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Beyond Big Business, Opportunities and Challenges for Irish HEIs in Engaging with Family Businesses and Community & Voluntary Groups through the Student Work Placement Process

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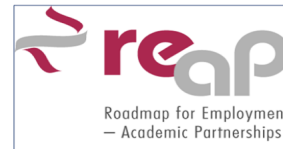


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Beyond Big Business for Student Work Placement: An Overview of Project Results



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Background to Project



- El Amoud and Buckley (2010) identified 411 undergraduate courses with a work placement element among 23 Irish HEIs, with almost 11,000 students undertaking placement in non-clinical programmes on an annual basis.
- 2011 REAP report '*Work Placement in Third Level Programmes*' suggested that:
 - HEIs, employers and students all agree that work placements make a valuable contribution to the third-level educational experience. In particular, work placements were considered to enhance the employability prospects of future graduates as the industry competences gained through informal learning in the workplace make individuals more employment ready (REAP, 2011:5).
- Economic climate causes greater difficulty for work placement practitioners in Irish HEIs to secure placements for all students.
 - There are not enough work experience placements available to meet the growing demand from students... For education institutions, this means that finding work experience for students can often be time-consuming, difficult, and not always successful (REAP, 2011:52).
- How to overcome shortfall?
 - Develop new partnerships with organisations who may not traditionally have been seen as within the reach of HEIs, but which are abundant in Ireland.

Project Description



- Project Aim: To examine the opportunities and challenges for Irish HEIs in engaging with community and voluntary groups and family businesses through the student work placement process.
- Project key questions:
 - How can HEIs reach these organisations and establish lasting partnerships with them?
 - What kind of practical difficulties exist in this type of engagement?
 - How can these obstacles be overcome?
- Project funded by HEA in 2012 through *Roadmap for Employment Academic Partnerships (REAP)* project.

Project Scope



- **Community & Voluntary Groups:**

- Working definition proposed by *The Wheel*: ‘organisations which are independently governed and are not-for-profit’ (RSM McClure Watters, 2012: 21).
- Approx. 2/3 of Irish adults (2 million+) engage annually in activities offered by Ireland’s 19,000 community and voluntary organisations (The Wheel, 2012) .
- The sector contributes over €2.5 billion to the Irish economy each year and employs over 63,000 full and part-time staff (The Wheel, 2012a).

- **Family Businesses:**

- CSO definition: An enterprise is a family-owned business if it meets one or more of the following conditions:
 - ✦ An enterprise where one family holds more than 50% of the voting shares;
 - ✦ A family supplies a significant proportion of the enterprises senior management and is effectively controlling the business;
 - ✦ An enterprise where there is evidence of more than one generation working in the business;
 - ✦ An enterprise that is influenced by a family or a family relationship and that perceives itself to be a family business.
- Minister for Small Business, John Perry T.D. (2012): Family-owned enterprises are estimated to account for up to 75 per cent of all enterprises in Ireland and for half of the employment in the private sector.

Project Methodology



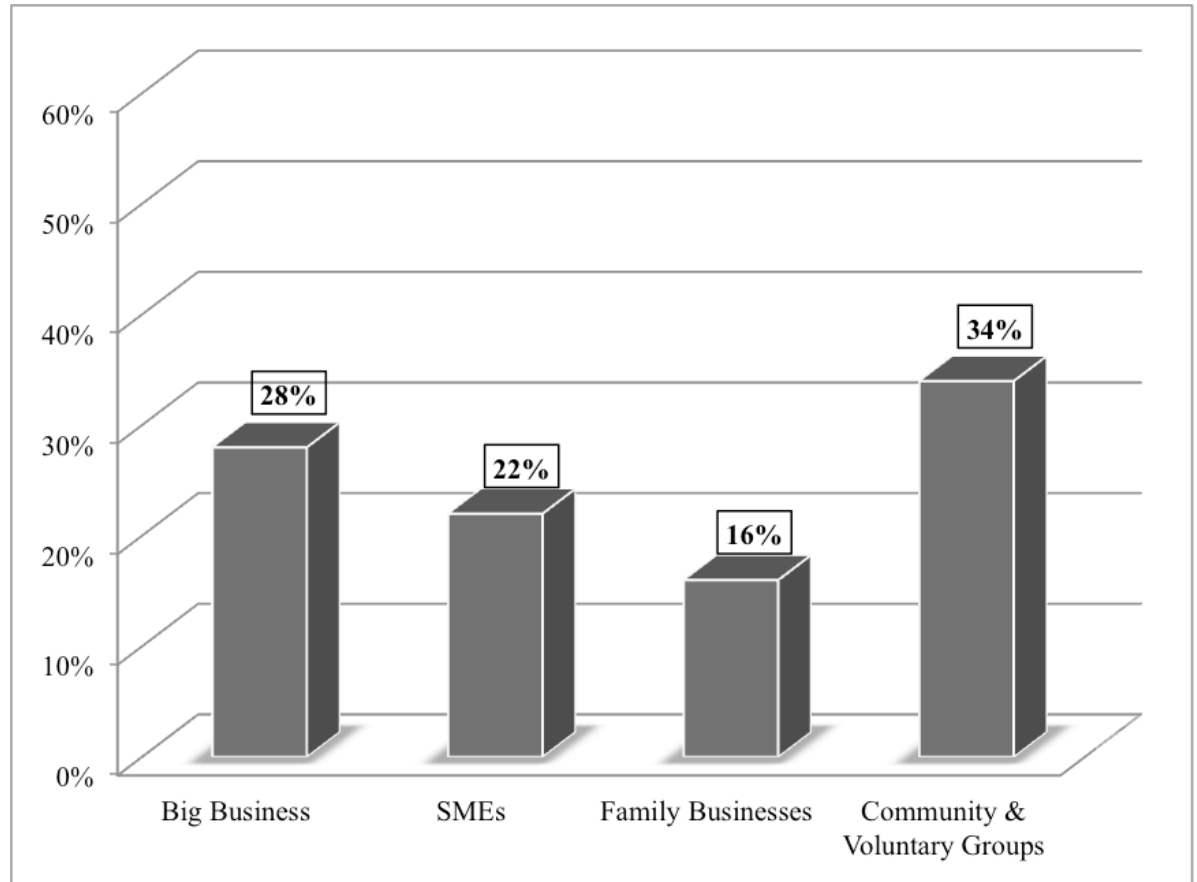
- Project Team in UCC collaborated with the newly established Work Placement Committee of the *Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS)*.
 - Representatives from NUIG, NUIM, UL, DKIT, IADT, and WIT
- Project partners accumulated their own institutions' experience of engaging with family businesses and community and voluntary groups and presented this at a project workshop in early 2012.
- Two surveys were designed and used by the project team to capture the perspectives of placement practitioners, and representatives from family businesses and community and voluntary groups.
- Second workshop in autumn 2012 to discuss issues arising from the survey responses and to attempt to contribute to best practise in this field.

Placement Practitioner Survey



- Responses from **29** practitioners representing 14 HEIs based in 10 counties.
 - Responsible for approx. 5,000 placement students annually
 - Students from approx. 150 courses spanning the disciplines of Humanities, Engineering, IT, Science, Business, Health and Education
 - Placements last an average of 4 months, but can be as little as 4 weeks and as much as 10 months
 - 59% of these placements are unpaid – 41% of students receive some form of payment

*Distribution of
Placement Partners
of Placement
Practitioners
Surveyed*

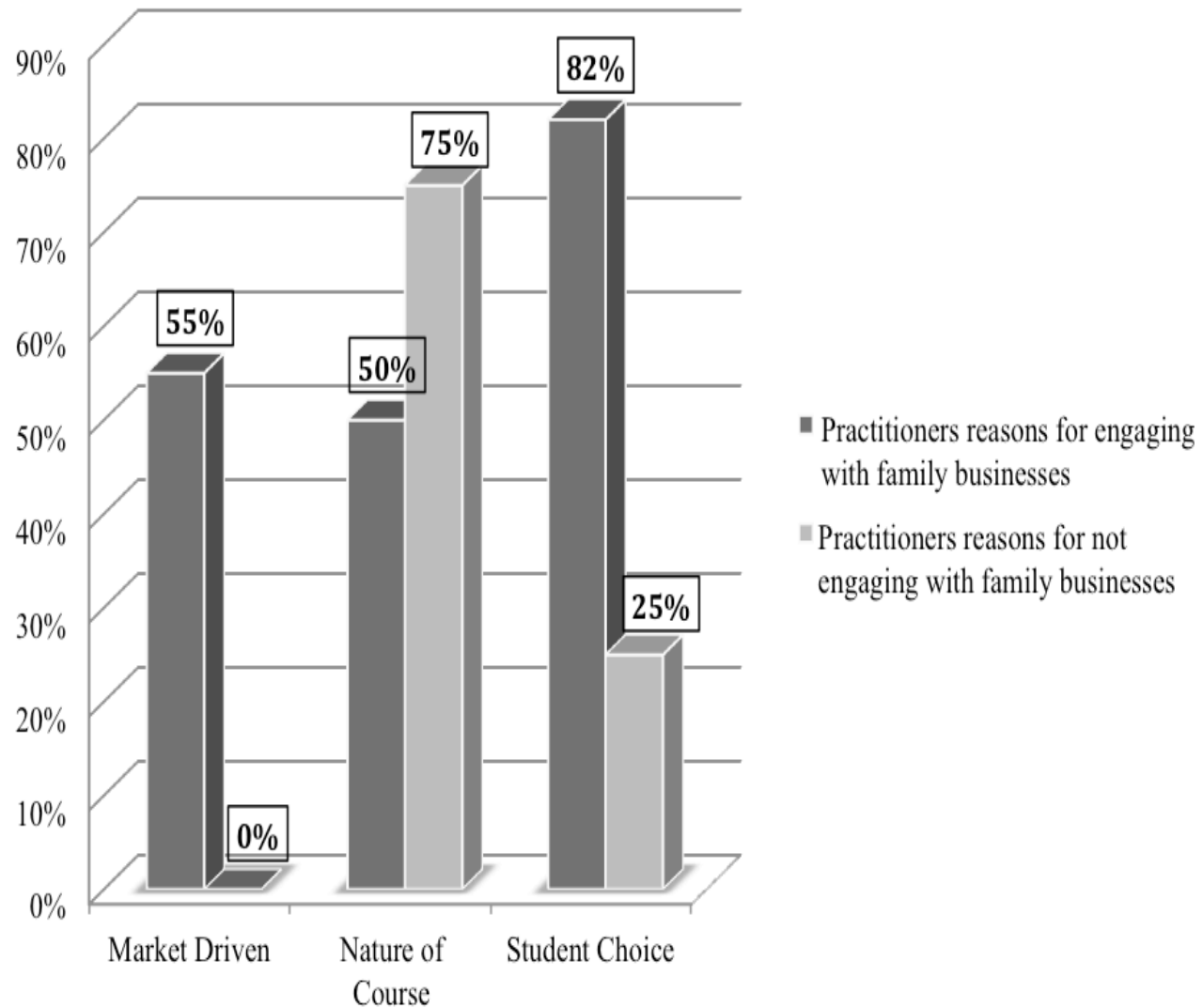


Employer Organisation Survey

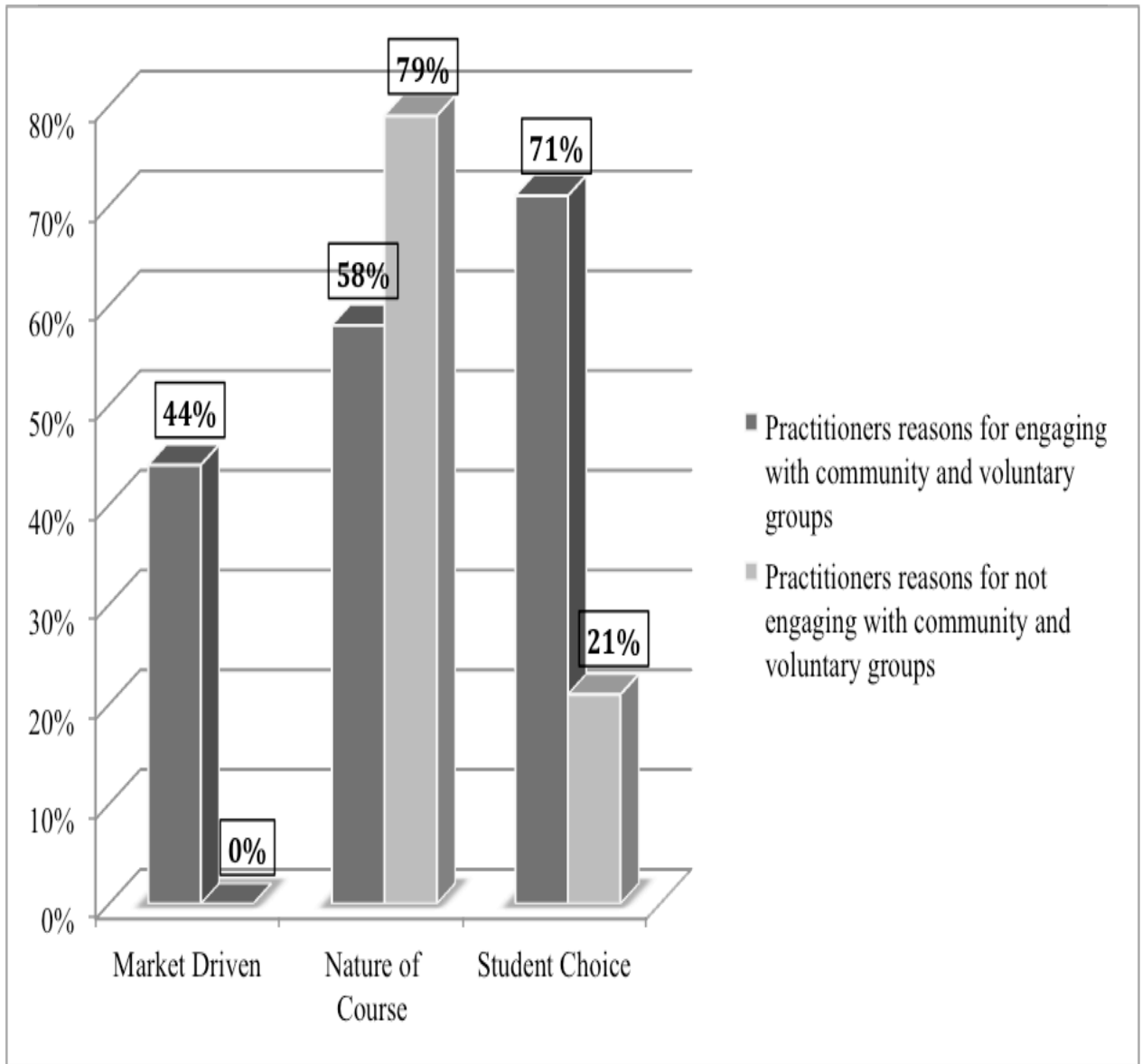


- **15** responses received from family businesses and **18** from community and voluntary groups.
 - 75% had been asked to take a student on work placement
 - 28% had approached a HEI looking for a work placement student
 - In total, 55% had hosted a work placement student in the past
 - 41% reported no payment to the student
 - 41% offered the student a token payment / gift / travel expenses
 - 18% paid the student the minimum wage or above

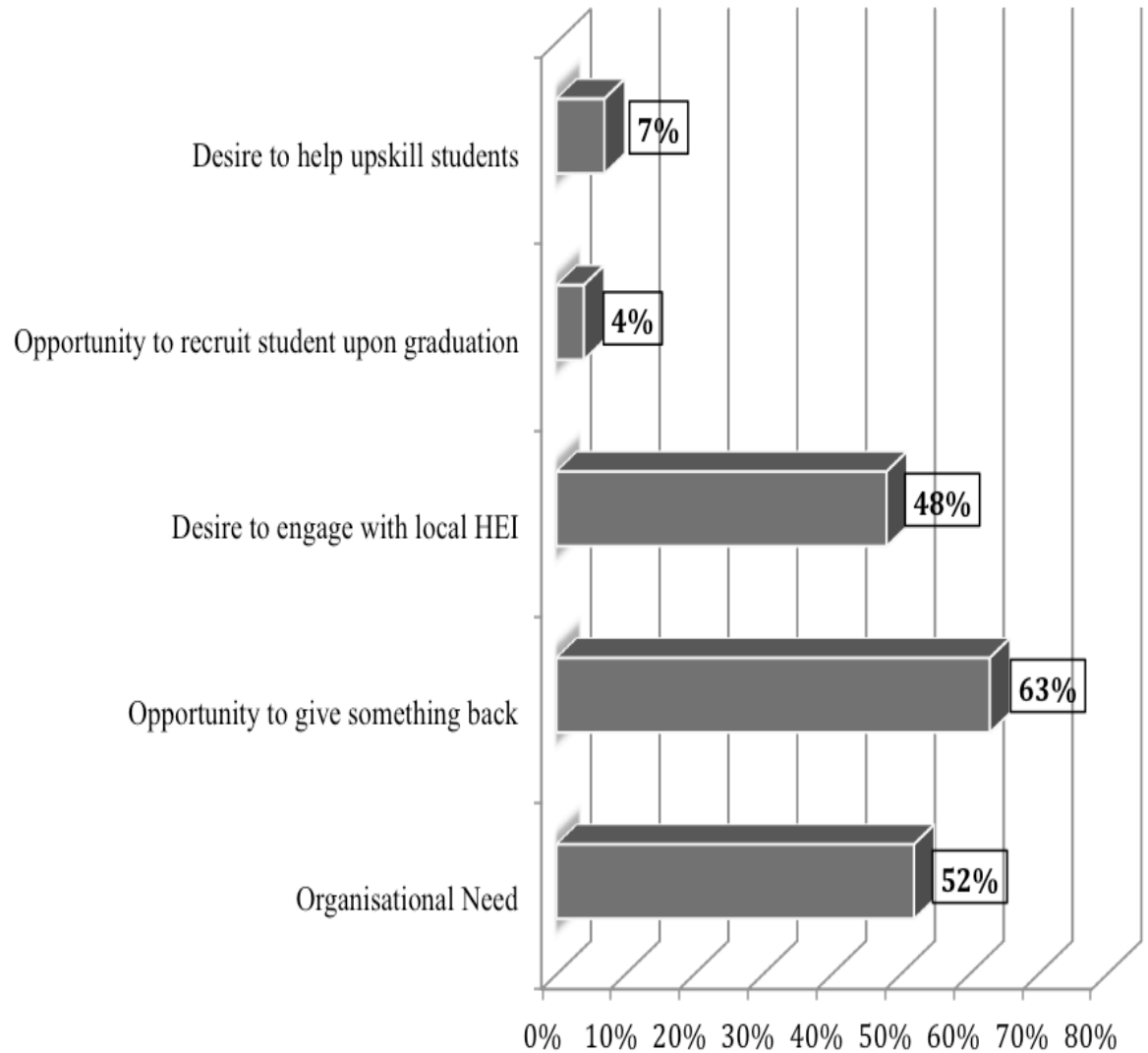
Practitioners' Reasons for Engaging or Not with Family Businesses



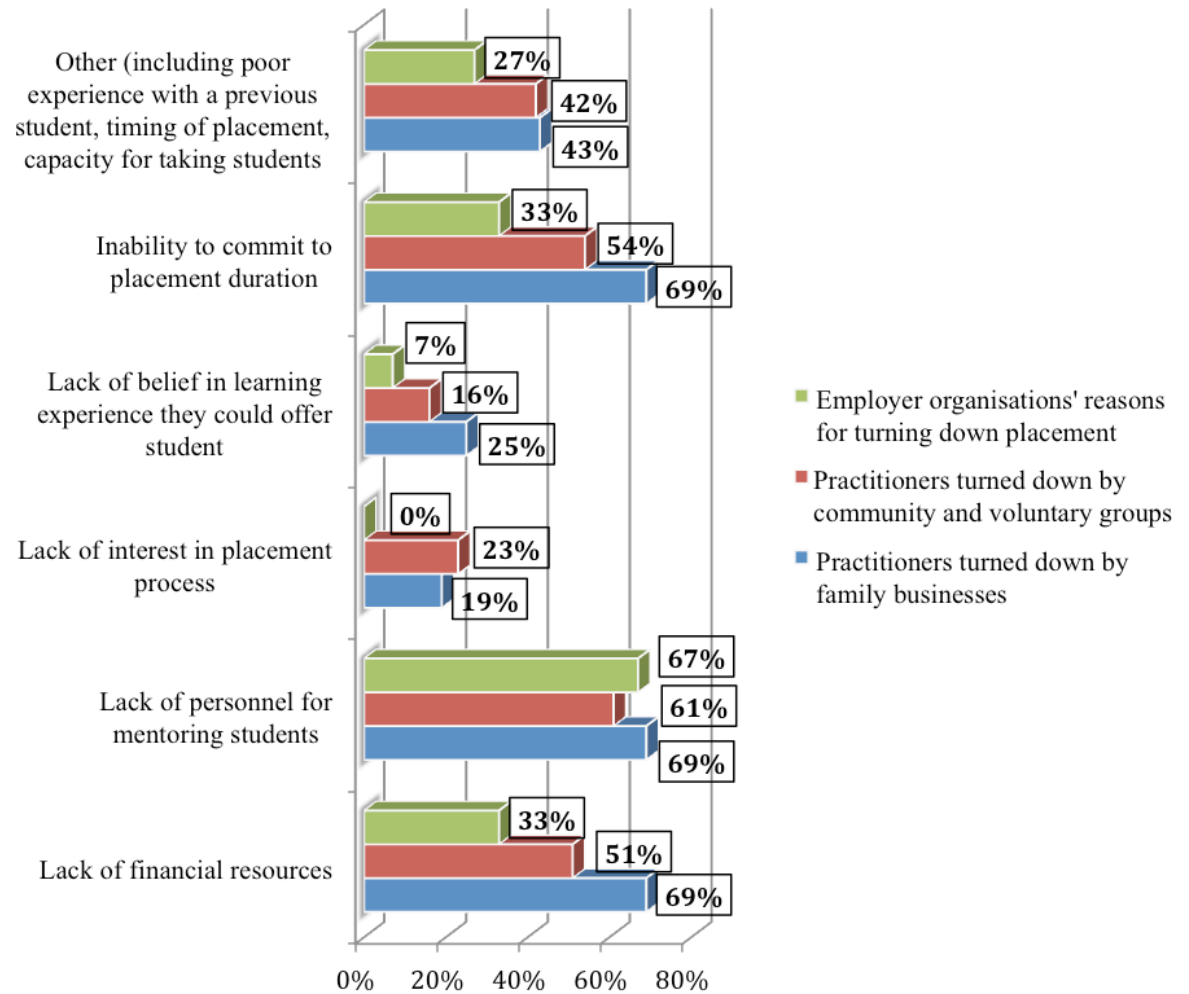
Practitioners' Reasons for Engaging or Not with Community and Voluntary Groups



***Reasons Supplied
by Family
Businesses and
Community and
Voluntary Groups
for Engaging in
Work Placement***



Reasons for Turning Down Work Placement Opportunities





***Student Perceptions
of Work Placement
in Family
Businesses,
According to
Placement
Practitioners***

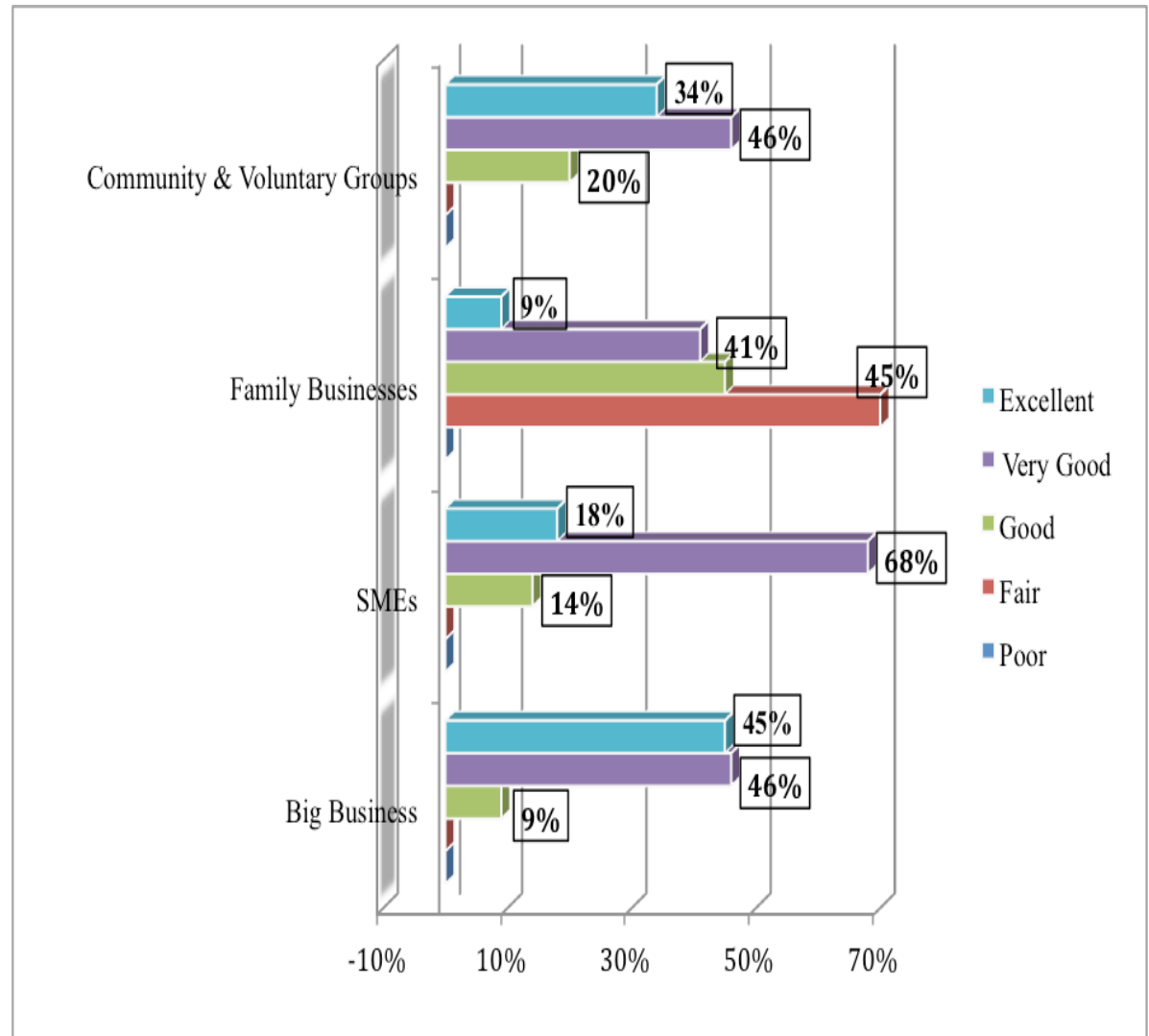
	Positive Perceptions	Negative Perceptions
Working Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smaller and less intimidating• Atmosphere more relaxed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students often worried that they won't fit into a family business• Students feel suffocated and micro-managed sometimes
Learning Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique opportunity to develop skills• Great variety – exposure to all areas of business• Opportunity to get broad insight into workings of a business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less beneficial for CV and career• Not as attractive as 'big name' employers• Fear family business is too small for student to gain any value from placement• Sometimes students are given menial tasks as owner won't leave go of the reins
Style of Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very hands on• Students sometimes given significant responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of structured training and mentoring as in bigger organisations



***Student Perceptions
of Work Placement
in Community and
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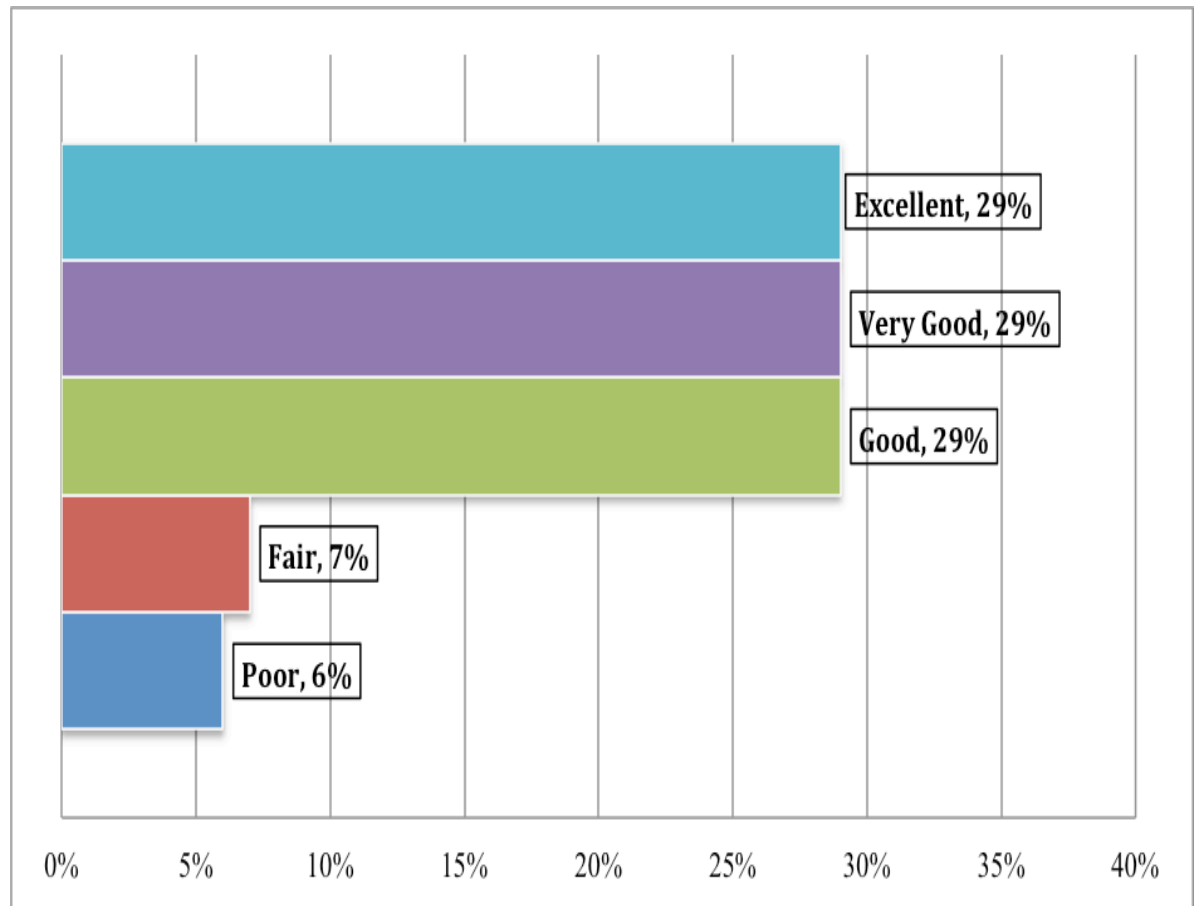
	Positive Perceptions	Negative Perceptions
Learning Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality unique experience• Valuable and worthwhile experience• Good networking opportunity• Opens up a new outlook as students engage in new experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students feel placement is not particularly relevant to their degree and career aims• Not very stimulating but easy placement• Students feel that they should be getting exposure with more renowned companies• Sometimes students are given menial tasks as there is an expectation for students to get their hands dirty
Style of Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very hands on• Students sometimes given significant responsibility• Opportunity for students to give something back	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure and mentoring support less developed than in bigger organisations

Students' Post-Placement Ratings of Placement Experience, According to Placement Practitioners





*Employer
Organisations'
Ratings of
Placement
Experience*



Obstacles to Placement



- Awareness of placement opportunities among employer organisations
- Understanding of the work placement process
- Resources to support work placement
- Management of both employers' and students' expectations of work placement
- Duration and timing of placements
- Matching of students to employers

How to Improve the Placement Process



- **Recommendations from Placement Practitioners:**
 - Take a personalised approach to this form of placement
 - Offer more frequent and efficient communication
 - Simplify the process
 - Ensure employers fully understand the process
 - Offer greater support to the students on placement with these types of organisations
- **Recommendations from Employers:**
 - Increase contact with us
 - Ensure the timing of placements works for us
 - Make sure students are compatible with our work
 - Publicise work placement more
 - Simplify the process

Project Leaflets



- **Guide for Placement Practitioners**
 - Reasons family businesses and community and voluntary groups engage/don't engage in work placement
 - Key benefits of work placement in family businesses and community and voluntary groups
 - Key challenges for these employers in engaging in work placement
 - What employers want
 - Customised guide for pre-placement, during placement and post-placement
- **Guide for Family Businesses and Community and Voluntary Groups**
 - What is work placement
 - Reasons employers engage in work placement
 - Key benefits of work placement
 - What is expected of placement employer
 - Customised guide for pre-placement, during placement and post-placement

Conclusion



- There is a real willingness among these employers to engage with HEIs and give something back to the community, provided that the conditions are right.
- Of the employer organisations surveyed by the project team, over 25% had never previously been asked to participate in work placement, even though almost all (95%) stated that they would consider engaging in work placement in the future.