff to try to challenge this restriction on young people's opportunities. One suggested approach to overcoming this challenge was asking employers to attend the college and talk to the students before their placements began.

Most of the case-study colleges had used some of the trial funding to cover travel expenses or provide transport for students on placement. This support was considered important in encouraging participation by students, as was the provision of personal

protective equipment. In one college, participating students had been given vouchers worth £50 for good attendance on their placement. Staff interviewees explained that this was mainly to counter-act the objections of some parents, who had picked up on media stories about student 'free labour'. Some students had refused to take the vouchers, as they were satisfied with having had the opportunity to undertake a placement.

A challenge to student engagement which was highlighted particularly in one college related to some students having to attend placements on their 'study days'. Some students considered this their 'free time' and were resistant to giving this up for work experience. Some of the students interviewed here said that they had not been told about the placements until they had started their course, and so considered that they had not been informed early enough. As the coordinator explained: 'The ones who are committed to the course and see themselves progressing are more likely to engage. Motivation is key'. In another college, some students had not taken up the offer of a placement, as the tutor explained: 'Some of my students have part-time jobs, and would have to have given these up to do a placement. To make work experience more inclusive, you would do it in the three days that they are timetabled to be in college'.

### **4.3.2 Employer views on student engagement**

All the employers who were interviewed were satisfied with the way in which the students had participated in their placements and felt that they had been positively affected by their experience. Some referred to the initial nervousness of the young people, noting how students had gained confidence and benefited from team working and developing technical and social skills. The following employer's comment was similar to many others: 'They relish the opportunity to get out of college and see a real working environment. They are able to practise what they have learnt and build up their social skills'. Some employers said that they intended to offer employment to those who had been on placements with them.

### **4.3.3 Student views on work experience placements**

Most interviewed case-study students participating in work experience placements in the colleges had been told about the placements by coordinators and tutors. In most cases this information had been given at the beginning of their courses.

Those on level 1 and 2 courses usually had placements found for them, but level 3 students had more often found their own. Most participating students also had their travel expenses for placements paid by their college, and this was often cited as having been of great value in assisting their participation. All were positive about the support provided by their college staff in preparing them for, and in assisting them during, their placements.

All those interviewed were enthusiastic about participation in a placement and particularly valued the opportunity to gain experience of a 'real work environment';

meet new people; to be given responsibility; learn technical, social and communication skills; and gain confidence. Many also commented on the benefits of being able to put vocational skills into practice, and how the placement was useful for their CVs, and, where relevant, for higher education applications.

A lack of confidence and 'fear of the unknown' was the challenge most commonly mentioned amongst students undertaking their placements. Learning technical skills was also identified as an initial challenge amongst a few students, but once these had been mastered, it greatly increased their confidence. In addition, those who had not had travel expenses paid felt this had been a disadvantage for them and students in rural areas reported that they sometimes faced logistical difficulties in travelling to placements.

Students who had not participated in the placement trials were asked to comment on the reasons why they had not undertaken work experience. Reasons commonly related to concerns that they would fall behind with their college course, or just did not have sufficient time (particularly if they had part-time employment on days when they were not in college). This raises the issue of whether work experience is necessary or desirable for students who have some form of part-time employment. Here it is important to consider that genuine meaningful work experience is substantial and is relevant to a student's study programme and requires the employer to prepare a structured plan for the duration of the work placement that provides tangible outcomes for the student and the employer. It is unlikely that part-time employment will fulfil these criteria.

#### **4.3.4 Student views on employability skills**

Students participating in work experience who we interviewed as part of the case studies were asked to complete a short survey about their views on employability skills and how their placement had helped develop these skills (a total of 35 were completed).

Reflecting on the skills they needed to develop prior to undertaking work experience, respondents most commonly reported that they needed to develop their:

- decision-making skills (N=15)
- presentation skills (N=15)
- problem-solving skills (N=14)
- communication (N=11)
- time management skills (N=10)
- team-working (N=6)
- 'a positive attitude' (N=6).

The skills more frequently perceived to be valued most by employers were:

- team-work (N=28)
- time management (N=27)



- having a positive attitude (N=27)
- communication skills (N=26).

Respondents were also asked to comment on the extent to which their experience had already helped them (or they believed would help them) to develop these skills. The vast majority agreed or strongly agreed that their placement had helped/would help them develop:

- team-working skills (N=33)
- a positive attitude to work (N=33)
- communication skills (N=32)
- time-management skills (N=32).

Encouragingly, all but one respondent reported that they were satisfied (either very satisfied or fairly satisfied) with their placement (34 out of 35 students).

Students not participating in work experience who were interviewed during the case study visits identified the following skills and qualities as most important to show if they were an employee at a company (in order of frequency in which they were reported), which largely echoes those described above:

- a positive attitude/showing enthusiasm
- being reliable
- communications skills
- timekeeping/punctuality
- having the technical skills associated with the job
- confidence
- team working
- self-discipline
- dressing appropriately for the role.

The next chapter presents evidence from the evaluation of the impact of the trial on students, employers and colleges.

## 5. Impact of the trial

### Key findings

- Increased numbers of students were benefiting from work experience, and more employers were involved, due to the trial.
- The additional funding had enabled colleges to support work experience through the employment of coordinators who were instrumental in establishing and developing relationships with employers and coordinating placements. In turn, this helped work experience become more holistic and centralised and changed the college ethos. The funding also provided the opportunity to extend placements to more students.
- Colleges considered it important to capture the benefits of work experience and were developing and applying monitoring methods and tools.
- The trial helped students develop the skills necessary for employment, including team work, communication and interpersonal skills and enabled students to be more work-ready.
- Some students had gained or were in the process of securing employment or apprenticeships following their work experience placement.
- The trial had helped to maintain and develop colleges' relationships with employers.
- Employer benefits from providing work experience included increased capacity, staff development and recruitment of apprentices.

This chapter explores the perceived impact<sup>18</sup> of the work experience trial on students and how the impact of the trial is being monitored. The ways in which the additional funding has helped to support work experience is also explored.

### 5.1 Monitoring impact

Colleges placed importance on developing and applying effective methods of monitoring the impact of work experience. Commenting that monitoring was central to the trial and part of the programme, work experience coordinators said that they were planning to embed this function in their management processes. In particular, they considered that monitoring should capture the benefits to students including variety of work activities undertaken and range of skills gained. Colleges were using a variety of approaches to monitor the impact of the work experience. These included collating feedback from students and employers and placement visits by curriculum staff, support staff and work experience coordinators to, for example, carry out assessments to gather evidence for student portfolios. In one instance, the placement coordinator noted the difficulties of assessing the quality of placements for students on courses where work

---

<sup>18</sup> In general, no distinction was made between internal and external placements in terms of impact. Students interviewed during case-study visits were predominantly undertaking external placements.

experience is not a compulsory element due to a lack of targets and contribution towards course components.

In a few cases, colleges were using an electronic Individual Learning plan (ILP) which records students' qualifications and achievements. In one instance, this had been adapted to include a section for work experience, allowing students to log details of placements undertaken and the skills developed. There is also a template for employers to provide students with a reference which would then be attached to the ILP and provides students with documented evidence of their experience to show potential employers. This will then be linked up with destinations data in order to measure impact.

Examples of other cited ways in which impact was being monitored included:

- the completion of review sheets by employers on a weekly or fortnightly basis
- informal discussions amongst college staff
- post-work experience assessments with employers and students.

Employers noted that monitoring generally took place informally through contact between their organisation and college staff such as the placement coordinator or course leader. In other cases, more formal processes were in place for collating information through students logging their skills and achievements or working through work books which were signed off by the employer.

## 5.2 Impact on providers

Staff in nine of the ten case studies felt that the trial had changed work experience in their college. Some talked of a 'changed ethos', with work experience being more 'holistic' and 'centralised' owing to the employment of work experience coordinators and broadening the offer across departments. For example, one project manager remarked: 'everybody is now involved in work experience and know its part of their role'. A greater understanding about the potential benefits of work experience was also observed. In one college for example, raising awareness of work experience and employability skills was done in every lesson to help students realise its importance.

There was evidence that the trial had enabled colleges to offer more effective work experience to young people through, for example, offering a real insight into the world of work and encouraging staff to think differently and provide curriculum activities which relate to those delivered in the workplace. Other approaches considered effective in relation to specific types of students included developing work skills of NEET young people through a pre-apprenticeship programme and offering taster days for Foundation Learning students.

Increased numbers of students were benefiting from work experience, and more employers were involved, due to the trial. Meeting their aims of being involved in the trial (see Chapter 2), students who had not previously benefited were now involved to a

greater extent (such as those with LDD). To illustrate, in one college where the trial funding had enabled them to 'reintroduce and kick-start' work experience, a senior manager said 'the money was a Godsend'. The funding had helped to 'lift barriers', for example by enabling colleges to employ a coordinator who had *time* to organise work experience. Coordinators were instrumental in establishing and developing relationships with employers and coordinating placements. A curriculum leader noted that tutors would not have been able to develop such good links, and importantly, would not have been able to sustain these links alongside their teaching responsibilities.

Colleges commonly reported that the funding had provided the opportunity to extend work experience placements to more students, including those, for example, undertaking courses where this is not mandatory element. One work experience coordinator observed: 'We've been able to offer a variety of high- quality work experience to a wider range of young people that we couldn't do before, especially for young people who are quite disadvantaged and a long way from the labour market...we have the capacity to mentor and support those people and that has been a fantastic opportunity for us to be able to do that'.

The appointment of work experience coordinators or employer recruitment staff to help identify placements, build relationships with providers and oversee the process was considered important to enable young people to participate in high-quality placements and develop relevant work place skills. One placement manager reasoned: '...because without those relationships, you don't have work experience'.

Maintaining effective relationships with employers is critical to work experience procurement and provision. A senior manager interviewee observed: 'Employers will come back to colleges where they have good relationships and have trust. The business development arm of colleges needs to be very pro-active and very careful in how they manage placements'. Providers also highlighted the need to ensure the matching of students to the appropriate placement. In addition to relationships with employers, colleges noted that adopting a whole-organisation approach, because work experience is 'useful, valuable and here to stay', and ensuring students understand the importance of undertaking work experience, were also important.

Negative impacts on existing work experience identified by interviewees included challenges associated with achieving a whole-college change in attitude and encouraging all curriculum areas to embrace the change and the risk of overloading companies with requests for placements.

### **5.3 Perceived impact on students**

The work experience trial was widely perceived by students, colleges and employers to have helped develop the skills necessary for employment, including team work, communication and interpersonal skills. One senior manager highlighted the value of undertaking work experience for skills development: 'you don't get employability skills

without doing work experience...you can sit in the classroom and write a CV and you can role play interview techniques but you cannot learn how to interact with a group of people, turn up on time, socialise with people at lunch and break time...without doing it'.

Colleges, and in a few cases, employers reported that the work experience delivered through the trial had enabled young people to be more work-ready through, for example, developing an understanding of employer expectations and what is required in terms of time management, dress code and behaviour. In some cases, the experience was perceived to have had a positive impact on students' punctuality and attendance in college. A work experience coordinator said: 'In the past we'd had some issues about attendance, and now instead of it being tutors constantly nagging about attendance and punctuality, now they have a practical understanding about punctuality and how important that is in the world of work – they have a practical understanding of it from their work experience – they know they can't be two minutes late. This message spreads through the whole college'.

Examples of other impacts identified by providers, employers and students included:

- Increased confidence through developing the skills and abilities required to gain employment. An employer said: 'you can see how much they have come on – the way they interact with staff and customers, you'd think they'd been here for a long time; [their] confidence has grown no end'.
- Exposure to the world of work, as the following comment by a student illustrates: 'I've got a different perspective on how the business sector works – the course is very theory based but this is what it is like in reality'.

In some cases, providers and students noted the value of work experience in helping to determine whether the sector or type of work was a route that they wanted to pursue in the future. Enhancing students' CVs and increasing motivation to progress into employment were also identified by providers.

### **Future career choices**

Two students were undertaking a two year BTEC course in hospitality. They undertook a three week block placement at a hotel where they gained experience across a number of areas including housekeeping and waitressing. They both valued the opportunity to gain a real insight into the world of work and undertake a variety of roles. They felt that the experience would put them in a strong position when applying for future employment opportunities as they had developed a range of skills such as communication skills and team working. One student felt that the placement had helped to confirm her future career choice in the sector, while the other subsequently decided it was not a route she wanted to pursue although she valued the experience positively in helping make this decision.

Where specifically mentioned, placements were also perceived to have had a positive impact on LLDD including increased confidence and developing independence through, for example, developing their ability to travel to their work experience alone.

Students not involved in work experience as part of their course felt that those who were would gain practical experience that would be viewed positively by potential employers and the opportunity to put theory into practice.

There was evidence that some students including LLDD had gained (or were in the process of securing) employment or apprenticeships following their work experience placement. A senior manager interviewee reflected on the progress that one particular student had made through his placement: 'One kid used to be really disruptive...constant poor behaviour...he's now on the [company's] paid placement and he's [motivated] – he talks to me, looks me in the eye, tells me how well he's getting on, what he's learning, and now he's been offered a job'. Moreover, in a small number of cases, students' enthusiasm and enjoyment in the role meant that they returned to the company in the holidays, or during days they were not at college, to work.

A college reported that a few students had been recruited for employment during their course as a result of the work experience they undertook. This was felt to be problematic amongst staff because students had not completed their course. However, this presented a positive outcome for students and showed evidence of progression. Overall, there appeared to be no real evidence of negative impact of undertaking work experience.

### **The impact of work experience on LLDD**

LLDD at this college were involved in running a café with support from their learning support assistant or job coach. This support was considered crucial for the company to offer placements to a number of students at the same time. The students work alongside other staff and volunteers in the café three days a week on an ongoing basis. They undertake a range of activities such as cooking, running a lunch club for the over 50s, preparing food, staffing the café, taking orders and dealing with money. The café was rated five out of five for hygiene and the students keep the kitchen clean themselves. At first, the LLDD were not sure what to do and were shy - 'then you see them blossom and come out of their shells'. At first 'they wouldn't say boo to a goose but they gain in confidence'. The students won an award for their volunteering work. The experience has equipped them with the necessary skills for employment such as working with others and enhanced their confidence.

The employer felt that the students would be missed by staff and the community if they were not undertaking placements at the cafe, noting that 'It is good for business and good for the community. It is good for building relationships across the community'. She felt it had helped to reduce the stigma the community associated with this group of young people.

In a minority of cases, employers identified challenges experienced by students including the length of the working day and time keeping although students did adapt.

Few interviewees noted whether the impact of the trial differed by the type of student. However, where comments were made, perceptions related to level 3 students being more mature and open to work experience than those at level 2 and higher attaining and more motivated students gaining more from the experience because they recognised the value of undertaking a placement. Interestingly, an employer observed a difference in the impact of the placements on level 2 and level 3 students which was attributed to their ability. As a result, it was decided that future placements should be tailored to better suit different needs and linked to the curriculum.

## 5.4 Perceived impact on employers

As noted in section 5.2 above, there was some indication that the trial had helped maintain and develop relationships with employers. The work experience coordinators had played a key role in this process (as discussed in Chapter 4). In one instance, discussions had resulted in some areas of industry expressing an interest in working closer with the college. In another case, it was felt that employers' attitudes towards LLDD had changed. This was attributed to the good support and relationships with employers.

The consensus amongst employers was that they were satisfied with their involvement in work experience. The benefits for organisations included increased capacity (for example, students on placement released staff to do other work), staff development such as management skills and developing a workforce for future vacancies or gaining apprentices. An employer observed– 'Long term, all companies need good employees, so even if they don't come to us, we see it as building up the workforce of the future'.

Employers were generally positive about their relationship with colleges. For example, an employer said that communication channels via email and telephone had been effective and allowed them to feel connected at all times, while another commented on the shared understanding of how the company could support the college in preparing students for employment.

Staff time was identified as the main cost of employer involvement in providing work experience but this was not seen as a barrier, with some suggestion that the benefits of offering placements outweighed the associated cost, as illustrated by this employer's remarks:

'There's cost in terms of time allocation and providing resources, but the company is willing to absorb it. We spend a lot of time working with young people and trying to fine-tune what we are doing. Even if only one in eight becomes an apprentice, it's worth it. The emphasis of the business is on production, but we

need to be doing this for the future. I was an apprentice and people had to invest time in me, so I want to do the same.'

The next chapter presents a value for money assessment of the Work Experience Placement Trials.



## 6. Value for money

### Key findings

- On average, colleges spent £69,482 of their £80,000 funding in Year 1 and £96,584 of their £97,000 funding in Year 2.
- The largest proportion of funding was spent on Model 3 (providing extra resources, often employing a member of staff to coordinate work experience).
- Eight colleges in Year 1 and thirteen colleges in Year 2 reported spending over their budgets, an additional £2,633 and £15,400 on average respectively.
- Some colleges had not spent all of the funds during the trial period, although evidence from progress reports and case studies suggests that some colleges had spent considerable time *planning* for the provision of work experience which would gradually be expanded.
- The average additional cost to the college of a work experience placement in Year 2 was calculated, by dividing the total number of placements by actual additional expenditure, as £236 (set-up costs are likely to have inflated the average cost of a placement in Year 1). However, the *context* of work experience is important when calculating costs; the average cost varied across colleges, depending on the number of students placed, their characteristics and level of support needs, and the length of placements.
- College staff clearly felt that particular elements of the trial had been important for success, namely the role of the coordinator, support for students (particularly more intensive support for LLDD), and investment in pre-placement preparation. Although some elements might be considered expensive, they are likely to achieve efficiencies.

This chapter presents a value for money (VfM) assessment of the trial, drawing on financial information provided by the colleges and qualitative evidence collected from the case-study visits.

VfM can be thought of in terms of the “three Es”:

- **Economy** – details of expenditure and what activities have been delivered using the funding by colleges following different approaches? Note that a quantitative assessment of economy has been fairly limited, as MI focuses on outputs (i.e. number of work placements) but not on the specific inputs in terms of activities undertaken by each student during their placement, or a breakdown of other costs incurred by colleges. Therefore we also draw on case-study evidence.
- **Efficiency** – how many work placements have taken place; and what is the average ‘cost per placement’? As colleges were not advised how to calculate ‘cost per placement’, caveats are applied to analysis of quantitative data (see below).

- **Effectiveness** – how generally successful have the placements been; have they been completed, and what impact have they had on the students involved, particularly in terms of post-16 destinations? As the quantitative MI focuses on *outputs*, not *outcomes*, effectiveness is explored qualitatively through the case studies.

*Economy* and *efficiency* are explored in sections below (as student outcomes have not been measured quantitatively, see a discussion on *impact* and *effectiveness* in Chapter 5).

## 6.1 Economy

In March 2013, colleges were asked to submit the following details on *expenditure*, overall and broken down by work experience model:

- total expenditure for 2011-12 academic year (up until July 2012)
- total expenditure for September 2012-March 2013 and *expected* expenditure for April-July 2013 (note that some provided two distinct figures which were added together to give a total figure for expenditure for Year 2, while others just gave one figure which was assumed to be a total for the whole of Year 2 which they had summed themselves).

As Table 2 shows, on average, colleges spent £69,482 of their £80,000 funding in Year 1 and £96,584 of their £97,000 funding in Year 2. The largest proportion of funding was spent on Model 3 (providing extra resources, often employing a member of staff to coordinate work experience, as discussed in Chapter 3). The smallest amount was spent on Model 2 (combating challenges faced by SMEs). It should be noted, however, that models are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, colleges not specifically assigning funds to Model 2 might still have found ways to engage SMEs.

**Table 2: Average expenditure, overall and by model**

	<b>Year 1 (11/12) N=24 £</b>	<b>Year 2 (12/13) N=25 £</b>
Budget	80,000	97,000
Average £ Spent	69,482	96,584
Average £ Model 1	15,184	22,684
Average £ Model 2	13,662	17,277
Average £ Model 3	<b>36,666</b>	<b>46,213</b>
Average £ Model 4	16,831	22,103
Average £ Model 5	19,999	26,380
Average £ Model 6	12,625	18,937

**Key:**

Model 1: Removing cost barriers for employers (for example, by providing materials or financial incentives)

Model 2: Investigating specific challenges faced by small to medium-sized employers (SMEs) when offering work placements

Model 3: Providing extra resources to colleges (for example, to employ staff to organise work placements and liaise with employers)

Model 4: Exploring the timing of placements for students (for example, investigating whether a block of time or individual days throughout a course is most effective and why)

Model 5: Supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) or vulnerable/disadvantaged students (for example, considering support employers need to employ young people with specific needs).

Source: MI financial data submitted March 2013

As Table 3 shows, six colleges in Year 1 and two in Year 2 reported being 'on budget'. The MI data did not necessarily capture whether these colleges had supplemented funds with other college budgets, although eight colleges in Year 1 and thirteen in Year 2 reported over-spends of an average of £2,633 and £15,400 respectively. This clearly shows that some colleges were supplementing funds with other resources. Table 3 shows that ten colleges in both years had not spent all of the funds (an average of £27,350 in Year 1 and £21,060 in Year 2 remained un-spent). However, it should be noted that some colleges had spent significant time in Year 1 planning work experience which would be provided to a greater extent in Year 2 and beyond, suggesting that this may not be a recurring issue in subsequent years. Moreover, providers submitted expenditure information at the end of March in Year 2 and although they were asked to predict expenditure for the whole academic year, some might not have included April-July expenditure, which could account for under-spend.

**Table 3: Average over- and under-spend**

	Year (11/12) N=24	Year 2 (12/13) N=25
Budget in £	80,000	97,000
Number of colleges on budget	6	2
Number of colleges with under-spend	10	10
Average under-spend in £	27,350	21,060
Number of colleges with over-spend	8	13
Average over-spend in £	2,633	15,400

Source: MI financial data submitted March 2013

As discussed in Chapter 3, case-study colleges reported ‘tangible’ expenditure, including: recruiting one or more work experience coordinators; funding LLDD support workers and job coaches to accompany students on placements, or other less intensive student support for students in general, such as general mentoring; physical resources, including safety equipment and an online tool for employers to advertise work placements and for students to apply for them and upload CVs; and student expenses, such as travel or meals. A breakdown of the separate costs was not submitted by colleges. As discussed in Chapter 5, the funding had undoubtedly had a positive impact on college provision of work experience. In particular, the recruitment of coordinators had helped to develop a systematic and structured approach to work experience.

## 6.2 Efficiency

As reported in Chapter 2, *at least* 9,725 students participated in work experience placements during the two-year trial (and this is likely to be an under-estimate as MI data was only provided in time for analysis by 23 of the 25 colleges in Year 1). Note, however, that colleges were already providing work experience and would have been doing so without the trial funding. Some also supplemented trial funds with other budgets (see Section 6.1 above). Case-study evidence suggests that colleges were not always able to separate work experience provided by the trial from other work experience, as funds will have been combined. Moreover, the funds were not used to pay directly for placements provided through the trial as employers did not charge for their time. Rather, funds were used to employ a coordinator, for example, who will have worked across the whole college and will have benefited all students doing placements. Therefore, we are unable to say what proportion of the 9,725 placements will and will

not have been provided without the trial funds. However, to calculate the average additional cost of a placement to colleges (see below) we have to use the numbers provided by them with these caveats in mind.

Case-study findings show that college staff found it very difficult to calculate the actual cost per placement at an individual student level. This is because employers were not charging to provide work experience, placements were very different from each other in nature and length, and staff were not sure what to include in cost calculations (for example, there were many hidden costs, including staff time to organise placements). Because there were no direct charges from employers for placements, there is no evidence to suggest that colleges were focusing on certain types of placements to reduce costs.

To give a *broad indication* of additional costs to the colleges in the trial, we have divided the number of placements provided by a college in Year 2<sup>19</sup> by their reported *actual* total expenditure in the same year (although some colleges might not have included additional funds spent in the figures submitted). As the MI financial data in Year 2 was submitted for September-July 2013, but MI detailing numbers of pupils receiving work placements was submitted for September-March 2013 only, we have calculated this on a pro-rata basis, assuming an even spread of placements across the academic year. Based on these calculations, with the above caveats in mind, the average additional cost to the colleges of a work experience placement was £236 (this equates to £11.45 per day). The range of costs per placement across colleges was £47 to £3,008. This will depend on the number of students placed and their needs, as well as the length of placement. Exploring this further, for example, the college with an average cost of £3,008 in Year 2 had in fact placed 22 LLDD in extended placements (average length of 105 days), so their average cost *per day* was one of the lowest across colleges, at £29 (see Appendix B for a college-level breakdown of total expenditure, numbers of students placed, length of placements and cost per day). Another college had placed 125 students (85 per cent of whom were LLDD) for an average of £509 for placements which were on average 13-days (£39 per day). The college with the lowest cost per placement (£47) had placed 1,358 students (17 per cent of whom were LLDD) for an average of 19 days, with a cost per day of £2. To summarise, the context of work experience is important when calculating costs, including the number of students being placed, their characteristics and level of support needs, as well as the length of their placements.

As colleges and students were often listed in the MI as being involved in a combination of models, it is not possible to calculate additional cost per placement *per model*. Similarly, as most colleges did not provide a breakdown of costs of separate activities *within* models, it was not possible to calculate the range or average costs of activities across colleges. For these reasons, it has not been possible to explore the most cost

---

<sup>19</sup> We have based this calculation on Year 2 data, which is likely to be more realistic in terms of 'running costs', as Year 1 included set-up costs which will have over-inflated the average.

effective model, or activity within a model. However, college staff clearly felt that particular elements of the trial had been important for success, namely the role of the coordinator, support for students (particularly more intensive support for LLDD), and investment in pre-placement preparation.

At the outset, some elements might be considered expensive, yet are likely to achieve efficiencies. For example, recruiting a central coordinator is likely to be more cost-effective than staff in individual departments working in isolation. Similarly, intensive support for LLDD might be considered expensive, but was undoubtedly thought to be cost-effective given the impact on students (see Chapter 5). As one coordinator commented, 'this [LLDD] cohort definitely has a higher cost than average because of the support required...[but] it has provided value for money because they are the students who need work experience the most, so we have made good use of the funding'.

The next chapter presents findings on the future of work experience including sustaining development and progress to date.

## 7. The future of work experience

### Key findings

- The principal factors contributing to successful work experience placements were effective coordination, good matching of students to placements, ensuring students were well-prepared for placements and flexibility in timing of placements.
- All the employers who were interviewed planned to offer placements in future
- Staff in all the case-study colleges intended their programmes to be sustainable, but most had concerns about the long-term financial implications.

This chapter considers the views of staff in the case-study colleges about the most important factors for successful work experience, and the main challenges. It also presents the views of employers on their future provision of placements and concludes with a discussion of the sustainability of the work experience programme.

### 7.1 What contributes to successful work experience?

There was a common view amongst the college staff who were interviewed on the main factors contributing to successful work experience placements. These were:

- The role of a **coordinator** in proactively finding placements, liaising with employers, organising student matching and preparation, and acting as the main point of contact between employers and the college was regarded as essential amongst case-study interviewees (as discussed in Chapter 4). The use of the trial funding to pay for coordinator posts was seen as a significant element to the success of the project. Whereas in the past, each faculty where students undertook work experience may have had its own system for organising placements, the benefits of having an overall college system had been made obvious, as one teacher pointed out: 'A key element of effectiveness stems from having a structure in place and having consistency across the faculties is key – a central resource to coordinate it, but being fed information from the students and tutors'. The value to employers of having a central point of contact in the college supported the view from college staff themselves about the importance of this role.
- **Flexibility in the timing and length of placements** to fit in with employers was seen as necessary in order to gain the support of employers and manage the diversity of placements required. Although college staff admitted that this could sometimes present challenges for those teaching courses, a willingness to be flexible was often cited as important to securing high-quality placements.
- The need to have a system in place for **matching students** to placements and ensuring the quality and usefulness of the placement was an important factor for both students and employers. College staff reported the use of student application forms, interviews (carried out by college staff, or employers) and visits

to employer premises to ensure that there was mutual benefit from the placement. Good communication was linked to this – many college staff spoke about the need for employers to have a named contact in the college who they could contact as appropriate as well as the requirement to visit students while they were on placement.

- Adequate **student preparation** for a placement was also commonly identified by interviewees (and is also discussed in Chapter 4). In several colleges, staff reported how some employers had initially been reluctant to provide placements because of previous negative experiences, where young people had been sent to them without any understanding of what to expect, how to behave, or even how to get to their placement. In order to overcome this, colleges sought to ensure that appropriate information was provided to students so that they were well informed and that students were well supported by college staff if they lacked confidence, or had special needs. In some colleges, students undertook an employability skills course before going on placement, and in all the colleges where LLDD went to placements, there were comprehensive preparation and support systems for the students, and close contact with the employer.

## 7.2 Future employer involvement

All employers interviewed stated that they intended to carry on providing placements, and four said that they hoped to expand their placement programme. They were all very positive about the success of the placements and the impact on the students. This following comment from an employer was characteristic of the general attitude of satisfaction and commitment to future involvement:

‘It has benefits all round. We develop our own people as well, as they are working with the young people and helping them get the most out of it. Long-term, all companies need good employees, so even if they don’t come to us, we see it as building up the workforce of the future’.

Bureaucracy was considered to be discouraging some employers who in principle were sympathetic to providing placements. Employers said that they appreciated tasks such as risk assessments and DBS checks being carried out by college staff. This removed a burden from them and made it easier to encourage their employees to become involved in the delivery of placements. Subsequent to this, new guidance (see page 10) has confirmed that risk assessments are required where employers do not already employ young people. Large companies generally found such formalities less of a burden than smaller employers, but the more that college staff could assist in these areas, the more positive employer responses were likely to be.

Related to this was the view that many potentially interested employers were discouraged from offering placements by ‘myths’, such as needing to have specific insurance for placement students, or having to have all their workforce DBS checked. If colleges could provide information which clarified the legal and insurance positions



involved in taking 16-19 year-old placement students, then this might help to reduce these fears.

Employers were strongly supportive of the need to engage with young people and help their future careers but were also realistic about the need to persuade employers that there was much to be gained from offering work experience placements. Colleges may wish therefore to promote the 'try before you buy' angle to employers looking for future employees or apprentices, to promote the benefits of involvement. In a few case-study areas, college staff had put successful placement photographs and histories on their web sites and produced leaflets, which could be used as promotional material.

### **7.3 Sustainability of the work experience programme**

There was a positive response from college interviewees about their hopes for the sustainability of their work experience programmes, with their intention being not only to continue with their current programme, but to expand it to include more students, from more departments or faculties and at different levels of study. Although this was partly connected to the forthcoming introduction of 16 to 19 study programmes, it was also a measure of how much they considered their students had gained from their placements.

This positive outlook was qualified, however, by comments related to the future uncertainty of funding and college finances. The role of coordinators with dedicated time had played an important part in the success of the trials, and college staff were particularly concerned that a lack of funding might have a negative impact on this role. In at least three colleges, senior staff said that they intended to find the funding from college resources, but in others there was less certainty about the long-term ability to do this, particularly as programmes expanded and became more expensive. In two colleges there was scepticism about their ability to sustain their programme into the future, with the coordinator in one warning: 'If we can't make the finances of the college balance in the next couple of years, we won't be able to maintain this'. In the other, the coordinator had serious concerns about how the programme would operate if his role, and that of his assistants, were not funded: 'We've only just got it started – the tutors will have to take it on board when we finish. I think it will fall off a cliff – they need us to stay, but there's no money to support that'.

In colleges where there had been successful programmes to provide placements for LLDD, staff commented on the expense of this highly supported model. While they thought it was important to provide opportunities for these students, there was recognition that the cost was considerable.

It is worth noting that colleges can make use of the flexibility in the post-16 funding reforms being introduced to support curriculum reform (institutions will attract a standard rate of funding for each student which will cover qualification and non-qualification activity retention and with additional funding for those at a disadvantage) to expand work experience as part of their post-16 provision.

The final chapter presents the conclusions from the evaluation and recommendations for policymakers and colleges.

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

### 8.1 Conclusions

The main conclusion from this evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials is that they supported the development of a more systematic and structured approach to the planning and delivery of work experience for 16 to 19 year old students. The ten case-study colleges participating in the trials valued the additional resource which enabled them to test different placement models, innovate and assure the quality of the work experience they offered. As a result, work experience was gaining a more strategic focus and a higher status in colleges.

Investment in a work experience coordinator is key to making work experience a more centrally managed and coordinated college-wide process. Providing extra resources to colleges was the most prevalent work experience placement model trialled and funding the recruitment of a coordinator accounted for most of this investment. College senior managers highlighted the additional capacity work experience coordinators gave them to manage the cross-college procurement and organisation of work placements. Coordinators played four significant roles: they managed the contact with employers to secure placements, they worked with heads of departments and programme teams to help integrate work experience with the curriculum, they coordinated the preparation of students for going on placements and they played a key role in visiting students on placement.

Flexibility is instrumental in managing the demand and supply of work experience placements. College senior managers and coordinators valued the opportunities the trial gave them to innovate and try out different ways of organising placements. They used a variety of placement timings as appropriate to balance the requirements of students and their courses on the one hand and the requirements of employers on the other. The feedback from students and employers was equally positive regardless of the approach.

Support for students undertaking placements can make a useful contribution in enabling them to benefit from work experience. Colleges were supporting students in several ways, including briefing and preparation, one-to-one advice, visiting students on placement and in some cases paying for travel and work clothes. They provided enhanced support for students with LDD which was the second-most prevalent work experience model trialled. Coordinators, mentors, coaches and support assistants worked with these students to support them through the placement process and assist them in maximising the benefit from work experience.

Providing placements that expose students to a real work environment is important. Students interviewed for the evaluation valued this experience, which enabled them to put vocational skills into practice. The experience had also helped them to develop employability skills such as technical, social and communication skills.

The genesis of this research was the Wolf Report (2011) which recommended an evaluation of ‘models of supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds’ (Recommendation 21, p. 131). The evaluation has provided evidence of how the placement models work and their outcomes for participants. This will help to inform the organisation and delivery of placements which will be an integral part of the forthcoming study programmes. It is important that the experience and ‘voice’ of students, college staff and employers obtained through this evaluation inform what Wolf asserts is a critical requirement: ‘Helping young people to obtain genuine work experience ... should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years’ (p.130).

## 8.2 Recommendations

The report concludes by presenting recommendations for policy and practice. The messages are based on ‘what works’ evidence.

### Messages for the DfE

DfE should continue to help employers to understand that work experience placement health and safety and DBS check requirements are not bureaucratic processes. This would help to support the procurement and provision of placements.

DfE should disseminate good practice examples of internship-type models of work experience for LLDD. This would help to address employers’ apprehension by showing that with the right support LLDD can flourish in the workplace.<sup>20</sup>

DfE should advise colleges, schools and work-based learning providers on what counts as success in work experience. For example, if a student is offered and takes up a job or apprenticeship as a result of doing work experience and does not complete their course, should this be recorded as a success rather than being counted as course drop-out?

### Messages for colleges, schools<sup>21</sup> and work-based providers

Colleges, schools and work-based providers should consider appointing a work experience coordinator. This is a cost-effective way of driving forward work experience and centralising the management and organisation of placements. A coordinator is an important part of the college structure for effective work experience delivery.

---

<sup>20</sup> Supported Internships for LLDD, currently being piloted by the DfE, provide a structured study programme, based at an employer, that is tailored to the individual needs of the young person and will equip them with the skills they need for the workplace. This will include on-the-job training, backed by expert job coaches to support interns and employers, and the chance to study for relevant qualifications – where appropriate.

<sup>21</sup> Due to the focus on work experience for 16-19 year olds, the messages are most relevant to school sixth forms.

Colleges, schools and work-based providers should explore what they need to put in place to scale up work experience provision for their students, including procuring enough placements of the right type and integrating work experience in study programmes. They can make use of the flexibility in the post-16 funding reforms being introduced to support raising of the participation age, which will allow them more autonomy to expand work experience as part of their post-16 provision.

Colleges, schools and work-based providers should think about how best to continue sharing their work experience 'story' across their institutions to maximise student and staff engagement by explaining the benefits with real life examples and illustrations. This could be included in continuing professional development for heads of faculty/department and tutors. Students who have completed work experience can be used as ambassadors to describe their placement 'journey' and explain the benefits gained.

Colleges, schools and work-based providers should examine how effectively they are monitoring the quality of work experience placements, including evaluating and reviewing the outcomes. For example: Are learning objectives agreed at the beginning of the placement and is progress towards the objectives reviewed at the end? Are employers as well as students and college staff involved in this process? How consistent is this process across the college?

Colleges, schools and work-based providers should consider what follow-up contact and communication is required for employers who have offered placements. This could include providing feedback on the post-placement progress made by students, including qualifications achieved and their progress to higher education, employment and apprenticeships. Employers appreciate finding out about what students go on to achieve.

To summarise, the evidence suggests that there are a number of steps that a college, school or work-based provider should take when providing quality work experience. These are listed in Figure 11 below.

**Figure 11: Steps to providing quality work experience**



## References

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2013). *Making Work Experience Work* [online]. Available:

[http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/5832%20Work%20experience%20leaflet%20\(WEB\).pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/5832%20Work%20experience%20leaflet%20(WEB).pdf) [26 June, 2013].

Confederation of British Industry (2013). *Changing the Pace: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2013*. London: CBI [online]. Available:

[http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2119176/education\\_and\\_skills\\_survey\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2119176/education_and_skills_survey_2013.pdf) [24 June, 2013].

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2011). *Plan for Growth*. London: BIS [online]. Available: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/growth/the-plan-for-growth> [26 June, 2013].

Heseltine, M. (2012). *No Stone Unturned in Pursuit of Growth*. London: BIS [online]. Available: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/n/12-1213-no-stone-untuned-in-pursuit-of-growth> [19 April, 2013].

Kahn, L., Abdo, M., Hewes, S., McNeil, B., and Norman, w. (2011). *The Way to Work. Young People Speak Out on Transitions to Employment*. London: The Young Foundation [online]. Available: <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/the-way-to-work.pdf> [26 June, 2013].

Mann, A. (2012). *Work Experience: Impact and Delivery. Insights from the Evidence*. London: Education and Employers' Workforce [online]. Available: [http://www.educationandemployers.org/media/15807/work\\_experience\\_report\\_april\\_2012\\_.pdf](http://www.educationandemployers.org/media/15807/work_experience_report_april_2012_.pdf) [27 June, 2013].

Reid, A. (2011). *Skills for Business : More to Learn?*. London: BCC [online]. Available: [http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/assets/downloads/policy\\_reports\\_2011/Skills%20for%20business%20-%20more%20to%20learn.pdf](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/assets/downloads/policy_reports_2011/Skills%20for%20business%20-%20more%20to%20learn.pdf) [27 June, 2013].

Rüdiger, K. (2013). *Employers are from Mars, Young People are from Venus: Addressing the Young People/Jobs Mismatch* (CIPD Learning to Work Initiative). London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [online]. Available: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/MarsVenus%20FINAL%2030%2004%2013.pdf> [26 June, 2013].

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2012). *UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey 2011: England Results* (Evidence Report 46). London: UKCES [online]. Available: <http://www.ukces.org.uk/assets/ukces/docs/publications/evidence-report-46-uk-employer-skills-survey-2011-england-report.pdf> [27 June, 2013].

Wolf, A. (2011). *Review of Vocational Education: the Wolf Report*. London: DfE [online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/The%20Wolf%20Report.pdf> [21 June, 2013].



## Appendix A

**Table 4: Number of placements (in ascending order), at college-level, and proportion of LLDD (Years 1 and 2 combined)**

College	Number of placements listed in the MI*	% of placements which were undertaken by LLDD**
2	40	40
1	74	100
3	77	20
7	130	32
4	154	16
6	161	16
11	171	19
8	206	92
5	220	42
13	222	32
9	236	9
10	236	43
18	316	23
23	320	37
19	326	9
21	368	40
12	421	26
14	474	40
15	525	55
17	528	33
16	541	24
22	597	23
20	694	20
24	994	24
25	1794	19

\* It should be noted that some students could be listed more than once in the MI, if they participated in more than one placement. As the entries were anonymised, excluding a student Unique Learner Number (ULN), we were unable to restrict the analysis to individual students only. Therefore, we refer to number of *placements*, rather than number of students.

\*\* Note that not all of the records listed in the MI were successfully matched to the ILR. Of the 9725 placements, 8739 were successfully matched to be able to explore if they were LLDD.

## Appendix B

Table 5: College-level financial breakdown (Year 2)

College	Overall expenditure September 2012-March 2013** (Year 2)	Number of placements	Additional cost per placement	Average length of placements (days)	Cost per day	% of students placed who were LLDD
1	66182	22	3008	105	29	100
2	43160	23	1877	21	89	43
3	59818	54	1108	17	64	19
4	61536	68	905	4	248	10
5	99909	122	819	10	81	44
6	60582	78	777	11	70	9
7	61727	90	686	6	111	38
8	63636	125	509	13	39	85
9	63636	157	405	11	38	12
10	91720	236	389	13	30	41
11	50909	140	364	8	46	20
12	63636	179	356	4	87	23
13	61727	189	327	30	11	29
14	43712	150	291	9	32	57
15	71283	253	282	32	9	54
16	43718	179	244	15	17	30
17	70636	299	236	19	12	33
18	64273	276	233	12	19	19
19	63503	276	230	26	9	8
20	63636	322	198	33	6	23
21	43340	281	154	37	4	39
22	83418	597	140	31	4	22
23	25571	312	82	5	17	32
24	50909	737	69	25	3	19
25	64385	1358	47	19	2	17

\*We have based this table on Year 2 data, which is likely to be more realistic in terms of 'running costs', as Year 1 included set-up costs which will have over-inflated the average.

\*\*Although colleges were asked to provide costs for the whole academic year, the number of placements was based on September-March, thus expenditure was calculated on a pro-rata basis in order to be able to calculate a cost per placement.



Department  
for Education

© Crown copyright [October 2013]

**Ref: DFE- RR298**

**ISBN: 978-1-78105-266-2**

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or e-mail: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at Jonathan Johnson, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Email: [jonathan.johnson@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.johnson@education.gsi.gov.uk)

This document is also available from our website at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/research>